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What's in a Name? Exploring Anglicized Naming Practices amongst Chinese International Students

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

EXPLORING ANGLICIZED NAMING PRACTICES AMONGST CHINESE

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, Communication

By

Garrett Robert Ruzicka

May 2018

WHAT'S IN A NAME? EXPLORING ANGLICIZED NAMING PRACTICES

AMONGST CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Communication

Missouri State University, May 2018

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to use Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory to gain a better understanding of the process students from China go through when they choose to Anglicize their names. This thesis begins with a review of the literature and then discusses the limitations found within the current research on this topic in order to formulate research questions. Qualitative research was conducted using semi-structured interviews and focus groups with international students from China that resulted in various findings. These findings—barriers and adapting to barriers, choosing an "English" name, preferences between names, and problems with using "English" names—provide insight into a topic that has not yet been adequately researched. These findings provide various points of discussion addressed in this thesis. However, as discussed near the end of the document, there were various limitations within the research; this thesis offers recommendations for future research based off of what was found in this study.

KEYWORDS: Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory, student experience, intercultural communication, communication education, international students

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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Chairperson, Advisory Committee
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May 2018

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

Instructors and professors at the university-level see an interesting phenomenon happen often when going through the class roster on the first day of a new semester: They call on an international student, and he/she requests to be addressed by a different, more "American-sounding" name. These everyday occurrences might initially seem mundane and unimportant, but communication scholars should take them into closer consideration because they could provide important insights into the experiences of international students on university campuses. These types of insights are especially important when one considers various statistical data available on international students.

International students who speak English as a second language make up a significant portion of university campuses in the U.S.; nearly 68% of all international students in higher education—about 662,949 students—came from countries where English is not the primary language during the 2014-2015 school year (Project Atlas, 2016). However, international student enrollment numbers are on the decline. One survey of nearly 500 universities showed international student enrollment decreased by an average of 6.9% for the fall 2017 semester (Baer, 2017). This downward enrollment trend can have both severe economic and cultural consequences on universities in the United States.

Statistics show that for every seven international students enrolled, three U.S. jobs are created or supported through spending in areas such as education, dining, and retail; overall, international students studying in the U.S. contributed $36.9 billion to the economy and supported more than 450,000 U.S. jobs (National Association of Foreign

Student Advisers, 2018). The Missouri State University (MSU) campus offers a clear example of the financial impact international students can have within institutions of higher education; MSU enrolled more domestic students and fewer international students during the 2017-2018 school year, which resulted in $1 million in lost enrollment revenue for the University (Smart, 2018).

International students provide much richer contributions other than economic ones, however. These students offer some of the strongest talents universities can find, and many countries have put forth large efforts to recruit international students for this reason (McCormack, 2007). International students have also been shown to contribute both innovation and cultural diversity on university campuses (Chellaraj, Maskus, & Mattoo, 2008), and they drive teaching and research in new directions (Rudenstine, 1997). As one group of researchers put it, "There is simply no substitute for direct contact with talented people from other countries and cultures" (Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, & Nelson, 1999). Clearly, it is now vital to understand the international student experience due to both university efforts to become more diverse and international student enrollment numbers being on the decline; one such way to better understand the international student experience is by researching the various forms of intercultural communication that take place.

Martin and Nakayama (2006) argue that race is a social construction that exists as a cultural contradiction between being real and being fictional. These authors call for communication studies to take race more seriously in order to avert the potential marginalization of the discipline; "we risk our profession and our field if we continue to ignore the significance of race and the role of race in society" (p. 81). This topic of

international student name-changing—sometimes referred to as the Anglicization of one's name (Robbin, 2012)—is certainly an important one to discuss when one takes into consideration the aforementioned statistics and view on the communication discipline.

The purpose of this study is to use Kim's (2001) Cross Cultural Adaptation Theory to gain a better understanding of the process students from China go through when they choose to Anglicize their names. This thesis begins with a review of the literature and then discusses the limitations found within the current research on this topic. Research questions are then formulated before moving on to the methods and findings of the conducted qualitative research. This paper concludes with sections that further discuss the findings and identify some limitations within the present research. First, however, the existing body of literature must be discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three broad themes emerged when reviewing the existing literature: naming practices and perceptions, international student challenges, and the current theoretical attempts at explaining the Anglicization of international students' names. An understanding of the importance of naming practices and perceptions is necessary to discuss before a review on theorizing the phenomenon can take place.

Naming Perceptions and Practices

While researching and reviewing the literature, three subthemes emerged within the broader theme of naming practices and perceptions. These themes include the cultural significance of names, the ways in which international students might obtain their "English" names, perceptions that exist on difficult-to-pronounce names, university workshops, and the current research into this phenomenon.

The cultural significance of names. A name, being part of someone's identity, can often carry a lot of information about a person. On a broader scale, a name can be representative of various social categories such as age, race, ethnicity, intellectual competence, and various other attributes. The names Michael and Edith help to exemplify this phenomenon; Edith is a name that is largely considered less attractive and more old-fashioned than is the name Michael (Kasof, 1993); this phenomenon shows how certain names can be associated with age and can go out of style within cultures as time passes.

On a smaller scale, parents may choose to give their children specific names for many reasons; it could be because the name's meaning embodies qualities the parent

wants the child to have, to honor another individual important to the family/society, or simply because the name sounds good to those parents (Kiang, 2004). Clearly, names can carry a lot of cultural and societal weight. Next, it is important to discuss how international students might obtain their "English" names.

  Perceptions of "difficult-to-pronounce" names. Some research has been dedicated to studying the implications of words and names that are "difficult to pronounce." While the phrasing, difficult-to-pronounce, can have some problematic effects—such as being inaccurate depending on who is saying the word or name—this thesis uses this terminology in order to stay consistent with the existing research. Laham, Koval, and Alter's (2011) series of studies attempted to answer the question of whether or not pronunciation experiences have an impact on impression formation. They conducted five different tests, each of which found that easy-to-pronounce names are evaluated more positively than difficult-to-pronounce names. The researchers also found people who bear easy-to-pronounce names as being ranked more favorably than those with difficult-to-pronounce names. Their study offers important insight to both the importance of names and the types of perceptions a dominant group can form when presented with a name from a minority group that is difficult for them to pronounce. The results of this study help to further show how human communication is a raced phenomenon.

  As Martin and Nakayama (2006) say, "Racial histories and demographics inform and reflect communication behaviors" (p. 75); clearly, difficult-to-pronounce names that might be common within certain minority groups are being shown to negatively influence a dominant group's perception of those people, further proving the need to discuss this

topic. Some researchers even argue that instances of mispronouncing names within schools specifically are racial microaggressions—daily insults that, while subtle in nature, support cultural and racial hierarchies (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). For international students with names that are uncommon in the U.S., it is clear how the phenomenon found in this study could pose many problems while attempting to adjust to their new environment.

   Obtaining "English" names. Taylor, Meynard, and Rheault (1975) present a study that was designed to determine if learning another language can become a threat to one's own ethnic identity. The researchers argue that minority groups around the world are faced with a complicated set of costs and rewards for learning the language of the majority group within a culture. The authors' study on French- and English-speaking Québecers found that one of the consequences of learning the dominant language may be the perceived loss of identity with one's own ethnic group. Anglicizing one's name could certainly be seen as the loss of a person's identity within his/her ethnic group, or—at the very least—the alteration of a person's identity. As Thompson (2006) argues, "an investment in a personal name is an investment in a social identity" (p. 187). So, it proves vital to discuss how international students might alter their identities through name changes in order to adjust to a culture different from their own.

   Immigrants in the United States sometimes attempt to incorporate their names into their new culture by Romanizing—converting one's name into a Roman writing system—from their native language into English. However, this strategy can prove to be difficult when a name does not share similar phonetics across the two languages (Thompson, 2006). Choosing an "English-sounding" name oftentimes offers a solution to

this problem. The practice of Anglicizing one's name can vary depending on the country of origin of the international student. First generation Korean-American students, for example, oftentimes obtain their "English" names at a young age due to their Korean names being difficult for English-speakers to pronounce (Thompson, 2006). Chinese students, on the other hand, often receive "English" names during their adolescent years while taking English as a second language (ESL) classes in China. Chinese ESL students often imagine the Anglophone world as being a homogenous, monocultural place where "English-sounding" names must be used in order to facilitate interactions with native English speakers (Diao, 2014).

While Korean-American and Chinese students oftentimes receive "English" names at a young age, Hong Kong businesspeople sometimes receive theirs as adults; this practice is oftentimes done in order to speed up the process of getting acquainted while doing business with people from the West (Li, 1997). In another study, Duthie (2007) found that Chinese businesspeople working within foreign-invested corporations often Anglicize their names for two main reasons: First, it made conducting business with Western clients easier due to issues in pronunciation and remembering. Second, proficiency in English was a sign of status within the company; those who spoke English proficiently were more likely to be promoted, and using a Western name was seen as a sign of status. It is clear that Anglicizing practices can vary by reason and country of origin. However, an Indian student's discussion on his "English" name could offer insight to how many some international students feel: "As many groups who are labeled 'not American,' I tried my hardest to fit in and be as 'American' as possible. This included

hiding my middle name, changing the pronunciation of Ravi, and changing the pronunciation of Dixit" (Kiang, 2004, p. 210).

Unfortunately for international students like Ravi, the various barriers they face in a new country can have multiple negative impacts on their mental health. As the Center for Mental Health in Schools (2013) says, international students' transitional problems can cause intense feelings of grief that only worsen culture shock. In these cases, the stress of adapting to new environments can feel overwhelming and make international students even more vulnerable to future stressors. Clearly, a "foreign," difficult-to-pronounce name is one of many barriers an international student might face when introduced to a new culture; obtaining an "English-sounding" name could offer a way for many students to overcome this barrier. For students who do not choose to be addressed by an "English" name, on the other hand, some universities have implemented ways in which faculty and staff can be trained to better address students who have names that might be difficult for them to pronounce.

University Workshops. The Tippie College of Business at the University of Iowa has a large population of students from China; because of this large population, the University has created workshops designed to teach faculty and staff how to correctly pronounce the names of students from China. These workshops focus specifically on teaching the correct pronunciation and tone of Chinese names (Snee, 2013). While workshops like the ones conducted at the University of Iowa are certainly a step in the right direction for making international students feel more comfortable with using their actual names, a couple of problems are apparent with this strategy: First, their workshops train faculty and staff on how to pronounce only Chinese names; it seems the names of

students from other countries would still be mispronounced by many faculty and staff members. Secondly, this approach does not train domestic students on how to pronounce these names; therefore, it seems that university instructors would be the only people on campus who would be able to correctly pronounce these students' names. Now that naming practices, perceptions, and university accommodations have been reviewed, various types of challenges international students face while studying abroad can be discussed.

International Student Challenges on University Campuses

Many researchers have investigated the various forms of culture shock and/or difficulties international students face when studying abroad. For example, Lin's (2006) study identified various types of stressors students from China experience when studying in the U.S.; the participants reported various instances of prearrival stressors (how to find housing and worrying about being picked up at the airport), post-arrival stressors (lack of transportation, living expenses, adapting to the schooling system, and language barriers), political discrimination, poor cooking facilities, separation from family, and boring small town life since most Chinese universities are situated in larger cities. Other research on willingness to communicate in intercultural interactions found that people from China are less willing to communicate with Americans in the U.S. than are Americans in China; the researchers of this study attribute this phenomenon to differences in Eurocentric communication style, which prefers direct and explicit verbal expressions, and Asiacentric communication style, which values group harmony and silence (Lu & Hsu, 2008). Thus, it is clear how these cultural differences in communication might affect

international students' ability to make new friends and connections while studying abroad.

Brown's (2009) ethnographic research on 150 international students in the U.K. found that international students overall desired to achieve contact and make friends with host nationals. However, many of these international students ended up forming "monoethnic" friendship groups for two reasons: First, the host community was perceived by the students as being indifferent toward them when they would try to engage in communication with them. The second, and more extreme, reason the international students failed to communicate with the host community was due to instances of racial and Islamophobic prejudice. In another study, Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) found that social interaction with a host community in Britain was consistently identified as problematic for Chinese international students. These issues in social interaction, along with difficulties adjusting to daily life, were highly correlated with the levels of psychological stress in these students, and their GPA was shown to go down as levels of psychological stress increased. Clearly, international students face *many* types of culture shock and challenges when studying at Western universities. Therefore, the topic of the study found later in this thesis addresses an important question involving the international student experience: How does the act of changing one's name impact an international student's ability to address the barriers they face while studying in the U.S.?

Current Theoretical Frameworks to Explain Anglicization

In a review of the literature, few academic studies were found that attempted to apply theory to research the name-changing practices amongst some international students. These theories—both of which come from outside of the communication discipline—include Lave and Wenger's Community of Practice Theory (CoP) and Bandura's Social Learning Theory.

Community of Practice Theory. The CoP Theory refers to a process of social learning that happens when a group of people who have common interests collaborate over an extended period of time. Membership status—in this theoretical perspective—is shaped and shapes the participation in the community's practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This perspective has three required components: first, there needs to be a domain of shared interest; second, there needs to be a community; and third, there needs to be a practice that develops over time (Diao, 2014).

Diao's (2014) article offers a study on Chinese international students within a graduate program. Diao argues that the graduate program in his study is a typical CoP in various ways. First, he says it specializes in language education, so its members share a goal of promoting the learning of language. He then says the members also engage in various activities to achieve this goal (conducting research, teaching languages, etc.). The findings in his study suggest that international students' use of "English" names grants them mobility between Chinese communities and English communities in order to be able to work toward the common goals of each community. However, results from other participants viewed the use of one's "ethnic" name within the classroom as being a way to demonstrate knowledge of the multicultural society (Diao, 2014). Clearly, the findings

of this study show that the Anglicization of names is a complicated topic; furthermore, CoP does not seem to adequately describe the complex aspects of this phenomenon. The Social Learning Theory offers another theoretical framework used to examine the Anglicizing of international students' names.

Social Learning Theory. Banbura's Social Learning Theory suggests that people learn from one another through imitation, observation, and modeling. It is based on five key tenants. First, learning is a cognitive process that occurs in social contexts. Second, learning can occur by watching a behavior and by watching a behavior's consequences. Third, learning can happen without observable change in behaviors. Fourth, reinforcement of behavior plays a role in learning, though it is not solely responsible for cognitive learning. Finally, learners are not passive when receiving information; cognition, environment, and behavior each have influence on one another (Banbura, 1977).

Robbin's (2014) study uses Banbura's Social Learning Theory to examine the those who Anglicize their names on Facebook. Robbin administered a questionnaire to 200 undergraduate students at private and public universities in Nigeria. In analyzing their responses, the researcher found rationale for this name-changing practice on social networking sites to range from "ease of pronunciation, gaining acceptance and attractiveness with other Facebook users to attracting more friends" (p. 9). The participants in this study also reported that "westernized" names gave their profiles a "cool" and "trendy" image, and they felt such an image could help them gain more friends on the social media site. Overall, this study's results aligns with the Social Learning Theory as a motivated habit created by imitation. However, as this thesis

addresses in the next section, Robbin's study has a few limitations that this study seeks to

address.

LIMITATIONS WITHIN THE EXISTING LITERATURE

Various limitations can be found within the literature discussed above. First, there clearly has not been sufficient research conducted on the topic of Anglicizing one's name; only three research articles relating to this topic were found by the author, and one of those studies was an anthropological study that did not use theory to analyze the phenomenon (Duthie, 2007). Another limitation comes from Diao's (2014) research. As the author says, the study fails to "capture the dynamic picture of how transnational Chinese students from other backgrounds in other CoPs negotiate their name choices" (p. 220). Also, due to the participants' area of study, they were likely more aware of the social/linguistic contexts that could affect their identity.

Finally, the practice of Anglicizing one's name has not been adequately studied in the context of higher education. Duthie's (2007) previously-discussed research studied international businesspeople who Anglicized their names while living in Hong Kong; sojourners who have relocated for the purposes of studying abroad were not studied. Although not a limitation, a gap in the existing literature comes from the fact that Robbin's (2012) study only examined name changes on Facebook, and it only examined people from Nigeria. Robbin's study also did not seek to answer the question of why people choose the names they choose when they decide to Anglicize their name. While studying this practice in business and online settings certainly helps to provide insight, it is also necessary to research how this topic functions within university contexts.

As a final note on limitations, it is important to reiterate that none of these aforementioned studies used a communication perspective as a basis for examining the

14

Anglicization of international students' names, which could help to provide further insight on this practice of altering one's personal identity when introduced to a new cultural environment.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION THEORY

The research in this thesis uses Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory (CCAT) in an attempt to adequately explain and further understand the name-changing practices amongst international students from China, which previous research has not addressed. In her book, *Becoming Intercultural*, Kim (2001) offers the theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation. She defines her theory as, "A communication process—the process that makes the intersection possible through the exchange of messages" (p. 32). She asserts that her theory is not about *whether* people adapt when faced with new cultural environments; rather, her theory is concerned with *how* and *why* people adapt. This theory is grounded in Bertalaniffy's (1956) General Systems perspective because it argues that every person is an "open system" that exchanges information with environments through their communication, and, as a result, they co-evolve with the cultural environment (Kim, 2008; 2001).

Acculturation and Deculturation

CCAT argues that people experience adaptation through two processes: acculturation and deculturation. Acculturation occurs when an individual acquires new cultural practices as a result of their pre-existing needs and interests. Acculturation can take many forms—the learning of a new language, discovering new ways of appreciating beauty, adopting new customs and habits, and many others. Deculturation, on the other hand, involves the unlearning of parts of one's original cultural elements; deculturation

occurs when an individual has new responses to certain situations that would have previously evoked old responses. In order for these two processes to occur, however, three boundary conditions must first be met (Kim, 2001).

Boundary conditions. The first boundary condition says that an individual must have been primarily socialized in one culture (or subculture) and have moved to another cultural environment. The second condition requires that the individual be at least minimally dependent on the host environment for meeting their needs. Finally, the third boundary condition says the individual must regularly engage in firsthand communication with the new cultural environment (Kim, 2001). When these three conditions are met, CCAT asserts that individuals will inevitably experience stress through their acculturation and deculturation processes.

Stress-adaptation-growth. Individuals experience stress, oftentimes referred to as "culture shock" (Ruben, 1983), at the interplay of acculturation and deculturation: On one hand, people want to change their behaviors in order to keep harmony and adapt to cultural challenges; on the other hand, however, individuals want to upkeep their original cultural identity and customs by resisting change (Kim, 2001; 2008). Figure 1 on the following page shows how growth happens over time as a result of both stress and adaptation:
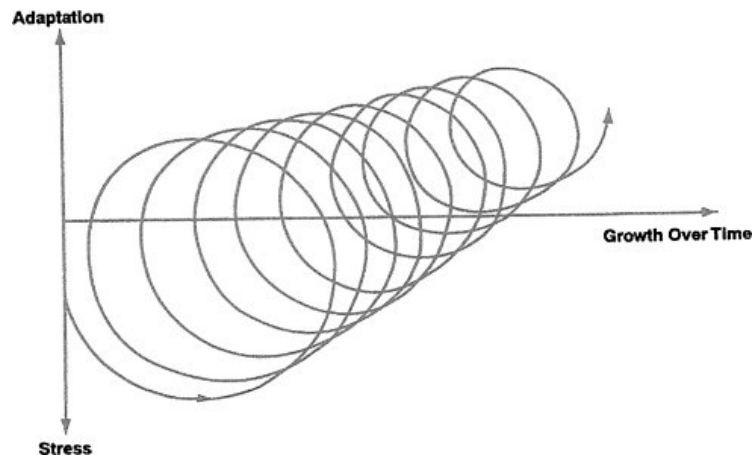
Figure 1: The stress-adaptation-growth dynamic (Kim, 2001, p. 59)

Many researchers have used the model CCAT provides to study the learning and acquisition of a second language (Janta, Lugosi, Brown, & Ladkin, 2012; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004;) and for researching international students' adjustments to new cultural contexts (Brown, 2009; Jung, Hecht, & Chapman, 2007; Ye, 2006), so this theory could provide new insights into the name-changing practices of some international students. Next, the basic assumptions that CCAT is rooted in will be discussed.

The Assumptions of CCAT

Kim's (2001) open systems-based theory relies on three basic assumptions: First, "humans have an innate self-organizing drive and a capacity to adapt to environmental challenges" (p. 35); second, "adaptation of an individual to a given cultural environment occurs in and through communication" (p. 36); and third, "adaptation is a complex and dynamic process that brings about a qualitative transformation of the individual" (p. 37). The following sections detail each of these three assumptions:

Adapting to challenges. This first assumption of this theory claims that adaptation is a fundamental goal for all humans as they face challenges from their environments. Individuals experience "sink or swim" situations at different moments in their lives, and, for the most part, they are able to successfully handle these challenges without the complete collapse of their internal systems. Adaptation is rooted in the self-organization and self-regulating principles of all living systems, and the degree of self-organization a person accomplishes mirrors the quality of their adaptive behavior (Kim, 2001).

Adaptation through communication. Kim (2001) asserts that individuals experience adaptive change when they are engaged with a sociocultural environment through two basic communicative activities: encoding messages and decoding messages. These processes are interactive and occur as individuals generate information output to the environment as well as create meaning from information input/feedback. Individuals who are new to an environment must learn the implied communication codes and processes of a host culture if they are to become successful in communicating with others within that environment. Overall, this assumption emphasizes that individuals adapt as long as they live/remain in contact with a given context due to the communication that occurs within the environment. Kim (2001) argues that, "The entire dynamic of our cross-cultural adaptation hinges on our ability to communicate with the host milieu" (p. 230).

Transformations within individuals. Kim (2001) then discusses three different facets of intercultural transformation that occur as a result of one's adaptations: functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity. First, she describes

functional fitness as being the result of repeated activities that allow an individual to increasingly function between their internal responses and the external demands of the new cultural environment; the development of functional fitness is linked to developing the ability to communicate in accordance with the cultural norms of the environment. Second, psychological health is discussed as improving as the individual becomes more functionally fit within the host environment. The individual gains a better sense of inner cohesiveness and confidence as mental, emotional, and physical disturbances are reduced. Finally, intercultural identity occurs once the individual's emerging identity connects the person to more than one cultural group. In this facet, the original cultural identity begins to diminish in its rigidity and distinctiveness as the individual increases in their interculturalness; in other words, the person is "neither totally *a part of* nor *apart from* a given culture" (Kim, 2001; Zaharna, 1989, p. 391).

Host Communication Competence

Kim (2001) asserts that every triumph or struggle brings about some degree of internal transformation within people who are new to a cultural environment, and host communication competence drives this transformative process; therefore, Kim argues that personal communication is central to all dimensions of adaptation. She says host communication competence can be conceptualized using three kinds of interrelated components: cognitive competence, affective competence, and operational competence.

Cognitive competence refers to the sensemaking of verbal and nonverbal codes. In other words, this component addresses the learning of "correct" or "right" behaviors within a cultural environment. The *affective competence* component facilitates adaptation

by providing both a motivational and emotional capacity to deal with and address challenges. Finally, *operational competence* refers to one's capacity to express their cognitive and affective experiences outwardly through specific behaviors; these behaviors include technical skills (language proficiency, academic skills, job skills, etc.), synchrony (the ability to carry out communicative interactions with the local people in a compatible and harmonious way), and resourcefulness (the ability to reconcile cultural differences and come up with creative ways for carrying out daily activities). Figure 2 below shows how these three facets of host communication competence are inseparable in reality and work interactively:
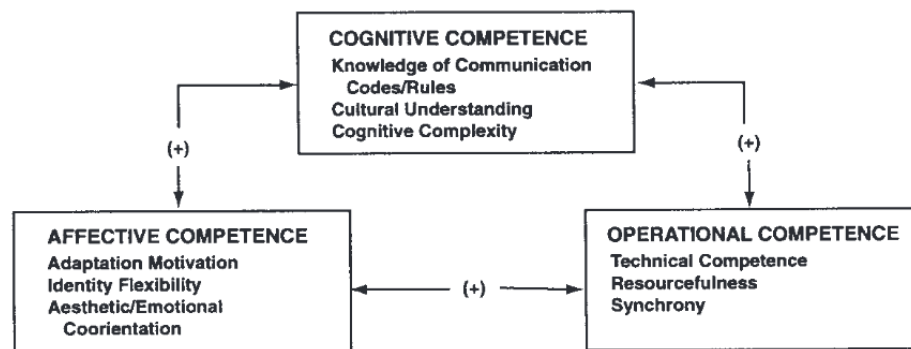
Figure 2: Interrelationships among the components of host communication competence (Kim, 2001, p. 118).
Note: Plus signs indicate positive associations.

Criticism of CCAT

While many researchers have used CCAT as a theoretical lens to study processes of assimilation, the theory has received some criticism. Kramer's (2014) critique of Kim's theory centers on her notion that one must conform to the dominant/mainstream culture or else fail. He cites Gudykunst and Kim's (2003) claim that adaptation can only occur if the newcomer is willing to "deculturize" and "unlearn" their own ways of

behaving, feeling, and thinking, and he refutes this argument by posing the following question: "What if the source of deviation is not mutable" (2014, p. xii)? Kramer then offers various examples of a person's culture—such as race, sexuality, ability, and religion—that are either not changeable or difficult to change, and he argues that CCAT is not applicable to those who cannot conform to the ways and norms of the dominant culture. With Kramer's criticism being offered, the present study does use CCAT as a theoretical lens because the topic of study involves a cultural identifier that is changeable for a person: the name by which one chooses to be addressed.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the limited literature available on this topic, and with the theoretical framework of CCAT in mind, the researcher formed the following research questions to help guide this study:

RQ1: What kinds of environmental challenges, if any, do "non-English" names create for international students studying in the United States?

RQ2: How do Chinese international students choose their "English" names?

RQ3: How, if at all, do international students communicate their name change within different cultural environments?

RQ4: How, if at all, does this form of adaptation bring about a transformation in the students?

METHODS

The presented research uses two qualitative methods—interviews and focus groups—to analyze this topic; these two methods allowed the researcher to collect data on how participants individually reflect upon their past communication, and allowed the researcher to collect data on how Chinese international students discuss their name-changing decisions amongst themselves. The researcher used the snowballing technique to obtain participants by using available persons as sources for making contact with other people who fit the criteria of this study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board on April 19, 2017 (study number IRB-FY2017-663), the researcher conducted a total of 13 individual interviews and three focus groups with international students from China who had chosen to Anglicize their names while studying in the U.S.

Conducting Research with Non-Native English Speakers

Since all of the participants in this study are non-native speakers of English, the researcher had to take two unique considerations into account while conducting this research: consent ethics and choosing semi-structured interviews as an appropriate qualitative method to use while working with the participants.

Consent ethics. Researchers working with non-native speakers of English need to be concerned with the ways in which ethics play a role in their research, particularly when it comes to the informed consent of the participants. According to Koulouriotis (2011), it is vital that the researcher make sure their participants understand the research

process and research ethics that must be taken since their cultural expectations and norms might differ significantly from the norms of the dominant culture. Because of this ethical concern, the participants were given ample time to read over the informed consent document prior to signing it. Each section was summarized to the participants by the researcher, and the participants were encouraged to ask the researcher for clarification about any of the content in the document.

Semi-structured interviews. Kim's (2006) study sought to investigate which of the three types of interviewing—structured, semi-structured, or open-ended—was the most effective when working with participants who were non-native speakers of English. His research indicated that structured interviews did not work well when interviewing his participants because the interviewees would often forget that their responses were supposed to be limited to the question itself; the participants were reminded to answer only the questions asked, but these repeated reminders threatened the harmony of the interview process. Therefore, the researcher did not use structured interviews in this study because each of the participants come from a country where group harmony is viewed as a vital quality to be emphasized (Aritz & Walker, 2014; Sarros & Santora, 2001).

Kim (2006) came to the conclusion that researchers should use semi-structured interviews when working with non-native English speakers for two reasons: First, semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to more-easily compare different statements from the participants compared to open-ended formats. Second, the semi-structured format guides the researcher without digressing too much from the core questions; the interviewer is able to clarify certain questions and concepts so as to help the participants if needed, but the interviewees still answer the core questions of the research. Therefore,

both the one-on-one interviews and focus groups in this study used a semi-structured format.

Individual Interviews

There were many reasons for choosing one-on-one interviews as a research method in this study. As Lindlof and Taylor (2011) say, interviews are useful for obtaining information about occurrences in the past, events and interactions that cannot be directly observed, and to gain a better understanding of communicative processes from participants' perspectives. The answers sought in this research required the participants to individually reflect on past experiences about communicative decisions and interactions that are not possible to directly observe; because of these requirements, interviewing was reasoned to be a sound method to use for this study.

The interview participants ranged in age, with the youngest participant being 19 and the oldest participant being 41. Five of the participants were undergraduate students, and eight of the participants were graduate students. Nine of the participants identified as being female, and four identified as being male. The participants also varied in the amount of time they have been in the U.S., with the shortest amount of time being one month and the longest being four years. The participants were given two copies of an informed consent document; they were asked to read and sign one copy and keep the other copy for themselves (see Appendix A to view the informed consent document). The participants were also asked to provide various pieces of demographic information by filling out a form (see Appendix B to view the demographics form). The researcher asked each of the participants the following filter question before interviewing them: "Are you

an international student from China who has chosen to be addressed by an "English"

name while studying in the United States?" The participants in each of the 13 interviews

answered yes to this question before being interviewed.

The researcher used a password-protected cell phone to record the audio from the

interviews; these recordings ranged from four minutes to 17 minutes and 25 seconds. The

interviews all occurred within the library or within an academic building at a large state

school in the Midwest region of the United States. The interviews were conducted within

the course of 11 months; the first interview occurred on April 28, 2017, and the last one

occurred on February 12, 2018. Each participant attended the university, but the

researcher was not acquainted with any of them prior to the interviews.

Focus Groups

After completing the individual interviews, the researcher conducted focus groups

to gather data about how international students from China discuss their name-changing

practices amongst themselves. Focus groups, being collective conversations, allow

researchers to listen to participants discuss the topic of study with one another without the

pressure of reaching a consensus. Data retrieved from focus groups is different from

interview data because this method gives the researcher the opportunity to observe what

is happening in the conversation as well as what participants say about the topic of

discussion (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).

The researcher facilitated a total of three focus groups with a total of 18

participants; two of the focus groups had seven participants each, and one of the focus

groups had four participants. The focus group participants ranged in age, with the

youngest participant being 24 and the oldest participant being 31. All of the participants were graduate students. 16 of the participants identified as being female, and two of the participants identified as being male. The focus group participants were given two copies of an informed consent document; they were asked to read and sign one copy and keep the other copy for themselves. Each of these participants had made the decision to use an "English" name while studying in the United States.

All of the focus groups occurred on March 22, 2018 within an academic building at a large state school in the Midwest region of the United States. Each focus group was led by the same investigator and used the same script of questions to guide the participants' discussion (e.g., Why do people choose to go by "English" names while studying in the United States? When do people choose their "English" name? Does going by one's birthname cause any challenges for Chinese students? Do you use your "English" name when speaking to other native Mandarin speakers? Do you have a preference between the two names?). This script was used to maintain the group structure, and participants were encouraged to elaborate on their responses before moving on to the next question. The focus groups lasted from 9 to 17 minutes and were recorded using a password-protected smartphone for transcription purposes.

After the interviews and focus groups were conducted, the audio data was transcribed; the transcription process resulted in 62 single-spaced pages of transcribed text from the interviews and 20 single-spaced pages of transcribed text from the focus groups. The researcher used the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) to conduct open and axial coding of the data; then, the researcher created categories during the

analysis of the coded data. The findings in the following section are the result of this

process.

RESULTS

The interviews and focus groups conducted for this research yielded various findings. The themes that emerged include barriers and adapting to barriers, choosing a name, preferences between names, and problems with using "English" names.

Barriers and Adapting to Barriers

The first research question asked about the types of environmental challenges using one's birthname creates for Chinese international students while studying in the United States. While the participants of this research discussed many types of barriers they faced when coming to study in the U.S.—such as adjusting to the food, language, and overall lifestyle—two specific barriers emerged from their responses that related to their choice in choosing an "English" name: the pronunciation of their names and the ability to remember their names. Many participants then discussed their choice of being addressed by an "English" name as a way of addressing these two barriers.

Pronunciation barrier. All of the interview participants explained that native English speakers in the U.S. tend to have difficulties pronouncing their birthnames when meeting them for the first time due to the phonetical differences between English and Mandarin. As Carson, a 29-year-old graduate student, said, "The rules of pronunciation in Chinese is different, so they say my Chinese name in English, but they don't know how to pronounce it correctly." Matt, a 26-year-old graduate student, discussed this challenge in a comparable way: "It's kind of hard to pronounce and say my name…the way Americans say it is a little different." Similarly, Aaron—a 25-year-old graduate student—

said, "My last name is hard to pronounce. I mean, I'm Chinese, so it's fine for me. But I think for Americans, it would be hard to pronounce."

Several focus group participants also discussed how American students and teachers have difficulties pronouncing their birthnames, and they discussed using an "English" name in terms of being a time-saving strategy when meeting people for the first time:

> Student 13 (female): I think that if you use [your birthname] in America—if you don't have an English name—you will, you will, like, get behind.
> Student 8 (female): I think it's easier; first thing is to introduce yourself, and it saves time to explain what's your Chinese name. And the many Americans when you say your Chinese name, and they will say, "What? Can you explain the meaning of the name, or how you spell it?" So, it saves time.

Most of the interview and focus group participants offered a similar discussion about how Americans mispronouncing their names creates social barriers for them; elaborating off their discussions on pronunciation difficulties, some participants also discussed the ability to remember their name as being another reason they chose an "English" name.

Remembering barrier. Many interview participants also discussed the ability of others to remember their name as being a barrier that exists when being addressed by their birth name. After discussing pronunciation problems that often exist, Jessie—a 34-year-old graduate student—said, "Because my Chinese name may be hard for Americans to…pronounce, it's also hard for them to remember my name. So, that's the only reason I picked an American name." Aaron also discussed how being addressed by an "English" name helps him overcome the remembering barrier: "I think it was just easier for them to recognize and remember." Happy, a 26-year-old from Beijing, also brought up the

challenge of remembering when she was asked how she introduces herself in the U.S. "I prefer to first introduce myself [as] Happy, and I will tell them my Chinese name if they ask me. But, Happy is easier to remember, so I prefer that." Interestingly, Ella, a 21-year-old undergraduate student, discussed remembering as being *other* people's challenge:

> I think that it didn't cause challenges for me, but…for people around me. Like, because I make concern that they are not able to pronounce my name…correctly, so I think maybe this [using an English name] is for the sake of convenience.

Cecilia, a 19-year-old undergraduate, also discussed how people had difficulties remembering her name, but she also shared that struggle when interacting with her American roommate: "…it is difficult…for me to remember my roommate's English name. I think they also have [difficulty] remembering my Chinese name."

These discussions align with CCAT's first and second assumptions of having a drive to adapt to cultural barriers—which, in these instances, are pronouncing and remembering the names—and adapting to those barriers through communication by altering the name by which people address them. Specifically, this practice seems to be an attempt at achieving synchrony—the ability to carry out communicative interactions with local people in a compatible and harmonious way—because it helped the participants achieve "social ease" (Kim, 2001, p. 116) with the host environment.

Overall, the practice of using a different name to address these aforementioned barriers answers the fourth research question, which asked how changing one's name brings about a transformation within an individual. Overall, this phenomenon appears to be a transformation in functional fitness because it allowed the participants to communicate in accordance with the norms of the host culture (Kim, 2001). The next

theme that emerged from the data involved the process of choosing a particular "English" name.

Choosing an "English" Name

The second research question asked how international students from China go about choosing their "English" names. Interestingly, all of the interview participants chose an "English" name *before* coming to the United States. Many discussed being required to choose an "English" name while taking English classes in China; as Kay put it, "The first step [to learning a language] is to choose a name from that language." Other participants, like Jessie, discussed choosing an "English" name for the first time simply for fun:

> Umm, back many years ago, I think maybe at least 10, I can't remember the specific time, [but] I just wanted to sign the end of an email. So, I chose an English name. That was the first time I chose an English name.

The participants offered a wide variety of reasons as to why they chose the names they chose; the following subthemes emerged: Western media influences, the meaning of the name, going through multiple name changes, and similarities in sound between the names. First, the most common subtheme that emerged from the data involves the influence of various types of Western media.

Western media influences. The most common reason for choosing certain "English" names was due to media influences (books, movies, etc.). For example, Carson, a 29-year-old graduate student, chose his name in high school after experiencing American media: "We watched a lot of movies and read a lot of books with American names in them. So, I chose a cool guy's name." A few other participants also stated that

English books inspired them to choose certain names. Tiffany, a 23-year-old undergraduate student, said she chose her name after reading *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

Other participants chose names after watching Western movies. Charlotte, a 21-year-old undergraduate student, chose her name after watching *Charlotte's Web*: "I saw a movie called *Charlotte's* [*Web*]. I really love that movie…the spider in that movie is called Charlotte, so that's why I chose Charlotte." Cecilia, a 19-year-old undergraduate student, chose her name because her favorite actress is named Cecilia. Other participants chose certain names due to the meaning they have.

Meaning of the name. Some participants chose an "English" name because the denotative definition is the same or similar to their birthname. Happy, a 26-year-old graduate student, chose her name because, "In my Chinese name, it means happy. So, I chose Happy because it means something similar." Happy also reported liking the name because of how it makes others feel: "…when other people call me Happy, they feel happy, and they can remember me. And I'm always happy, so it's good to make them remember me and make people happy." Happy's discussion is particularly interesting because she expressed a concern for not only choosing an "English" name she liked the meaning of, but she also wanted to choose a name that would be especially easy for others to remember due to the name's meaning.

Jasmine, a 21-year-old graduate student, also chose her name as a result of translation: "…if I translate my English name into Chinese, it's actually the same meaning as my birthname." Clearly, the meaning behind some of the participants' birthnames had cultural significance to them which was important enough for them to

want it to translate into their chosen "English" name. This subtheme was also prevalent

amongst the focus group participants:

> Student 16 (male): I got my English name by myself. I combined two words together to get a new word, but this new word isn't in the vocabulary. So, I got this as my English name.
> Interviewer: Okay, so which two words did you combine?
> Student 16 (male): I made the name, Cad, from the words "canny" and "candle," because my Chinese last name means bright and I like the pronunciation of this word. So, I got Cad from these words.
> Interviewer: Okay, so it's easy to use and similar to your actual name?
> Student 16 (male): Yeah.
> Interviewer: Okay, any other thoughts?
> Student 17 (female): My last name is Sun, so I chose the name Sunny, S-U-N-N-Y. It is just easy to use.
> Interviewer: Okay, so it's similar to your actual name?
> Student 17 (female): Yeah.

An interesting occurrence to point out is that many of the participants, like Sunny,

would spell out their "English" name when offering it to the interviewer for the first time;

although these "English" names tend to be easier for U.S.-born persons to pronounce,

they sometimes created issues in pronunciation for the students themselves.

Overall, there were many instances of participants translating the meaning of their

birthname into the host language to create their "English" name. These types of

occurrences relate well to Kim's (2001) discussion about adaptation resulting in an

intercultural identity because these participants' identities are neither completely *a part of*

nor *apart from* their original culture and host culture. A statement by one of the

participants, Jasmine, transitions well into what other participants discussed: "Some

people change their name by translation, others by meaning,"

A few of the research participants chose their "English" name because they liked

the meaning of the word itself. Belinda, a 23-year-old graduate student whose name

means "beautiful"(WordReference, 2018), chose her name because, "[It has a] very specific meaning [and] I like it a lot." Similarly, Jessie, a 34-year-old graduate student, initially chose the name, Pearl; "I liked the meaning because I like the jewelry." However, she later changed her name to Jessie for reasons discussed in the next subtheme.

Multiple name changes. Various participants reported changing their "English" name multiple times. Jessie has gone through three different "English" names, and, as was previously-discussed, she initially chose Pearl as her name. However, she later developed some cultural insights into the connotations that come with certain names:

> I used to use two other [names]. The first one was Pearl. I chose this just for fun, and I liked the meaning because I like the jewelry. But after that, I thought, "Okay, it's seen as an old name." So, I gave it up. The second name, from many years ago, was from high school. When I was in high school, I joined an activity, and several Americans came to our school to teach us about things. One of them gave me an English name: Susan. After a few years, I also thought it seemed like an old name, so I chose another name: Jessie.

Similarly, many of the focus group participants expressed a concern about choosing an "English" name that sounds old-fashioned and/or unusual to U.S.-born persons, and two female participants went as far as asking the interviewer if he thought their names sounded old-fashioned: "Like in your mind, what's the meaning of old-fashioned? Will you listen to our English names and tell us what your feeling is?" In a different focus group, other participants also expressed concern over choosing "unusual" names, and they, too, asked the interviewer what he thought about certain names:

> Student 13 (female): I have a question: When I was in college, some of my classmates were named, like, Summer, or Dragon, or Pebble.
> Interviewer: Dragon?

36

Student 13 (female): Yeah, yeah. What do you think of these names? They don't belong to English names, yes? Sometimes, as for American people, you will laugh at them by the names Dragon, or Cherry, or Summer.

These perception-checking conversations relate well to Kim's (2001) discussion on the cognitive component of host communication competence because the participants were making meaning out of verbal codes—their "English" names—in order to learn about the "correct" communicative behaviors within their host environment.

The interview and focus group data clearly shows how Chinese international students sometimes struggle with choosing a name due to having limited knowledge about the connotations with certain words at times. In her interview, Jessie rationalized why people sometimes go through many "English" names before settling on one by discussing the struggle of only knowing a word's denotative definition:

> We know the meaning, but we can't feel about this kind of thing as much. If someone says, "You're pretty," we don't feel as deeply as we can when it's said in our language. But if they say it in Chinese, we're like, "Oh, I see. I can feel the emotion more, and I know what you're talking about." But if we're using another language—like English—we just know the definition. That's all.

Aaron, a 25-year-old graduate student, also went through various "English" names before settling on his current one due to his struggles with pronouncing the names that he had chosen:

> I had a lot of English names. The first time I came here, my name was Vincent. But that was hard for me to pronounce, and whenever people would ask me, I had to tell them several times. And finally I was like, "Okay, I have no name." (laughs) And when I transferred to my English major, I changed it again to Aaron.

Aaron discussed how some of his other "English" names—such as Sam and Tom—came from cartoons and movies, but he eventually settled on Aaron while

37

studying in the U.S. The final subtheme that emerged involves sound similarities between both birthname and "English" name.

Similar sounds between names. Some participants reported choosing an "English" name that sounds similar or has similar sounds as their birthname. Mark, a 26-year-old graduate student, said, "I just chose it from my Chinese name; they have similar pronunciations. My Chinese name is (says name), which sounds similar to Mark." Kay, a 21-year-old undergraduate student, reported similar reasoning for choosing her "English" name: "…there's a 'k' in my Chinese name. I think they sound similar, and I think it's easy to remember because it just [has] three [letters]."

Overall, the participants reported a wide variety of reasons and processes for choosing the "English" names they chose. These subthemes—Western media influences, meaning of the name, multiple name changes, and similar sounds between names—emerged from the data as being subthemes due to their recurrence throughout many of the interviews.

While each of the interview participants chose their "English" names before coming to the United States and offered many reasons for choosing the names they chose, it is important to note that some focus group participants reported different experiences. For example, a few of the students chose their names after arriving to the U.S. and experiencing challenges with their birthname:

> Student 6 (female): I chose my English name when I was a freshman.
> Interviewer: In college?
> Student 6 (female): Yeah.
> Student 2 (female): Me too.
> Student 3 (female): Yeah, college. I chose [my name] in my graduate program.

Another difference that emerged from the focus groups was that some participants did not choose their own "English" name; in some cases, their names were chosen for them by others. When discussing why people choose to change their name, one focus group participant discussed being given a name by her English teacher in China. This discussion also turned into an interesting conversation on the significance of being able to choose one's "English" name as opposed to being assigned a name:

> Student 15 (female): I think it's mostly because English nickname easier to remember by teachers or new friends in America…as for me, my major is English. Ever since I got into a university, I chose English as my major. My foreign teacher, who came from British—who's British—can't remember us all, like 35 Chinese names in the class. So, he gave everyone an English name. So, sometimes you need to speak English and then just adopt it as [your] name for many years.
> Interviewer: Okay, so did you get to choose your English name, or did [the teacher] just select one for you?
> Student 15 (female): He just selected one.
> Interviewer: So, did you like that, or would you rather have chosen your own name?
> Student 15 (female): Actually, I was not very familiar with how to get an English name. Just my teacher said according to the pronunciation of my Chinese name, he gave me this one. So, I'd say it's okay. I don't know if I like it or not.
> Interviewer: Oh, really?
> Student 15 (female): Yes.
> Interviewer: So, if he were able to remember and pronounce everyone's Chinese names, would you rather use your Chinese name?
> Student 15 (female): I think if it's easier for the teacher to remember, I would rather choose Chinese name. But most of the time, when the students gave their Chinese name to the teacher, it will give the teacher a hard time.
> Interviewer: Okay, any other thoughts?
> Student 17 (female): I think it's not alright to not choose your own name, and it's interesting to pick a name for yourself. I mean, the real name is picked by our parents, and, like, the same chance that we can choose another—it's like a personality. You can show yourself through your name, and you can, maybe, prove something that you want to be. You can be the person you want to be in picking your own name, I think.
> Interviewer: Okay, so it's almost like a chance for a new identity?
> Student 17 (female): Yeah. You can [choose] some characteristics you want about you. You hope that you can gather personalities so that you add it to yourself.

Preference between Names

The third research question asked how Chinese international students communicate their name-change in different environments, and their responses indicated that it largely depended on the circumstance. The participants were asked which name they would prefer if pronunciation and remembering were not barriers, and, while most would prefer using their birthnames, a few reported that it did not matter to them.

Birthname preferred. Most of the participants reported that they would prefer using their birthname if barriers did not exist when using them. Cecelia reported preferring her birthname for cultural reasons:

> I went to America, so I have to…take a native name. So, I pick up my English name, but I'm born in China…[but I like] Chinese traditional culture, so I want some people to remember my Chinese name.

Charlotte also preferred her birthname due to the cultural significance behind her name: "Because if a Chinese name is given by your parents or your grandparents…they may have some meanings behind the name. So, it is very meaningful for us." Ella also reported preferring her birthname for similar reasons: "I think it's kind of, uh, my culture, my symbol, and a kind of [cultural] thing. I think that's more important, more matters for me." This tendency to prefer using their birthnames was reinforced by participants in the focus groups:

> Interviewer: If Americans could pronounce and remember your Chinese name, would you rather be called your Chinese name over your English name?
> Student 17 (female): I would prefer Chinese name.
> Interviewer: Okay, and why is that?
> Student 17 (female): Because my Chinese name I used for many years, and, so, I think it will let you know you are who you are.
> Interviewer: Okay, so it's part of who you are?
> Student 17 (female): Yes.

Student 15 (female): I'd prefer the Chinese name because, like [other participant] said, it's your legal name. All your documents use this name—your Chinese name. So, if you really want to have some connection with your new friends or some teachers or anyone, it's better that they can remember your real name—that name that you use wherever you go around the world.

Birthname preferred when speaking Mandarin. The participants were asked which name they choose to be addressed by when speaking with other native Mandarin speakers, which, again, addresses the third research question: How do Chinese international students communicate their name-change in different cultural environments? Overall, they largely reported that they preferred using their birthname in these contexts. Tiffany even reported it being weird to use her "English" name when speaking with other people from China: "…I mean, if I talk with the Chinese and I say their English name, I think it's maybe a little bit weird because we are Chinese." Similarly, Ella described it as being more natural to use her birthname when speaking to other people from China: "We know each other, we communicate in Chinese. So, of course that [using my birthname] is a first choice…I think it's just so natural."

Kay also reported that she typically uses her birthname when speaking with other people from China, but she said she uses her "English" name if they are speaking English with one another at English-learning events like the university's English Corner: "We really only use Chinese names. But actually, I…go to [English Corner] every week…we will use our English names there.

No preference between names. While most of the participants reported preferring their birthname, a couple of participants said they did not have a preference between the two. Jasmine, who has been in the U.S. for four years, said she switches back-and-forth between her names when speaking to other people from China:

41

Like, if I talk to people who just arrived in the U.S., I would use my birthname. But if it's people like me who have been here for years and plan to stay here longer, I would use my English name.

Similarly, Jessie uses both of her names when speaking with friends and classmates from China. The name she uses largely depends on which one she is introduced with:

Most of the time my classmates want to know my English name because in class, the professor calls us by our English names. So, they know my English name first, and then they may know my Chinese name after that. But I think most of them, my Chinese friends and Chinese classmates, all know my English name…so after that, most of the time we used our English names to call each other.

Problems with Using "English" Names

The use of an "English" name appears to be a transformation in functional fitness for the participants as they learn to adjust to the barriers of a new cultural environment; however, some participants discussed unique challenges that can happen when one chooses to change their name. For example, Aaron told a story about a time when he put his "English" name on a document that required his legal name:

Because Aaron is not my legal name, sometimes it can be confusing or get me into trouble. I remember one time I was buying car insurance, and [I] put Aaron on it. And that's not my legal name, so when they gave me the papers, I went to the bank. They told me, "This is not you."

Similar to Aaron, Belinda discussed how using a name different than one's birthname can cause issues within the classroom in particular: "Most of my professors would like to use my Chinese name, uh, because maybe the Chinese name is associated with my student ID…it's [a] problem to put my grade [in] or give me feedback; it's easy for them to find my [Chinese] name on the Blackboard." Overall, her choice to use an

"English" name has caused some issues because her instructors seems to have a difficult time remembering that her name is different on the roster and in the gradebook.

Cecilia discussed another classroom-related problem that can occur when using a different name other than one's birthname: not responding when called upon. "Sometimes when my instructor calls my name, Cecelia, I didn't know she is calling me, uh, so you know. [It's] a little embarrassing." Overall, it is interesting to note how Anglicizing one's name—which is largely a strategy of adapting to stress-causing barriers—can also create other forms of obstacles and barriers as well for these students.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the process students from China go through when they choose to Anglicize their names while studying at Midwestern universities in the United States. Using Kim's (2001) Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation, the researcher examined the transcribed text from both the interviews and focus groups in order to gain insight into this understudied phenomenon; various points of discussion emerged from the results of this study.

An Assimilation Process?

CCAT, being a theoretical model of assimilation, asserts that newcomers within a cultural context experience growth over time due to the stress they encounter and the ways in which they adapt to stress (Kim, 2001). Many of the research participants chose an "English" name *before* coming to study in the United States; therefore, the singular act of Anglicizing one's name is not in and of itself an assimilation process because choosing to change one's name is not always an adaptive means of managing stress within a cultural environment. In fact, many of the participants did not even meet the first required boundary condition for adaptation to occur—moving to a new cultural environment after having been socialized in another cultural environment—because they were in China when they first chose to Anglicize their name. However, choosing to *use* one's "English" name to address certain disequilibrium-causing stressors, such as pronunciation and remembering, is certainly a process of adaptation (or assimilation) from this theoretical

44

perspective; the three boundary conditions were met, and the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic is present.

Transformations within Individuals

Kim (2001) asserts that intercultural transformation happens when individuals experience an increase in their functional fitness and psychological health as a result of their adaptations within a new cultural context. The use of an "English" name helped the participants increase in their functional fitness by addressing the demands of being at an American university, and CCAT says this increase in functional fitness leads to a better sense of inner-cohesiveness and confidence as mental, emotional, and physical disturbances are reduced.

From the participants' responses, the use of an "English" name largely seems to be a strategy of reducing forms of mental disturbances (e.g. introducing oneself easily and being remembered); as Ella and some of the focus group participants explained, they use their "English" names for the sake of convenience and to save time when introducing themselves. This strategy of convenience and time-saving helped the participants more-easily make new acquaintances while studying in the United States. When someone increases their functional fitness and psychological health, CCAT says an intercultural identity emerges because the person becomes connected to more than one cultural group. This notion of an intercultural identity was present in all of the participants because a specific aspect of their identity—the names by which they chose to be addressed—came from both their original culture and their host culture. Intercultural personhood was especially prominent in Sunny, Cad, Jasmine, and Happy. Each of these aforementioned

students chose "English" names that have similar meanings as their birthnames, which shows a clear indication of an increased interculturalness because these names are "neither totally *a part of* nor *apart from* a given culture" (Kim, 2001; Zaharna, 1989, p. 391).

Stress-Adaptation-Growth: An Ongoing Process

The results of this study indicated that several participants went through more than one "English" name before settling on the name they currently use, and these occurrences provide a clear example of how the stress-adaptation-growth model is an ongoing and fluctuating process over time within cross-cultural adaptation. For example, Jessie realized that her original "English" name, Pearl, could cause new forms of stress within her new cultural environment because native English-speakers might view it as being too old-fashioned-sounding for a woman her age. This stress cause her to, once again, adapt by changing her name to Susan, and she later settled on her current name, Jessie, because she also thought Susan sounded old-fashioned. Over time, her adaptations to stress helped her to grow in her intercultural personhood because she was able to learn about the connotations that come with having certain names.

Aaron went through a similar cycle, since his first "English" name caused new forms of stress for him. He first chose to be addressed by the name, Vincent, but he had a hard time pronouncing the name; stress occurred when he would have to tell people his name multiple times when meeting them due to his difficulties in pronouncing the name, and he later settled on his current name, Aaron, because it is a name that both he and native English-speakers can easily pronounce. Once again, Aaron's experiences show

how the stress-adaptation-growth model is continual and ongoing when entering a new cultural context (Kim, 2001).

Practical Implications

CCAT, along with research that has used CCAT, claims that a newcomer's host environment largely determines the extent to which a newcomer will conform to the environment's normative patterns and ways of communicating. If a given environment is hostile and/or exerts more pressure on the newcomer to conform by changing their original cultural habits, then that person is more likely to adapt. If a given environment is a receptive and welcoming one, on the other hand, adaptation is discouraged because the newcomer is more welcomed to keep their original identity/practices for a longer period of time (Kim, 2001; Ruggiero, Taylor, & Lambert, 1996). This suggestion raises an important question: How accommodating and/or welcoming are Midwestern universities to international students?

Continually mispronouncing students' names is considered by some to be microaggressive behavior because it reinforces conceptions of cultural and racial hierarchies (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Since many of the participants in this study chose to use their Anglicized names after native English speakers continually mispronounced or, even worse, could not remember their birthnames, it would behoove American universities to take greater steps toward helping international students feel more welcomed. One such step would be for more universities to implement training workshops similar to the workshops conducted at the Tippie College of Business at the University of Iowa (Snee, 2013); while not a perfect solution, these workshops could

work toward teaching university faculty and staff members about the correct pronunciation and tone of common second languages spoken on their campuses.

A second option to avoid the microaggressive behavior of mispronouncing names in the classroom would be for university instructors to use the various name-pronunciation tools found on the Internet (e.g. NameShouts, Pronounce Names, etc.) to ensure they are correctly pronouncing their students' names. These tools would be especially beneficial for instructors to use before calling role on the first day of class. However, it is also important to keep in mind that some international students actually do prefer to be addressed by their "English" name, as was found in this study; it is best that the instructor ask the student which name they prefer to be called.

On a somewhat related note, many of the focus group participants discussed enjoying the freedom of choosing their own "English" names because they liked choosing particular names that had certain meanings; based on this finding, it is important that university instructors *not* choose "English" names for their students like some of the students' English teachers had done. Overall, given the decline of international student enrollment at American universities, it has become increasingly important to ensure universities are providing welcoming environments to international students, and these suggestions are small steps in that direction.

LIMITATIONS

Various limitations were present within this study that future studies could address. One such limitation was the short length of time of some of the interviews and focus groups; participants who were not as confident in speaking English seemed to have difficulties answering questions and elaborating on their responses. There were also moments where some students were not sure about what was being asked, and they oftentimes preferred to move on to the next question when these moments happened. Future studies could research whether or not having a translator present alters the length and quality of the answers provided by participants who are speaking English as a second language.

One important note is that only students from China participated in this study, so the discussed results are not likely to apply to all international students. Future studies would benefit from interviewing people from non-English-speaking countries other than China who have also made the decision to Anglicize their name while studying in the United States. The participants in this study were also all students, so the experiences of Chinese people who are in the U.S. for reasons other than school might be different from the experiences reported in this thesis.

A final limitation involves the size of one of the focus groups. Focus groups should typically consist of five to eight participants (Krueger & Casey, 2014); however, one of the focus groups conducted for this project consisted of only four participants because one student had to leave before beginning the final focus group because he had

another obligation. With that being stated, the researcher still conducted the third focus

group, and it resulted in rich data reported in this thesis.

CONCLUSION

> Although the process of becoming intercultural is never complete, each step on this path brings a new formation of life. This accomplishment is not one that only extraordinary people can attain. Rather, it is an instance of the normal human mutability manifesting itself in the work of ordinary people stretching themselves out of the old and familiar. The transformative experiences of intercultural persons around the world bear witness to the remarkable human spirit and capacity for self-renewal beyond the constraints of a single culture. Their struggles, as well as their triumphs, hold out wisdom and promise for us as we walk through our own intercultural journeys (Kim, 2001, p. 235).

This study sought to use Kim's (2001) Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation to explore an underinvestigated phenomenon within the current literature: international students from China who have Anglicized their names while studying in the United States. International students offer great contributions—both economically and culturally—to American universities (National Association of Foreign Student Advisers, 2018; Smart, 2018), so the international student experience is an important topic for researchers to consider. The experiences of international students are particularly necessary to study at this time, given the 6.9% decrease in international student enrollment for the fall 2017 semester (Baer, 2017).

After reviewing the relevant literature and providing the methods used to study this phenomenon, this thesis yielded many insights into the transformative experiences students from China have when Anglicizing their names: barriers and adapting to barriers, choosing an "English" name, preferences between names, and problems with using "English" names. This thesis then offered a discussion section that provided various theoretical implications involving this topic along with a few recommendations for universities and university instructors. Finally, various limitations within the present

research were identified by the researcher that future studies should seek to address when studying this topic.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Document

Missouri State University
Informed Consent Form for Research

<u>Title of Study</u> What's in a Name? Examining Anglicized Naming Practices amongst Chinese International Students

<u>Principal Investigator</u> Dr. Jake Simmons

<u>What are some general things you should know about research studies?</u>
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form, you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form, it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researchers named above.

<u>What is the purpose of this study?</u>
The purpose of this study is to develop a greater understanding of how non-native English-speakers make the decision to change their names while studying at American universities.

<u>What will happen if you take part in this study?</u>
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked a series of questions related to your being addressed by an English name. The audio from this interview will be recorded on an electronic recording device. The time of the interview is estimated to last between 15 and 30 minutes. The interview can take place in a public or private setting.

<u>Risks</u>
There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with your participation in this study. You will not be asked for your name. You will meet in-person with one of the researchers to be interviewed, and your answers will be recorded. No identifying information will be recorded to ensure confidentiality.
<u>Benefits</u>
There are no direct benefits for your participation in this study. However, you may achieve a heightened awareness of your communication behavior and how it relates to your identity. The information gained through this study will be used to better understand

the ways in which some international students go about changing the ways by which they are addressed.

<u>Confidentiality</u>
The information in the records of this study will be kept confidential. Recordings will be stored securely in electronic files on the researchers' computers. They each have antivirus software to ensure security. No references will be made in the recordings that could link you to the study. During the interview, you will NOT be asked to provide your legal name.

<u>What if you have questions about this study?</u>
If you have any questions at any time regarding this study or its procedures, you may contact the researcher, Garrett Ruzicka, at Ruzicka94@live.missouristate.edu.

<u>What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?</u>
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Jake Simmons at the Department of Communication, Craig Hall 369, Missouri State University, Springfield, MO 65897; DSimmons@missouristate.edu.

<u>Consent to Participate</u>
I have read and understand the above information. I have been provided with a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. By completing the interview, I give my consent to participate in this study.

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix B: Demographics Form

The purpose of this study is to research the practice of choosing to be addressed by a name other than one's birthname while studying at an American university where the participant's native language is not spoken. The interviewee will be asked a series of questions regarding their choice of being addressed by an English name. Follow-up questions may be asked as well. The questions should be answered as fully and honestly as possible. The audio of the interview will be recorded by the researcher.

Demographics:
Location of interview: _____ Time of interview: _____

Length of interview: _____Age of participant: _____

Sex of participant: _____ Hometown (City, Country): _____

Attending a university? Y_____ N_____

Academic year:_____