



The Adoption of non-Chinese Names as Identity Markers of Chinese International Students in Japan: A Case Study at a Japanese Comprehensive Research University

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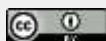
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Abstract

This study explores naming practices among Chinese international students and their relation to personal identity during their sojourn in Japan. Although previous studies have reported that some Chinese international students in English-speaking countries adopt names of Western origin (Cotterill 2020; Diao 2014; Edwards 2006), participants in this study were found to exhibit different naming practices: either adopting names of Japanese or Western origin; or retaining both Western and Japanese names. Drawing on fifteen semi-structured interviews with Mainland Han Chinese students, this investigation examines their motivations for adopting non-Chinese names and determines how personal identities are presented through them. The qualitative analysis reveals that the practice of adopting non-Chinese names is influenced by teacher-student power relations, Chinese conventions for terms of address, pronunciation, and context-sensitivity of personal names. As will be shown in this article, through the respondents' years of self-exploration, their self-adopted non-Chinese names gradually became internalized personal identity markers that allow the bearers to explore and exhibit personality traits, which might not have been as easily displayed via their Chinese given names.

Keywords: Chinese students, Japan, Japanese names, English names, anthroponymy, identity.

Introduction

Background

Japan has long been a popular study abroad destination for the Chinese due to its geographical closeness and advanced economic, cultural, and technological achievements (Liu-Farrer 2013). With the launch of the Global 30 Project in 2009, the 11 most world-renowned Japanese national and private universities began offering undergraduate and graduate English programs. The spread of English as a major working language in many academic institutes in Japan may help bring about changes to terms of address since both cultures use Chinese characters. Although previous studies have already shown that Chinese students prefer to adopt so-called English names when learning English in Chinese-speaking societies (Li 1997; Lee 2001; Tan 2001; Cheang 2008; McPherron 2009; Chien 2012; Henry 2012; Gilks 2014; Sercombe et al. 2014; Chen 2015; Huang and Ke 2016) and when studying abroad in English-speaking countries (Edwards 2006; Diao 2014; Schmitt 2019; Cotterill 2020; Xu 2020), little is known about their practice of adopting foreign names in non-English-speaking countries like Japan.

Given that Japanese is the major language in Japan, some Chinese exchange students in Japan may opt for a Japanese name as their chosen name, while others may prefer to retain their English names. For the purposes of this study, these self-adopted names will be called "non-Chinese chosen names" to differentiate them from Chinese given names. Non-Chinese chosen names are loosely defined as self-adopted names from languages other than Chinese including, but not limited to, Japanese and English. This study analyzes names adopted by Chinese students as personal identity markers during their sojourn in Japan. Specifically, it seeks answers to the following research questions: What are the reasons and motivations for adopting non-Chinese names in Japan? How are Chinese given names and non-Chinese chosen names presented and used as personal identity markers in Japan?

Previous Studies

Identity

Aldrin (2016) suggests that identity encompasses similarities and distinctions. The distinction aspect is highlighted when a name distinguishes the bearer from others and functions as a uniqueness marker. Uniqueness here corresponds to Delanty's notion of identity, which is constructed in "relations of difference rather than of unity and coherence" (2003, 135). Norton (2013, 4) defines identity as "the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future." The formation of self is a social process, during which one explores and identifies his or her relationship with the world through social interactions. Further, a person's identity is also determined by a collaborative process between the world and the self. Therefore, apart from its social characteristic, identity is also self-conscious.

Chinese Reading of Names

Wang (2010) asserts that psychological, cultural, and philosophical connotations constitute the core of a name. Psychological connotation refers to a name's implications for the bearer and others (Wang 2010, 10). People tend to make assumptions based on a person's name. A girl named *Shengnan* 'doing better than boys' may be expected to be more diligent and ambitious than boys. Alternatively, bearers may also act in accordance with their names. A *Jianhua* 'establishing the country' may therefore be motivated to truly endeavor to develop the country.

Cultural connotation primarily refers to the bonds of familial relations, tied together by blood or law. This aspect of naming is partly reflected through the use of generation names. In addition to familial ties, the aspect of cultural connotation also refers to religious and cultural preferences. Some parents in China, for example, name their children *Chou* 'ugly' to ward off evil spirits. Traditional Chinese culture considers men as superior to women, and sons were considered more valuable than daughters. Such cultural preference is reflected in the female name *Zhaodi* 'inviting younger brothers,' through which parents express their wish for a son.

Philosophical connotation centers on self-exploration. A name chosen by a bearer upon reaching adulthood can express one's will in some cultures (Heffernan 2010). In ancient China, the practice of adopting a *hao* (appellation) was common among literati (Wang 2010, 126; Li 2017, 99). *Hao* is an expression of moral conduct and personal will (Li 2017). Tao Yuanming, a well-

known Jin Dynasty (1115–1234) poet, called himself *Wuliu-Xiansheng* ‘Master of the Five Willows’ to signify his pursuit of spiritual fulfillment. *Hao* is often used among peers and friends to portray friendliness and intimacy (Li 1997). In addition, some appellations are selected by acquaintances based on an assessment of the context, occupation, gender, and hierarchy. The prominent poet Du Fu was called *Du Yuanwai* ‘Ministry Councilor Du’ when he was alive and *Shisheng* ‘Poet Sage’ after his death to signify people’s respect. Lu You, the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279) poet, adopted *Fangweng* ‘a liberated and self-indulgent man’ as his *hao* because of his unsuccessful political career and the loss of his wife. Li Qingzhao, a female *ci* (lyric) poet in the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127), is also known as *Yian Jushi* ‘Householder of Yian,’ which signifies her pursuit of peaceful life. Thus, a name can become a voluntary marker that signifies the bearer’s understanding of self.

Naming Conventions in China—Past and Present

Most modern Chinese names comprise two parts: *xing* (a clan name) and *ming* for household registration and healthcare system (Duthie 2007). Combined, the two parts are called *mingzi*. Names in traditional Chinese culture are, however, far more complicated. In addition to a *ming* and *zi*, people used to have many other names as well. Li (2017) suggests that the following were all considered parts of personal names: *xing* (a clan name), *shi* (a family name), *ming* (a given name), *zi* (a courtesy name), and *hao* (an appellation). Since the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.), people in China have stopped differentiating between *xing* and *shi* names; and after the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, they stopped adopting *zi* and *hao* names (Zhu and Millward 1987).

Giving oneself an informal name is not rare in contemporary Chinese-speaking societies (Cheang 2008; Gao, Xiu, and Wei 2010; Chen 2015). According to *Law of the People’s Republic of China on the identity card of residents* (The National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China 2003), only standard Chinese characters can be used for registration, meaning that non-Chinese-language names are not legally recognized. As a result, such names may have non-Chinese origins, and bearers enjoy more freedom to use and change their names to suit their needs. Some use their informal names on social media to protect their privacy (iFeng 2014). From the addressor’s perspective, some may use them to avoid choosing a context-sensitive Chinese term of address at workplace (Li 1998) because it is possible to address a colleague according to his or her seniority or job title which denotes different levels of interpersonal distance with the addressee. Inappropriate Chinese term of address may also cause unnecessary embarrassment. For example, it might be offensive to call a woman *Xiaojie* ‘miss’ since this Chinese honorific also meant a profanity for prostitute in Mandarin. To avoid these potential risks, people may adopt friendly-sounding non-Chinese names to maintain interpersonal relationships without intimacy (Mathews 1996). For students, non-Chinese names in a foreign language classroom may help create access to the targeted language-speaking communities and thereby facilitate learning (Sercombe et al. 2014). Additionally, self-chosen names in adolescence and early adulthood may allow bearers to explore possibilities in their identities without the burden of long-term commitment (Erikson 1968); thus, such names can become a channel for the autonomous selection and control of identities (Cheang 2008; Chien 2012).

In this sense, the practice of adopting non-Chinese names is consistent with the practice of selecting a *hao* and may be seen as an expression of Chineseness (Li 1997; Duthie 2007). It cannot be solely or automatically understood as an imitation or cultural imperialism. Rather, the adoption on non-Chinese names can be viewed as a practice of Chinese culture and exploration of personal identities.

Methodology

This study was conducted at a comprehensive Japanese national university in 2019. As of 2019, this university had 1,248 foreign students from the People’s Republic of China. Of these students, 1,116 (89.42%) were graduate students and 115 (9.21%) were undergraduates. In order to ensure that the sample was representative of the population of Chinese visiting students, the participants were recruited based upon the university’s undergraduate/graduate ratio of Chinese international students. However, there was no official data from the university regarding the population’s ethnic group affiliation, age, and current non-Chinese names. Employing purposive and convenience sampling techniques, fifteen Mainland Chinese were recruited for this investigation. Three participated via personal invitation and twelve were recruited from three WeChat groups. For both groups, the selection criteria were (1) being a native speaker of Chinese; (2) using English as a working language in Japan; (3) having basic Japanese conversation skills; and (4) having used non-Chinese names while studying and living in Japan. In addition, age and current education status were taken into consideration. Although the sample is small in size, it reflects the salient characteristic of the target group, yet also allows for variations (e.g., gender, origin of current non-Chinese name, and program enrolled in) that are crucial to the analysis (Ritchie et al. 2014). Since this exploratory study did not seek to generalize to the entire Chinese student population in Japan, but to gather information about an under-studied area, the utilized sampling methods were considered appropriate.

Over eight months, starting from June 2019, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews at the university seeking to determine participants’ experience with using both Chinese and non-Chinese names in Japan; and to investigate their attitudes towards these names. Before the interview, all participants were asked to sign an informed consent form and provide the above-mentioned demographic information. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Participants were given the freedom to speak in Chinese, English, or Japanese. Except for one participant who chose to speak English, all of the participants used Chinese. Japanese was only used for onomastic examples. For the analysis, I audiotaped and later transcribed all interviews.

Results and Discussion

Participants

As shown in Table 1, participants' ages varied between 19 and 28. One participant identified himself as genderqueer, ten as female, and four as male. Two female participants identified themselves as bisexual. All participants were Han Chinese. Four were undergraduates, nine were master's students, and two were pursuing doctoral degrees.

Table 1. Participants' Profiles and non-Chinese Names (nCN)

Participant Nr.	Current nCN	Current nCN Source	Previous nCN	First Previous nCN Source	Gender	Age
1	Maggie	Teacher and Self	Betty Sherry	Teacher	Female	...
2			Mavis Bobo	Self, motivated by Peers	Queer	26
3	Kaori	Self	N/A	N/A	Female	23
4	Martin	Self	N/A	N/A	Male	21
5	Sarah	Self	Mary	Teacher	Female	26
6	Jason	Teacher	N/A	N/A	Male	20
	Shouri	Self				
7	Cincin	Self	Daisy	Teacher	Female	26
8	Sherry	Teacher	N/A	N/A	Female	23
	Yuki	Customer				
9	Shirley	Teacher	N/A	N/A	Female	19
	Sheng	Self				
10	Faye	Self	Phoebe	Teacher	Female	...
			Freya	Teacher		
11	Kasy	Teacher	N/A	N/A	Female	23
12	Ian	Self	Jane	Teacher	Female	19
13	Harry	Self	N/A	N/A	Male	28
14	Yimo	Self	Sophia	Self, motivated by Teacher	Female	23
15	Peter	Self, motivated by Teacher	N/A	N/A	Male	22

Reasons for Adopting Non-Chinese Names

Teachers' Influence

Although informal non-Chinese names may be considered an opportunity for "rebirth" (Chien 2012), nine participants reported that they had not selected their names themselves but had received their first non-Chinese names from English teachers before university. Five of these nine retained these teacher- assigned names. Two other participants were motivated by teachers to take on a non-Chinese name. Burke (2001) suggests that teachers of English as a second language (ESL) often follow these naming practices to avoid the embarrassment of mispronouncing foreign names. It is also believed that by assigning students a name from the target language, an imagined community may be created and language-learning may be accelerated (Huang and Ke 2016). For these reasons, teachers, who are hierarchically superior in teacher-student relations, may use this strategy to facilitate teaching. Maggie received her current name in elementary school from an English teacher she liked. She stated that "when that English teacher first started teaching English in elementary school, we didn't like learning English. I think she taught pretty well because she graduated from a university in the U.S. She made me hate English less [她开始教英语的时候我们上小学, 很多人都不喜欢英语, 但是那个老师我觉得教的挺好, 然后她本身也是从美国回来的, 所以我觉得她让我不讨厌英语]." For this reason, she has retained *Maggie* as her current non-Chinese name. Like Maggie, a major reason for Jason to keep his name is because he had a good relationship with

the teacher who named him. He liked both the teacher's explanation that *Jason* means "wise person [贤者]" and the name's uniqueness.

Teachers can also negatively motivate students to choose a non-Chinese name. Maggie once called herself *Betty* for an extracurricular English program. Her teacher made a reference to the U.S. American television series *Ugly Betty*, which Maggie found unpleasant. She then changed her name to *Sherry*, explaining that "it was too late to change the name because the program had already started [因为已经开始上课没办法改了]." An old saying in Chinese goes "Teacher for one day, father forever [一日为师, 终身为父]." Teachers are almost highly regarded as fathers whom one should never disobey. Being inferior in Chinese teacher-student relations, students may find it difficult to reject a teacher-assigned name. Cheang (2008) reported a common phenomenon in Macau where students retain two English names: one is used to "please their English teacher" and the other is their original English name that their teachers deemed was either "not appropriate" or filled with "negative connotations" (200). Participants in this study who did not like their teacher-assigned names named themselves later on in life. Sarah, named *Mary* in elementary school, was inspired by *Sara* in the 1939 movie *The Little Princess* and chose the slightly different name *Sarah* after graduating from elementary school. *Cincin*, called *Daisy* by her elementary school teacher, adopted her new name when she started working at a company that enforced an English-name-only policy. For these respondents, their original teacher-given names were only used in their English class and they became meaningless and unnecessary once they left the classroom.

Chinese Conventions for Terms of Address

Conventions for terms of address in Chinese culture seem to play a crucial role in the participants' naming practices. Chao suggests that Chinese terms of address include pronouns, proper names, title, and kinship terms (1956, 217). Chinese speakers tend to avoid personal pronouns because such terms lack specificity with regard to hierarchy and relationship (Blum 1997). This avoidance has also been found in the Japanese language which is primarily influenced by the interlocutors' relationships (Mogi 2002). Social, official, and occupational titles such as *Shizhang* 'mayor' and *Laoshi* 'teacher' were seldom used by the participants in this study who were full-time students. Further, although kinship terms can be extended to people who are not family members to indicate solidarity and intimacy (Cotterill 2020), this form of addressing was hardly reported as being used by the participants in their social relationships: neither at university nor in the workplace. In terms of proper names, Li (1997) suggests that full Chinese names are for formal occasions and Chinese given names communicate intimacy. To maintain an appropriate level of interpersonal distance, speakers need to think of a way to address each other that neither sounds too distant nor too close. The results indicate that for participants in this study, using non-Chinese names may help them to avoid making hard choices regarding terms of address and can assist them in continuing their conversations naturally.

Panda described "having goosebumps" when he is called his Chinese given name because it sounds too intimate. He insists on using the name *Panda* for almost all occasions. Peter adopted the name in university to facilitate communication with international students in China, and uses his non-Chinese name on casual occasions because he felt being addressed by his Chinese name with a Japanese pronunciation and the Japanese honorific suffix *-San* sounded distant. Maggie feels the same and told me *-San* is too explicit in determining interpersonal distance. For her, addressing each other using non-Chinese names at her part-time workplace "feels more equal [感觉会更加平等]" and helps continue the conversation. *Cincin* seldom calls her Chinese friends and colleagues by either their full or Chinese given names because doing so would require her to explicitly define her relationship with the interlocutor and could cause embarrassment.

Pronunciation

Chinese names may be considered lexical items (Lu and Millward 1989, 265) that are chosen for the meaning (Cotterill 2020, 3). As a tonal language, mispronounced Chinese names may lose their original meaning and lead to undesirable interpretations. Chen reported just such a case. A girl's name *Weiju* was mispronounced as *Weizhu* 'feeding pigs' by non-Chinese speakers (2016, 62). This example shows mispronounced Chinese names may make it difficult to continue a conversation, which would eventually hinder the communication harmony. Moreover, coercing the interlocutor into pronouncing a Chinese name correctly goes against the maxim of relation in conversation (Grice 1975).

Seven participants considered nonstandard pronunciation hard to accept and remember. Martin finds it "uncomfortable [别扭]" when his Chinese name is pronounced by non-Chinese speakers and believes that its difficult pronunciation would make it hard for people to remember him. Therefore, he uses *Martin* which is easy to remember and helps the flow of communication. According to him, *Martin* "is just a tool which makes it convenient for me to communicate in English, and my Chinese name is my real name [名字它只是为了我用英语的时候方便交流的一个工具, 中文才真的是我的名字]." Faye goes by the name because her Chinese name is hard for her academic supervisor to pronounce. She is addressed as *Faye-San*. Sherry, Sarah, Harry, Yimo, and Ian also expressed a similar idea.

Nonstandard pronunciation was also reported by the study participants as potentially tarnishing a name's image. Kaori's acquaintances tried to pronounce her name in Chinese; she described their attempts as "trying too hard [用力过猛]." She is addressed by her Chinese family name pronounced in Japanese, followed by *-San* when at the university. Kaori expressed her dislike for the way she is addressed since it sounds similar to *Kaa-San* 'mother' in Japanese. She uses Kaori at her workplace because it is the Japanese reading of her Chinese given name. She also uses the name as a Japanese reading aid (furigana) to indicate her Chinese given name's pronunciation for her bank account and several membership cards. For the same reason, Ian adopted her name partly because of the potential undesirable interpretations. She considers it unique to have a boy's name and therefore chose the name *Ian*. Although Maggie adopted the name partly for better communication, she reported a reverse use of her Chinese name with Japanese speakers. According to Maggie, some Japanese speakers tend to mispronounce Maggie as the Japanese slang word for 'seriously' *maji* which "makes no sense and is strange [很莫名其妙, 都很奇怪]." As a result, she uses her Chinese family name with some Japanese friends.

Different Worlds, Different Names

For the majority of the respondents, the conventions governing terms of address were described as being highly context-sensitive. Panda was the exception. He insisted on using that name in all instances that did not involve family. He therefore introduced his non-Chinese name first and told me his Chinese name later in the interview. All of the other participants, however, first introduced Chinese names because the interviews were in Mandarin with a Chinese interviewer. Although Kaori, Sarah, Cincin, and Sherry hesitated because the interview was about non-Chinese names, they answered with their Chinese names first when I asked them to tell me “your name [你的名字].” The participants told me that they usually use their Chinese names when conversing with Chinese speakers and their non-Chinese names when talking with non-Chinese speakers.

Regarding nicknames, Adams (2009) reminds readers of the existence of multiple “worlds.” In this study, the “worlds” are closely related to languages and cultural norms. As sojourners in Japan, adopting a non-Chinese name is no longer constrained to the English-speaking “world.” In this new world, the use of non-Chinese names adopted either from their current surroundings or the international cultural supermarket may be motivated by the pragmatic pursuit of effective and friendly communication (Mathews 1996). For this reason, Sherry retains the name Yuki when speaking Japanese with neighbors. Shouri ‘victory,’ whose name is an expression that is understandable in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, uses the name when speaking Japanese and *Jason* when speaking English with his non-Japanese-speaking roommates. He is especially fond of Asian cultures and frequently uses the name *Shouri*. He believes that the name helps construct an ideal character for him and is often a conversation starter that helps him make new friends. Contrarily, he considers *Jason* a mere code with little “added value [附加的东西].”

Participants’ personal perceptions also appear to influence the choice of name. Martin strongly identifies with the name which stands for “bravery [勇敢]” and “eruditeness [博学].” He uses it when speaking English. At his part-time job where all his colleagues speak Japanese, he uses his Chinese name with a Japanese pronunciation. Unlike Shouri, he prefers using *Martin* instead of his Chinese name because he feels “repression [压抑]” when speaking Japanese. By comparison, using the name *Martin* and speaking English give him “a sense of success [成功的感受].”

Identity, Chinese Given Names, and Non-Chinese Adopted Names

Non-Chinese Names with Chinese Origins

Although participants’ names seem to have non-Chinese origins, they are chosen partially because of the resemblance to their Chinese counterparts. Maggie, Shouri, Cincin, Sherry, Sheng, Faye, Ian, Harry, and Yimo adopted their names for the resemblance of pronunciation. The names *Kaori* and *Yuki* were adopted because of connotation. Panda was chosen by the respondent because he felt it represents his ethnic identity since the giant panda is seen as a national symbol of China in Japan.

Such preferences may be explained by a real name’s three criteria: (1) subjecthood as in legal or official registration; (2) representation of ethnic or national identity; and (3) relation to the essence of being (Pina-Cabral 2010, 302). During the participants’ sojourn in Japan, their ethnic and cultural identities have become a constant reminder of differences. They do not consider themselves eligible to membership in the Japanese culture and language. According to the respondents, their Chinese given names nevertheless meet the first two criteria.

Gaps between Identity and Name

There seems to be discord between participants’ identity and both their Chinese names and non-Chinese names. Five participants explicitly expressed their dislike for their Chinese given names when they were younger. Maggie did not like hers because she considered herself a boyish girl and her Chinese name did not match the personality traits. Cincin and Shouri did not like the meaning of their names. Cincin used to interpret her name as ‘hard work’ which she found unappealing and simple; and Shouri considers his Chinese name vulgar. Similarly, Kaori considers her Chinese names “too normal [非常普通]” that “doesn’t represent anything [没有代表我任何东西].” Panda said that he hated his name because of its unpleasant sound.

Two strategies emerged as participants accept and bond with their given names. Through repeated use, Maggie, Kaori, and Shouri seem to have come to terms with their Chinese names and view them as merely a code used for daily conversation and official documents. Shouri also frequently uses this self-adopted name’s Chinese pronunciation to replace his given name’s for its positive connotation. Panda and Cincin actively re-interpreted their given names. After realizing and embracing his gender queerness, Panda reinterpreted his name “born queer.” This extra layer of meaning helped him claim his name. Cincin now interprets her given name as “down-to-earth [踏踏实实]” and “strong-minded [坚强]” after her parents objected to her legally changing her Chinese name.

Eight participants experienced discordance between their identity and their non-Chinese names. Just as Norton (1997) reported, this disconnect was related to the tension between their ethnic and cultural identity and their feelings of emotional separation from the languages of their adopted names. Li calls such names “borrowed identity” (1997). Although Kaori is the Japanese reading of her Chinese given name and she uses it in multiple settings for its convenience, Kaori confessed that she felt “embarrassed [不好意思]” when she tells people her name. At another workplace, she avoids using the name because “there is a real Japanese person whose name is Kaori [真正的日本人叫 Kaori 在那里了].” She sees Kaori as a borrowed name. Jason views his name as a mere code that is “disconnected [脱离]” from his ethnic identity. To him, the borrowed name is only used to communicate with English-speaking friends.

To bridge the gap between their identity and their non-Chinese names, participants adopted similar yet different strategies. For some participants, the bonding process tended to be passively achieved through repeated daily uses. Sherry eventually, over many years, came to see her non-Chinese name in the same way she sees her Chinese name when speaking English. Maggie’s bond with her name has also been passively strengthened through years of use, until it gradually became internalized in her identity. Despite Kaori’s initial embarrassment, she is also now more accustomed to using and being called by *Kaori*. Faye, Ian, and Yimo experienced the same bonding process with their adopted names. It took Sarah and Yimo a long time to re-position their names from an online nickname to an adopted non-Chinese name. Peter explained that he had not established a close bond with his name because he is often addressed by his Chinese family name followed by the Japanese honorific suffix *-Kun*. He thought the change from *-Santo -Kun* is a sign of appreciation from his academic supervisor, and therefore liked being addressed this way.

A more active strategy involved adopting new names because the previous ones were considered undesirable. Panda actively constructs an empowered identity via his current non-Chinese name, for example. Although not officially recognized on his passport, he has started to integrate Panda into his official name as a middle name. This may also be because people have more freedom to take on informal self-adopted names because they are not officially registered. Taking advantage of this freedom, the six participants who received their teacher-given/teacher-motivated non-Chinese names replaced them with self-adopted ones to better project their preferred personal image. Maggie interprets her name as “girl next door [邻家女孩]” and considers being an easygoing girl an ideal personality trait. Sarah finds the movie character *Sara* a strong-minded and loving person, and adopted a similar name to aspire to become a person like her. Faye wishes to project a quirky image. She finds the name Faye meets her criteria, whereas the teacher-given *Phoebe* “erratic [疯疯癫癫]” did not, in her opinion. Acknowledging that Ian is conventionally a boy’s name, Ian decided to adopt the name because she considers it a cool name. This name also matched her self-perception as a boyish soccer-playing girl. The participants tend to choose a name that matches their personality traits and assign a unique connotation to it. Through adopting new names and projecting personality traits, participants in the present study also became able to explore identity possibilities and define themselves.

Summary and Conclusion

The earlier sections revealed that teachers played a major role in motivating some participants to adopt non-Chinese names. This influence is important as names are a channel for autonomous exploration and selection of personal identity. The cultural and linguistic similarities between China and Japan also seem to have influenced the participants’ naming practices. The similarities in the pronunciation of Chinese names, as well as the hierarchy and solidarity suggested by Japanese honorific suffixes, and the avoidance of personal pronouns were all found to be important here. The respondents’ names may also facilitate engagement in the local society for the three participants who adopted Japanese-sounding names. Furthermore, two naming patterns that seem to originate from Chinese culture among the participants were also identified: (1) retaining multiple names to explore philosophical connotation of oneself; and (2) following Chinese conventions for terms of address for better communication.

Functioning as an identity marker, the participants’ names in this study reveal a degree of discord between their names and their identity. On one hand, some tended to re-interpret their Chinese given names and embodied them as a given identity marker. On the other hand, the participants tended to more actively explore and define their adopted names to suit their perceived personality traits. As they grow up, the participants may adopt new names based upon an assessment of their current personal identity. It was also found that the respondents’ Chinese names seem to play a part in the participants’ endeavor to justify and claim the ownership of the adopted non-Chinese names.

Despite these important findings, this exploratory study has a few limitations. Although this study largely centers on cultural influences, Chineseness is by no means the sole factor. A localized analysis of the social norms and the English program system in Japanese universities may provide new insights. Additionally, the context-sensitivity of name choice may be biased since all but one of the interviews were conducted in Chinese. The participants might have answered with their non-Chinese names if the interviews had been in English or Japanese, or the researcher had been a non-Chinese speaker. Regarding the sampling methods, new themes might have emerged if more diversity had been included. Due to the small sample size and accessibility, naming practices of other ethnic groups and Chinese-speaking societies were not investigated, making the findings potentially biased. Additionally, gender imbalance in the sample made it challenging to investigate different naming practices among male participants, if there are any.

For future research, quantitative approaches may provide more information regarding the ratio of Chinese sojourners in Japan retaining non-Chinese names, origins of the adopted non-Chinese names, and perceptions toward the names. Additionally, a closer look at one group of Chinese sojourners in Japan based on the identity domains (e.g., occupation, gender, religion, education, and ethnic group) may yield fruitful results concerning issues such as girls with traditionally male names, gender identity and naming practice, and Chinese business professionals’ naming practices in Japanese corporations. Furthermore, a longitudinal study on non-Chinese names and identity may offer new insights. Clearly, this subject area offers great potential for future onomastic research.

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China, *Chinese*, and *Chineseness* in this paper are cultural ideas. Anything related to politics is beyond the scope of discussion.

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