Peer Reviewed Article

Between Ethnic and English Names: Name Choice for Transnational Chinese Students in a US Academic Community

Wenhao Diao, PhD
The University of Arizona (USA)

Abstract

This article explores how transnational Chinese students negotiate identity options through name choice while studying in the US. Name choice can discursively index membership in various communities. Drawing on theories of heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981) and community of practices (Lave and Wenger, 1991), this study examines how name choice becomes a site of identity negotiation for transnational Chinese students who received their English names from ESL classes in China. Using a qualitative approach, the analysis illustrates divergent patterns in name choice among a group of transnational Chinese students within one academic community, and demonstrates how membership in the community intersects with notions of cosmopolitanism to affect their name choice. The findings shed light on the pedagogical practice of assigning English names in ESL classrooms. They also call for future research to study the complex links between Chinese students' histories of engagement in such practices and their identity negotiation processes when overseas.

Keywords: name choice, transnational Chinese students, community of practices, identity, English as a second language

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More and more Chinese students are pursuing education abroad – especially in developed Anglophone countries. Their sojourns overseas differ fundamentally from the typical study abroad experience of American students described in the applied linguistics literature (see a review in Kinginger, 2009). In this article I use the term "transnational Chinese students" to refer to this group. These transnational students bring with them their imaginations of the developed world, and they often experience complex processes of identity negotiation while abroad (Fong, 2011). The aim of this study is to explore such identity negotiation processes by examining a group of Chinese students in one academic community in the US. Specifically the focus is on their choice between a self-assigned English name and their Chinese given name. For sake of brevity and consistency, the term "name choice" will be used in what follows to refer to the phenomenon in question.

Many educators and administrators in Anglophone countries may be quite familiar with the phenomenon of transnational Chinese students arriving on campus with self-assigned English names in addition to their Chinese names. While in many cultures it is possible to have more than one name over one's lifespan, having multiple names simultaneously at a given time period is not the usual situation for the majority of people. Scholars have investigated the use of multiple names as a linguistic and social phenomenon. For instance, researchers have found that using alternative names allows people to index and perform various identities in different communities, such as "nicknames" among subcultural groups (Bierbach & Birken-Silverman, 2007; Rymes, 1996) and English names for "1.5-generation" immigrants (Thompson, 2006). However, scant attention has been given to transnational Chinese students' choice between their English and ethnic names. Different from the Korean immigrants in Thompson's study (2006) who adopted their English names at an early age, these Chinese students often receive their English names during adolescent years through ESL learning experience. Their name choice is likely to be a decision that involves more conscious identity negotiation processes in specific contexts.

This study attempts to understand how a group of Chinese students chose between their two names in a US academic community. To conceptualize identity in relation to two linguistically different names, I draw on Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossia" (Bakhtin, 1981) and the community of practice (CoP) theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991). From the Bakhtinian perspective, identity is an option that is emergent from negotiations. In our complexly stratified societies, each individual has multiple – and sometimes contradictory – identities available to them (Norton, 2000). The specific identity option one makes in a given context must be a socially meaningful act to the community and/or the individual (Pavlenko, 2002). In addition, meanings of these identity options are often not consistent across different contexts. They are disputed, negotiated, and reconstructed (Hopper, 1987). Therefore, to capture the Chinese students' processes of identity negotiation through their name choices, it is important to understand how they interpret the different social nuances related to their name choices in various cultural contexts and communities.

The CoP theory can help us further conceptualize their name choice in relation to the kind of communities of which they are members. A CoP is a community in which members share a common enterprise and social practices but not necessarily the same status. Identity thus should be seen as membership in such a community. One's membership status is shaped and in return shapes their participation in the community's practices. Thus, transnational Chinese students' name choice should be seen as practices situated in the specific communities that they belong to, such as the academic community that is under investigation in this article.

The focus of the current study is the experience of identity negotiation through name choice by a cohort of Chinese students in a graduate program in the US. Using ethnographic methods, I examine how they understood the meanings of their two names in China and the US, and how they make choices between their names within the community in the US. The findings are not intended to be conclusive. Rather, the intention is to offer implications for researchers and language educators to reflect upon how ideologies about target language communities can be shaped through pedagogical practices such as assigning English names in ESL classrooms.

Theoretical Frameworks

The goal of the study is to examine how transnational Chinese students' negotiate their identities by choosing between names in two languages. Drawing from Bakhtin's (1981) theory of heteroglossia, each individual has multiple identities. Choice of identity through language is always socially meaningful. Meanings of a certain identity choice are not static. They are fluid and emergent from social actions – especially through linguistic practices (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). They are linked both to the past and to the individual speaker (Bakhtin, 1981). Identity choices emerge from negotiations in ways that reflect individuals' pasts and their assessment of the present – which includes their interlocutors (Hopper, 1987). Because social meanings can be disputed, identity choice reflects "a perpetual tension between self-chosen identities and others' attempt to position them differently" (Bakhtin, 1981). Pavlenko and Blackledge (2001) further theorize that the relationship between language and identity options includes the following four aspects:

> 1) Linguistic and identity options are limited within particular socio-historic contexts …; 2) Diverse identity options and their links to different language varieties are valued differently and that sometimes it is these links rather than the options *per se* that are contested and subverted; 3) Some identity options may be negotiable, while others are either imposed (and thus non-negotiable) or assumed (and thus not negotiated) .…; 4) Individuals are agentive beings … which allows them to resist identities that position them in undesirable ways, produce new identities, and assign alternative meanings to the links between identities and linguistic varieties. (p. 27)

The statement above illuminates the complexity of identity choices that are made possible by different languages. These choices involve both subjectivity and inter-subjectivity. They are connected to individuals' histories and are negotiated with other people in specific contexts. When Chinese students arrive in Anglophone countries and join new academic communities, they encounter cultural contexts where meanings of their name choice can no longer be the same.

To further understand transnational Chinese students' name choice, I also follow the theory of CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and situate their identity negotiations within specific communities. CoP refers to a group of people who share a common enterprise and ways of doing things (Lave & Wenger, 1991). From this perspective, identity is defined as one's membership status in a certain community, which is formed through engagement in shared practices as well as the endeavor with other members. These practices may include ways of talking, beliefs, values, and power relations (Eckhert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). Members of the same community also share understanding concerning these practices and what they mean in their lives and for their community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). However, they often do not share the same level of participation and their membership statuses differ (Eckert, 2000). Construction of a certain identity, therefore, is a process of moving from legitimate peripheral participation towards central membership through participating in these socially meaningful practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The CoP theory has generated a profound impact on the line of research that examines language and identity. Scholars have used it as an interpretive framework to study individuals who have crossed national borders such as immigrants (e.g., Han, 2009; Norton, 2000) and overseas sojourners (e.g., Gao, 2011; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2008). Indeed, the act of border crossing entails a spatial discontinuity and a temporal continuity from one's past. For each individual who has moved to a different country, the context within which meaning is interpreted includes not only

the physical location but also his/her personal histories and those of their interlocutors. Individuals therefore have to "reposition," "reimage" and "refashion" their identities in the new environment (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001).

These theoretical perspectives contribute to the design of the current study. Based on these theories, having two names can be seen as having different options that are socially meaningful for transnational Chinese students. Their choices are reflective of the negotiations of identity that emerge as they move from old communities in China to new ones overseas. The goal of this study is to examine how a group of transnational Chinese students chose between their English and ethnic names and negotiate their identity options.
The research questions are:

1) How did these transnational Chinese students choose between their names within an academic community in the US?

2) How did they interpret the meanings of their name choice that emerged from their experience and negotiate their identity options through name choice while studying in America?

Research Context

English in China and Chinese Students in Anglophone Countries

Since its Open Door policy in 1978, China has transformed itself from an economically isolated country to an active participant of globalization. Its role in the global market has created a growing demand for English-speaking professionals in various fields and the increasing popularity of English language education in China (Graddol, 2006). English is currently the most commonly taught foreign language in China, with an estimated 20 million new English users each year (Graddol, 2006, p. 95). Due to the socioeconomic gap between rural and urban China, however, English education is much more common in cities. Meanwhile, because English education was not popularized until the late 1970s when China opened to the outside world, English names are also found among young professionals and college students in urban China.

Along with China's participation in the global market, an increasing number of Chinese students are also studying overseas to pursue both linguistic competence and first-hand knowledge from the developed world (Graddol, 2006). Institutions in the US are particularly popular because of their prestige and the possibility for them to pursue mobility by remaining in residence after earning their degrees (Fong, 2011). According to the *Open Doors* report (2011), students from China constitute the largest proportion of international students in the US. While studying in the US, many of them undergo complex processes of identity negotiation, involving struggles and their search for dual membership in the developed world and in their home country, China (Fong, 2011). The focal event in this study is their name choice.

Naming Practices in China

Chinese names carry meanings through logographic representation (Lee, 1998). Parents often choose Chinese characters that represent their wishes – what characteristics they hope to see and what kind of person the baby should become. For instance, characters such as 伟 (*wěi*, "noble"), 敏 (*mǐn*, "clever") and 勇 (*yǒng*, "brave") are among the most popular names in China. In addition, a Chinese name can also encode information about gender, class and other identities through its

constitutive character(s). These meanings can sometimes be problematic, though. For instance, conventional Chinese female names are often associated with physical features (e.g., "pretty") or their expected roles in the family (e.g., "awaiting a little brother") (Lee, 1998).

Another important aspect of Chinese naming practices is that historically one individual could have multiple names. An educated person typically had three names – a given name (*míng*), a *zì*, and a *hào* – for different identity and pragmatic functions. Of the three only the *míng* was given by one's parents. The other two were often assigned by oneself or peers. This practice allowed people to seek alternative names and resist certain identities that the original given name imposed, such as undesirable gender stereotypes for women (Lee, 1998). The practice of having *zì* and *hào* has become obsolete in China. However, the notion of a self-assigned name is not unfamiliar to the majority of the population.

Chinese Names in English and English Names for Chinese

When being romanized into the English alphabet, the meanings that the characters represented become lost. Chinese is a homophone-rich language, with on average about 11 characters sharing one spelling (Tan & Perfetti, 1998, p. 168). A romanized Chinese name can only be somewhat suggestive of the original meaning at the most, even to a native speaker. For instance, *li* can be a girl's name meaning "pretty" (丽), or a boy's name meaning "strength" (力).

Meanwhile, the official romanization system used to transcribe Chinese names for people from China, *pinyin*, is not always phonetically transparent to English speakers. The *pinyin* system contains letters that are pronounced distinctively different from English letters. For example, in *pinyin* "x" stands for alveolo-palatal fricative [ɕ] (which is absent in English), while "c" is alveolar affricate [tsʰ] (which does exist in English but is represented using "ts" as in "cats"). This disparity may cause difficulty for English speakers when pronouncing Chinese names such as *Caixia*, if they lack basic knowledge of Mandarin phonetics.

Research Design

Field Site

The community in question was a graduate program in applied linguistics at an American university located in a city in northeastern US. At the university, international students constituted 48% of the total graduate student body. Within the program, the students and faculty members came from various national and ethnic backgrounds. At the time of the study, half of the students were transnational Chinese students.

This graduate program could be described as a typical CoP in a number of ways. First, being an academic program specializing in language education, it was defined by a common endeavor and practices shared among its members (Lave & Wenger, 1991). All members (professors and graduate students) shared the common goal of promoting language learning. They also engaged in a range of activities to achieve this goal, including: 1) conducting research; 2) teaching languages; and 3) attending administrative events such as department meetings. Secondly, members of this CoP had different titles (e.g., students, professors, etc.). Their expertise in the shared practices also varied. These differences make the program a CoP in which membership statuses are unequal (Eckert, 2000). Thirdly, the graduate students in the program typically planned

to pursue careers in academia. Their relationship to the professors was therefore comparable to the kind of apprenticeship between experts and novices described in Lave and Wenger's work (1991).

Participants

My focal participants were four transnational Chinese graduate students enrolled in the program. All of them had received extensive training in English (including taking classes with foreign teachers).[1] They all obtained English names from their ESL learning experience in China. None of their romanized Chinese names contained letters that were distinctively different from the English alphabet (e.g., "x" or "c").   They are referred to using the pseudonyms Hui, Anna, Jing, and Bo in what follows.

As shown in Table 1, the participants had diverse social identities. They differed from each other in terms of 1) seniority in the community, 2) gender and relationship status, 3) previous major in China, and 4) research and professional plans. Anna arrived two months before the study. Hui was a second-year student. Jing and Bo were both in their third year in the program. Anna and Jing are female. Bo is married and a father of a two-year-old. Anna's research interests and professional plans were exclusively related to ESL teaching, whereas Hui and Jing were committed to Chinese as a second language (CSL) research. Bo was interested in both ESL and CSL learning. These differences respectively represented past, present, and future, and reflected a contextual continuum that may intersect with their name choice.

Table 1

Participants' Profiles

	Anna	**Hui**	**Bo**	**Jing**
Pseudonyms Chinese/English	Min/ Anna	Hui/ Mike	Bo/ Steven	Jing/ Vivian
Previous major	English	Chinese applied linguistics	English	English
Seniority	First year	Second year	Third year	Third year
Relationship status	Single, with a Portuguese boyfriend	Single, with a girlfriend living in China	Married, with a wife and a daughter in China	Single, relationship status unknown
Research	ESL	CSL	ESL	CSL
Future plans	Teaching ESL	Teaching CSL	Teaching CSL or ESL	Teaching CSL

At the time of the study, I was also a member in the program. Being a transnational Chinese student myself, I used to have an English name from my own English learning experience. This experience enabled me to establish rapport with my participants and view their name choices from an insider's perspective. Meanwhile, I acknowledge the influence that my own experience and identity exerted on the participants and the interpretation of the findings. However, I see the study as a project in which my participants and I reflected together upon individual experiences of identity negotiation through name choice. The findings, therefore, should be interpreted as what my participants and I have jointly constructed.

Data Collection

Data collection began in September of 2008 and lasted for approximately three months. During this time, I conducted participant observations (Angrosino, 2007) and took notes. Four community events became rich points in my analysis (see Table 2). In all four of these events, the participants had to choose a name to introduce themselves to the community. Meanwhile, the other people present at the events represented a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds that members in this CoP frequently encountered.

As shown in Table 2, the four events were: 1) the first class meeting of a course; 2) a class meeting with an American guest speaker; 3) a talk by a Japanese guest speaker; and 4) a department meeting at which the president of the university spoke. These four events represented the variety of activities that routinely took place in this community. The diverse identities of other attendees also provided a range of social relations that my participants experienced with other members in the community.

Table 2

Selected Sample Community Events

	Event	Participants	Other attendees
1	First class meeting of a course	Hui, Jing	10 American students, 1 British professor
2	Guest speaker for a course	Anna, Hui	1 American student, 2 international students, 2 American professors
3	Guest talk for a seminar course	All	1 Japanese speaker, all graduate students and faculty members
4	Department meeting	Hui, Jing, Bo	University President, most grad students and faculty members

In addition to the observations, I also collected their emails in which they signed their names. I only selected the messages that the participants sent to multiple members of the community (including myself), and those they chose to share with me for this project. After their name choice patterns emerged, I conducted semi-structured interviews with them individually. Each interview lasted for approximately 45 minutes and was audio recorded. The interview questions were in Mandarin, though all the participants switched between English and Mandarin in their answers. The interviews were transcribed into text for further analysis. In this article, transcripts are presented in English. [2]

Analysis

The data collected from various sources (i.e., observations, emails, interviews) were analyzed in a triangulated fashion (e.g., Maxwell, 2005) to answer the research questions. The participants' name choice patterns were examined through my observation notes and their emails. After their individual patterns were identified, I analyzed how they interpreted their choice by searching for recurring themes in the interview transcripts. To code these themes, an interpretative approach (Constas, 1992) was initially used. Recurring themes were identified and coded. I then adopted a participants' approach (Constas, 1992) and used their own language to label the identified categories. This process allowed me to represent their "beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences" (Talmy, 2010, p.133).

Findings

The participants' name choice patterns diverged during my observations (see Table 3).

Table 3

Participants' Name Choices Across Four Events

	Event 1[a]	Event 2	Event 3	Event 4	Email
Anna	Absent [b]	Chinese & English [c]	Chinese	Absent	Chinese, English
Hui	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese
Jing	Chinese	Absent	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese
Bo	Absent	Absent	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese

Note: [a] Event 1, 2, 3, and 4 denote respectively the class meeting, American guest speaker, Japanese guest speaker, and the department meeting.
[b] Absent = Participant was absent from the event.
[c] Chinese = Participant used Chinese name; English = Participant used English name.

Hui, Jing, and Bo used their Chinese names consistently across all events as well as in their emails. Anna switched between the two names during my observations. Her email signatures also varied between the two. She initially used "Anna" but then changed to "Min".

The interviews allowed me to gain insights into their name choice patterns. In what follows, the participants are categorized into two groups based on the themes that emerged from their interviews. Anna and Jing were categorized into one group and Hui and Bo into the second.

Being Cosmopolitan: Anna and Jing

Anna: Mobility Between Chinese and English Worlds

Anna had been in the US for less than two months when my study began. She studied English for both her B.A. and M.A. degrees at a university in Beijing before coming to the US. She obtained her English name during the fifth grade in elementary school as a requirement by her English teacher, but barely used it before college. In her interview, Anna associated her use of the English name in college with her interactions with foreigners. Her English teacher then was a typical foreigner with whom she interacted. She recalled that the foreign teacher couldn't remember her Chinese name but remembered her English name "very well." According to Anna, the foreign teacher saw them as members of the English department. Therefore, "the identity is English." (Anna's interview.)

Anna's name choice in China was also related to the CoP of which she used to be a member. She followed the name choice patterns of expert members (professors) in the English department. For instance, she recalled her former advisor as someone who only called her Anna whenever a foreigner was present, but would only use her Chinese name otherwise:

> *Sometimes for example/ some other university sent a foreigner/* [...] *when introducing me to others, she* [the advisor] *would say,* "this is Anna. She is our second-year post-graduate

student."/ *perhaps Chinese people just* cater to the foreigners' needs [*sic*: cater to foreigners' needs] / *I just think that you* <u>cannot remember</u> *Chinese names*/
  (Interview transcript, Anna.)

The excerpt above illustrates how the semiotic link between Anna's English name and her use of English with foreigners emerged not only from her interactions with her foreign teacher, but also her observations of what central members did. The foreign teacher and her advisor together confirmed a discourse that "foreigners cannot remember Chinese names" and hence only an English name could "cater to foreigners' needs." It became the token of transition from Chinese to English in daily communication.

Anna also commented that having an English name was an indicator of youth in her previous school. This link emerged from her interactions with other central members:

He [a professor at her school in China] *probably used his English name when introducing himself/* […] *I have this impression at the university/ that it seemed the young/ that professor was quite young too/ that it seemed between young teachers and students/ the young teachers used English* [names]/
(Interview transcript, Anna.)

Therefore, as Anna understood, only the "young teachers" at her previous school in China used "English names." This connection between having an English name and being young was constructed through her experience with the young professors who had a more central status in the community than she did. When she began teaching her own classes to undergraduate students as a graduate instructor, Anna appropriated this practice. According to her, the English name allowed her to establish rapport with the students and avoided their use of "Teacher Chen" to address her, which would have made her sound old.

Anna's name choice pattern changed when she entered the graduate program in the US. After her arrival to this program, she soon discovered that its members came from numerous cultural backgrounds and using one's ethnic given name was an integral part of the existing community practices. This practice contrasted with what she had already been socialized into while in China. She started to negotiate her name choice with other members of the community. In these negotiations, tension emerged when her professors used her ethnic name. For instance, she reported such tension with Sharon, a professor in the department:

Sharon *once told me/ she said that she absolutely could not stand using an English name to call a Chinese student/* […] *under such circumstances the choice is one hundred percent Chinese name/ because she is* Professor/ *of course I must consider that she is the* Professor/
(Interview transcript, Anna.)

In the excerpt above, Anna positioned Sharon as a member of central status ("*because she is* Professor") and herself as a peripheral member whose status is lower ("*of course I must consider that she is the* Professor"). She thus surrendered and used her Chinese name.

Yet Anna was still negotiating with other professors. Email provided a space for her to negotiate her name choice with professors and avoid direct confrontation. In her interaction with David (a professor who understood Mandarin), Anna interpreted his preference for her ethnic name as an indicator of him being "Chinese-minded". She wrote in her email to David:

> BTW, my English name is Anna. I know it's a kind of old-fashioned name. But I have had it for almost 18 years. So although it is not my official name, it is a real name for me. I use it now in the department.
> (Email from Anna to David.)

She was apparently still aware of the differences in their membership statuses. To tone down her position, she used phrases such as "BTW" and "although it is not my official name" in addition to choosing email and avoiding face-to-face interaction. Yet despite such hedging, she defined her English name as being "a real name" and granted it a legitimate status in the community.

Similar negotiations also took place between Anna and other professors. In her interview, Anna also mentioned Sofia, another professor who initially used her English name but then changed to her Chinese name despite Anna's effort to "consistently use Anna." Anna negotiated her name choice with Sofia in a more subtle way, i.e., through email signatures:

> *I just felt like I want to* come back to myself/ *because before that whenever I contacted with her* [Sofia] *I always used* Anna *so/ and she never used Min to address me either/ So later on I felt I should go back to* Anna/ *Then I* deliberately *used* Anna *when I wrote* email/
> (Interview transcript, Anna.)

Anna's gender identity also affected her name choice. She was in a romantic relationship with an exchange student from Portugal (Carlos), who preferred to use her Chinese name. The reason, according to Anna, was the 'exoticness' that her ethnic name implied. During the interview, she expressed strong dissatisfaction with Carlos' name choice:

> Never happy that Carlos called me Min/ I am never happy about that/ *He sometimes* [does so] *in order to emphasize* [me being] exotic Chinese/ *I would deliberately* correct *him/ I just feel what a snob/* Anna *is* Anna/ *that's because you* [i.e., Carlos] *are a <u>foreigner</u>/*
> (Interview transcript, Anna.)

Once again, the rationale for Anna's use of her English name was that she was interacting with a "foreigner," as evidenced by her reasoning that "Anna *is* Anna" and "that's because you are a foreigner." Her English-speaking identity allowed her transnational mobility as well as access to becoming a cosmopolitan woman. To her, being a transnational student and a woman in an inter-racial and inter-national relationship reflected her cosmopolitan identity, which is linked to the use of her English name.

> Anna's experience can best be summarized with her own words:
> [In China] *which name I use was based on what kind of people I talked to/ I never thought about that being a Chinese person- being a Chinese person <u>majoring in English</u>/ what* [name] *I should choose/*
> (Interview transcript, Anna.)

The English name that used to provide her mobility between different "kinds of people" as an English major in China now became contradictory to her ethnic identity in the new community. Name choice had turned into a site of struggles and complex negotiations.

Jing: Ethnicity in a multicultural community

Jing was also a female student who majored in English for her undergraduate and graduate studies in urban China. She assigned herself an English name during the freshman year because it was required by her foreign teacher. She initially selected a name that sounded similar to her Chinese family name, but soon changed it because it "sounded like someone else." Her second English name was based on the pronunciation of her mother's Chinese name.

Jing's name choice pattern contrasted with that of Anna. She consistently used her Chinese name across all events and in her emails. In the interview, she reported that her English name was almost only used in her English classes in China:

> *No matter who it is/ even with those who know nothing about the Chinese culture/ I would still use my Chinese name/ because I think that he must adjust to my* [culture]*/* […] *we cannot only think about catering to others.*
> (Interview transcript, Jing.)

The comments that Jing made – such as foreigners "must" adapt and "we cannot only think about catering to others" – directly contrast with Anna's belief that the English name allowed her to "cater to the foreigner's needs."

Jing's understanding of being unique was also based on the existing naming practices among central members in the community and the meanings that they assigned to these practices:

> *I think professors in the program even prefer/ and our students/ all* prefer to use your native name*/ because- because it seems that everyone uses this/ and also for example Richard Brown / last semester in class/ there was a student who couldn't speak his ethnic language well/* [Richard] *even said* "what a shame"*/*
> (Interview transcript, Jing.)

As a third-year graduate student, Jing had already gained her senior status in the academic community. She commented that in the past it had been a shared practice within the program for Chinese students to use their ethnic names. As a more senior member of the community, she used this knowledge to describe the Chinese students who broke the norm and used English names as being "kids" who were "really westernized." Having lived here for three years, she also claimed her knowledge of the US society:

> *America can be described as a very tolerant society/ and also a very diverse society/ basically they have seen all kinds of strange names/ their degree of acceptance is far beyond many Chinese people's imaginations/* […] [this was] *what I found out after I came here/*
> (Interview transcript, Jing.)

In Jing's statement above, she rhetorically distanced herself from the Chinese people who were *imagining* the US and granted to herself knowledge about the actual practices ("this was what I found out after I came here").

Her knowledge of the US further enabled her to have "criticisms" about the society and become comfortable with her ethnic identity in this diverse society:

In terms of the American culture/ I myself have some criticisms/ And I as a Chinese person/ my identity is very obvious/ I think there is no need to make any changes on anything at all/
(Interview transcript, Jing.)

Jing's use of her ethnic name is therefore consistent with the knowledge that she gained from living in the country and participating in this multicultural community. For her, the Chinese name became a marker of her ethnicity while living in the US:

I think that for them to remember me just as/ just as that sound/ not something that they grew up being familiar with/ […] it's just that I feel I am special/ at least my name is special/ sometimes you see a name Amy/ and probably wonder what country this person is from/ I think I don't want others to be surprised to see a Chinese person when we meet/
(Interview transcript, Jing.)

The sentiment expressed in this excerpt shows that, for Jing, name choice was closely linked to her ethnic identity and the multicultural community she belonged to. She perceived that her membership status in the CoP meant that she should maintain her ethnic identity through using her ethnic name. Furthermore, she interpreted engagement in practices pertaining to name choice as being evidence of her knowledge of the program and the US society, which further became symbolic of her seniority in the community.

Although Anna and Jing show very different patterns, we can see a common theme, that is, being multilingual and multicultural in a globalized world. The differences lie in their interpretations of cosmopolitanism. While Anna interpreted the English name as a symbolic resource for her to move between the Sinophone and Anglophone worlds, Jing understood it as losing one's identity in a multicultural society.

I shall now turn to the analysis of my two other participants.

Membership in a Community: Hui and Bo

Hui: A nonnegotiable identity in an institution. Hui received his English name from his English teacher in middle school. He majored in English in college and made "foreign friends" in China as a fluent English speaker. In his interactions with them, he used his English name because it was "probably easier for them".

When Hui entered the graduate program in the US, he initially used both his English and Chinese names in community events. It was due to his uncertainty about what was recognized as the shared practice within the community. Giving both names allowed him to "wait and see" what other people would prefer. Soon after he discovered what was the existing practice in the community, his name choice shifted from giving both names to exclusively using his ethnic name. Hui explained the change as a symbol of his participation in the community:

When a group of people meet together, it is not the same as individual meetings/ in a group of people, for instance, I would definitely not be the first one to introduce myself/ [When] *everyone else gives one name* [but] *you suddenly give two /*[…] *don't you think it'd be strange/*
(Interview transcript, Hui.)

As shown in the excerpt above, Hui interpreted a legitimate practice as one that was shared in the community and that other members were already engaging in. Therefore, for him, what was conventional became what was institutional and normal.

Hui's conceptualization of legitimate practices as those that were shared within the community was not only applicable to his own name choice, it was also his explanation regarding how other members (including central ones) chose between his two names:

> Sofia *probably called me* Mike *for a while/ then* somehow *she changed/ many people called me* Hui*/ maybe at the* seminar*s she heard it/* [after] *she heard it many times/* ok*/ she also knew what to call/* [if] *nine out of ten people call* [me] Hui*/ and you call me* Mike*/ then when everyone is having a meeting together/ don't you think it'd be strange/*
> (Interview transcript, Hui.)

As seen in both of the two excerpts above, Hui repeatedly asked rhetorically in the interview, "don't you think it'd be strange," indicating that using two names would violate the existing norm in the community. For Hui, name choice was not just an individual's choice. It was a social action that was located in the community. The existing practices shared within the community not only regulated his own behaviors, they were also interpreted as the guiding force behind other people's practices. To him, it was this kind of mutual engagement that helped to create solidarity in the community.

Furthermore, Hui's name choice was also related to what was seen as legitimate in the university as an institution. As an international student, he had to use his Chinese name on official documents. In his interview, he recalled a number of occasions where his English name was "not official," such as when he was requesting letters of recommendation as well as in the documentation of his enrollment and immigration status in the university. His Chinese name was the only acceptable one in these institutionalized practices, and hence, the real name.

To summarize, in Hui's case, using his ethnic name was interpreted as a conventionalized practice within the department. It was also seen as an institutionalized practice in the university. The Chinese name thus became an identity label that should not and could not be negotiated.

Bo: A Name and a Community. Born in rural China, Bo recalled that using English names was a practice that differentiates urban and rural China. According to him, having an English name was "trendy" in Chinese cities. When he moved to a city and started college as an English major, he also obtained an English name for himself.

The use of English names was more than just a marker of the urban identity in China. Bo recalled a discourse he encountered in China that imagined the Anglophone countries as places where Anglicized names can greatly facilitate interaction:

> *There was a popular myth/ if you go abroad you should have an English name for the sake of convenience of communication/ so that Americans can remember* [it]*/*
> (Interview transcript, Bo.)

His comment in the excerpt above is reminiscent of Anna's claims. In both of their accounts, English names were seen as a resource for transnational mobility ("if you go abroad"), and a default identity label in communication with "Americans."

However, Bo's name choice pattern changed when he actually left China. He worked in Singapore before coming to the graduate program in the US. He tried to discover existing community practices upon his arrival in Singapore, and soon found that ethnic names were commonly used there. "Singapore" is a recurring theme in the interview when he was asked about the reformation of his name choice pattern. For instance:

> *When* [I] *got to Singapore/ I found people were able to remember the name/ so I thought* [it] *was not necessary to use my English name/*
> (Interview transcript, Bo.)

As shown above, Bo searched for the existing practices instead of imposing new ones. His comments are rather comparable to Hui's. Both of them interpreted name use as a part of shared practices and themselves as community members who should also engage in these practices. In addition, Bo also mentioned how he found the popular discourse in China regarding name use in Anglophone countries to be false ("I found people were able to remember the name"). This discovery process marked his transition from imagining what people Anglophone countries did to actually engaging in practices with people in Anglophone countries.

When he arrived in the US, Bo maintained this name choice pattern formed in Singapore. Similar to what he did in Singapore, he also began by observing how his ethnic name was received. As soon as he discovered that "everyone just called me Bo," he decided to use his Chinese name only.

Another unique theme regarding Bo's name choice was related to his relationship to his parents and his childhood:

> *Since you were a kid this* [Chinese name] *was your only name/ this is your name/ in China you won't tell your parents your English name/ for example from the age of one to fifteen, this is your name/*
> (Interview transcript, Bo.)

As he repeatedly emphasized ("this is your name"), Bo perceived his ethnic name as his "only name" because it was how his parents knew him and what he used during his childhood ("from the age of one two fifteen").

However, despite the link he saw between his ethnic name and childhood, Bo, a father of a two-year-old, had given his daughter an English name. According to him, the English name was "useless" because she was living with his parents in rural China where "no English was spoken." The English name, however, was an identity marker both for himself and his daughter:

> *Just thought I was an English major/ so just felt like getting one/ it's fun/ probably now I think that in the modern society everyone has one* [English name]/ *so I got one* [for my child]/
> (Interview transcript, Bo.)

Bo's statement above illustrates how he interpreted his English name as being linked to future and modernity ("in the modern society") in addition to his major in English. Moreover, while his own Chinese name is seen as tied to his own childhood and parents in rural China, an English name becomes a symbolic token of modernity that he hopes his child will have.

Conclusion and Discussion

My analysis so far shows that, though the four participants were all aware that using one's ethnic name was the existing practice in the community, there was still no single simple pattern with regard to their name choice. They constantly interpreted and reinterpreted the meanings of the two names. For Anna, the English name granted her mobility from the Sinophone world to Anglophone communities. It was a marker of her cosmopolitanism and youthful identify in urban China. When these meanings became devoid of significance in the new community in the US, Anna chose to negotiate with other members in order to keep her English name. Jing, in contrast, "never" used her English name outside the language classroom. She interpreted the use of English names for Chinese people as a denial of their ethnicity. As a more senior member in this academic community, she also interpreted the use of her ethnic name as a way to demonstrate her knowledge of the multicultural society. Hui and Bo both looked for existing practices upon their arrival in Anglophone communities, as they understood legitimate practices as those that were already shared among other members or had already been institutionalized. Furthermore, Bo interpreted his ethnic name as linked to his rural hometown and parents, while the English name was connected to modernity, urbanity and his child.

The two overarching themes that can capture their different name choices are cosmopolitanism and community practices. The stories of the two women in the study, Jing and Anna, show how cosmopolitanism can be interpreted very differently and how these interpretations can become relevant to their name choice when overseas. While Jing understood it as maintaining one's ethnic identity in a multicultural society such as the US, Anna saw it as having dual membership in both the Chinese-speaking world and the Anglophone countries. Having two names, therefore, provides an important resource for her to transition between the two. The other important theme is community practices. Such practices included not only what had already been accepted among the central members in the community, but also the institutionalized practices that existed beyond it. In the cases of both Hui and Bo, we can see the significance of such community practices in their name choice.

These findings shed light on the pedagogical practice of assigning English names to Chinese students. It becomes a part of the many discourses that shape our ideas about the local and the global (Fairclough, 2005). Through events such as assigning English names, ESL teachers and their Chinese students jointly engage in the discourse of imagining (Anderson, 1983). As shown in my findings, the Anglophone world is often imagined as a homogenous monocultural society where Anglicized names have to be obtained in order to facilitate interaction. When they arrive in a multicultural academic community in an Anglophone country, they will likely encounter discrepancies between the imagination and the reality. Even for those whose names are phonologically transparent to English speakers, such as my participants, the link between the names, community practices and notion of cosmopolitanism are interpreted differently. The choice of names becomes a site where they experience negotiation of differences and where "third place" identities emerge (Block, 2007, p. 864).

The current study still has a number of limitations. Due to its preliminary nature, it is unable to capture the dynamic picture of how transnational Chinese students from other backgrounds in other CoPs negotiate their name choices. All participants majored in language education. Other members in this specific community (such as the professors) were also devoted to promoting multiculturalism. They were probably more aware of the social and linguistic contexts that may affect one's identity. Such awareness can be different in fields of study that are less concerned about language and identity but meanwhile are extremely popular among transnational Chinese students (e.g., engineering, business). Future research should address this difference by including participants from more diverse backgrounds and in various academic communities in Anglophone countries.

The findings also illuminate issues pertaining to the phonological nature of Chinese names. For instance, as one participant, Bo, commented, he used his Chinese name not only because it was an existing practice but also it was "easy" for English speakers to pronounce. How would students whose names are not phonologically transparent go about making choices? How would they choose between their names outside of academic communities? Moreover, how would they negotiate other identities (e.g., gender, class, age) through name choice? These questions remain to be answered in future research.

What this study has demonstrated, however, is the divergence that can exist in terms of individual name choice patterns and the complexity behind those patterns. The findings are certainly specific to the participants in the study, but they have shown that even among those whose names are phonologically transparent to English speakers, and within a community that is highly aware of linguistic and cultural diversity, the choice between a self-assigned English name and an ethnic given name is still neither straightforward nor simple. These findings call for further considerations of the link between the commonplace pedagogical practice of assigning English names in China's language classrooms on one hand and the construction of ideologies about a monolingual, monocultural Anglophone society on the other.

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Author's notes

1. Typically a foreign teacher would teach a class of around 30 students in China.
2. Italic in all interview excerpts denotes translations from Chinese to English. The translations were made as literal as possible. If the participant switched to English during the interview, the English part was kept at a usual font (without italic).

Appendices

1. Transcription for interviews

Normal	originally in English with no changes
Italic	translated from Mandarin Chinese
<u>Underline</u>	stress
-	prolonged vowel
[]	inserted comments by the author
[…]	a section of the transcript has been omitted
/	pause

2. Participants who appeared in the study

Graduate students	Anna (1st year), Hui (2nd year), Jing (3rd year), Bo (3rd year)
Professors	Sofia, Richard, Sharon, David

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About the Author:

Wenhao Diao holds a Ph.D. from Carnegie Mellon University. She is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Arizona. Her research interests include study abroad and language learning, language socialization and identity, Chinese sociolinguistics, and issues related to the teaching and learning of Mandarin. Her email address is wdiao@email.arizona.edu.