Federica Guccini

A 'SENSE OF RECOGNITION'

NEGOTIATING NAMING PRACTICES AND IDENTITIES OF OVERSEAS CHINESE
STUDENTS IN TRANSCULTURAL SOCIAL SPACES

Congratulations!
The Alias
Award

Awarded to **Siyang**
because she has successfully convinced thousands of
nonprofits that her name is Amy!:)

Awarded by the   Leadership team
We love you Siyang!
Thanks for all your great work!

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Title page image: The informal award which Siyang, a Chinese intern, was given by her American co-workers for introducing herself as Amy on the phone.

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———————————————————————————— ABSTRACT

Working with several anthropological theories of migration, identification and language, this paper aims to shed light on negotiations of Chinese naming practices in transcultural social spaces. Many Chinese youths studying abroad acquire international names in addition to their Chinese birth names that they use in different situations. The author argues that name choices are deliberate decisions, tied to a great amount of self-awareness and agency, as well as identification processes and positionalities in social space. Moreover, 'Chineseness' plays an important role even in the adoption of Chinese-international names, as inherently Chinese naming practices often contribute to the name choice. The research results show that names will be used contingently in different social spaces, and most often with the goal to create a 'sense of recognition' – the wish for an identity, or a multiplicity of identities, to be visible through the name.

Die vorliegende Arbeit soll mit mehreren ethnologischen Migrations-, Identifikations- und Sprachtheorien über Verhandlungen chinesischer Namensgebungspraxen in transkulturellen sozialen Räumen Aufschluss geben. Viele junge Chines_innen, die im Ausland studieren, legen sich zusätzlich zu ihrem chinesischen Geburtsnamen auch internationale Namen zu, die in unterschiedlichen Situationen Anwendung finden. Die Autorin argumentiert, dass die Namenswahl eine bedachte Entscheidung ist, die an Selbstwahrnehmung und Agency sowie an Identifikationsprozesse und Positionierungen im sozialen Raum geknüpft ist. Außerdem spielt „Chinesischsein" eine wichtige Rolle in der Zulegung eines chinesisch-internationalen Namens, da chinesische Namensgebungspraxen oft zur Wahl des Namens beitragen. Die Forschungsergebnisse zeigen, dass Namen oft situationsbedingt in verschiedenen sozialen Räumen verwendet werden sowie mit dem Ziel, ein „Gefühl des Wiedererkennens" herzustellen – den Wunsch, dass eine Identität, oder multiple Identitäten, durch den Namen sichtbar werden.

INTRODUCTION

想要好命，先有好名.

Xiǎngyào hǎomìng, xiānyǒu hǎo míng.

If you want to be fortunate, you need a good name first.
(Chinese proverb[1])

At first glance, the thought of needing a good name in order to live a fortunate life seems unsound. However, Chinese naming practices have many implications for a person's social life and future, as names are picked in accordance with long-established guidelines, values and virtues as well as social networks. While these practices are explicitly Chinese, this does not mean that they stay within contexts of Chinese language and culture. In the light of increasingly mobile academic education, many Chinese students consider spending time abroad, blurring the lines between cultural and linguistic social spaces. The stretch between familiar and new social environments requires a continuous negotiation of identities. This process might include complex strategies of simplified communication and adaptation, such as adopting an internationally usable name – a name that is not necessarily excluded from the above-cited proverb's message as it adheres to conventions similar or even identical to naming practices concerning Chinese names.

It is indeed quite common among Chinese students who study overseas to acquire an international name, though variations are a given. Many have at least once in their life had one of these names, most often an English one. Some switch back and forth between their Chinese and non-Chinese name, depending on the situation at hand. Others even have multiple non-Chinese names that they use in different situations. But a lot of Chinese students also deliberately choose to go solely by their Chinese name, not using additional names at all. All of these choices show a high amount of agency, pragmatism and awareness of current transcultural social spaces. However, Chinese students' names are under constant discursive scrutiny, which influences interpersonal and transcultural negotiations of values, purposes, meanings and embedded identities of both Chinese and non-Chinese names.

This thesis aims to discuss how Chinese students negotiate their names in respect to their identities and prevalent discourses in transcultural social spaces, and what purposes the adoption or rejection of international names can serve in these contexts. It highlights the way Chinese students position themselves in regards to their identities and in

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[1] I thank my friend Qián, who participated in this study as an interviewee, for providing me with this proverb and helping me transcribe and translate it accurately.

relation to others by using a certain name. Throughout, multiple challenges rooted in the identificatory nature of names will be addressed, such as the varied (cultural) expectations in transcultural environments, the importance of Chineseness for identification and naming practices, as well as personal agency and preference.

As the results of the research will show, negotiating names and identities is a process so complex that the outcome is remarkably diverse and contingent. Several factors, such as emotional attachment to a name, expectations of other agents in transcultural social space, wishes for belonging and respect, uniqueness, convenience and efficiency, as well as language learning and social networks, have a significant impact on the students' identities and on which name they choose to go by in different contexts and situations. Using a name in a specific situation is a conscious choice, tied to a great amount of self-awareness and agency, as well as identification processes that depend on the surrounding social space.

The interviews for this research were conducted in Germany and the United States of America (USA), including Chinese students of various lengths of stay abroad, ranging from six months to several years. Besides interviews and conversations documented in both written communication and audio transcripts, the gathered empirical data includes observations made during various meetings in transcultural settings as well as selected online material.

An array of theories will be addressed within the scope of this thesis, as Chinese students' non-Chinese names are significantly understudied. The few essays and monographies on Chinese international naming that do exist (Duthie 2007; Edwards 2006; D. Li 1997; E.W. Louie 2008; McPherron 2009) are undoubtedly fine works but do not cover the topic sufficiently as of yet. There is, to the best of my knowledge, no established theoretical framework that captures the joint study of migration, identities and naming. The study at hand therefore draws on several anthropological and related theories to find common ground. These include grounded theory and discourse analysis (see 2.4), transnational and transcultural lenses, social space, positioning and agency (see 3), and the anthropology of identities and naming, as well as translanguaging (see 4). To contextualise the study, Chinese naming practices (see 5) and (overseas) Chineseness (see 6) will be presented in combination with relevant empirical data. The research culminates in an in-depth analysis of my Chinese interlocutors' experiences regarding their names and identities in transcultural social spaces (see 7), paying close attention throughout to how underlying discourses influence choices and negotiations. To start with, I will define and reflect upon the boundaries of my 'field' and the applied methodology to give a more detailed overview of the study at hand.

2. FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Tentative Beginnings: Meeting 'Joyce'

'Hi, I'm Ruby!' my housemate's friend greeted me when we met up with her during our Christmas break. Another friend came forward and introduced herself as Jennifer. I was a bit taken aback, knowing that both of them were students from China, just like my housemate Qián[2]. I had expected Chinese names just like hers. I mentioned my surprise to Qián later that night, and she started laughing, telling me that those were not their 'real' names and that most Chinese people had an informal English name in addition to their Chinese one. That piqued my interest; I asked her whether she had an English name too. Visibly amused, she replied that her English name was Joyce. She could barely get it out through the giggling. It seemed ridiculous to her, the thought of introducing herself to others with that name, contrary to the natural ease with which her friends had told me that they were Ruby and Jennifer, respectively. Meanwhile, I was astounded that I had known Qián for almost half a year, yet had never been introduced to 'Joyce' before.

We moved on from the topic quickly but somehow, it would not leave my mind afterwards. I randomly brought it up at times, asking other Chinese friends about it, paying closer attention to the names I would receive upon meeting new Chinese students. This resulted in an idea for a presentation and subsequent paper in a class I would have to take upon my return to Germany, and thus I held tentative interviews towards the end of my stay in the USA, which marked the beginning of my research and would later become my thesis.

2.2 A Reflection on the 'Field': A Stranger at Home and at Home as a Stranger?

The data presented in this thesis was collected between August 2014 and April 2016. Nine of these months I spent in the USA as a non-degree student at a Midwestern liberal arts college. Throughout the course of this exchange year, I took two Chinese language classes, and became friends with many Chinese students on campus, four of which I interviewed later on. The other eight interviewees were students at my home university in Germany.

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[2] Because two interviewees were named Qian but with varying intonation, they will be spelt Qián and Qiàn accordingly. For a more detailed explanation of all of my interviewees' names see chapter 5.2.

However, as the country my interviewees studied in was not always the place where the interviews took place, the boundaries of my fieldwork were not as clear-cut as one might be tempted to define them. For instance, I conducted three interviews via Skype[3], during which the interviewed students were in a different country than I was, in some cases for a semester abroad, in other cases both of us 'at home': One student had just finished her studies abroad and talked to me from her home in Taiwan, another had just returned to the USA from her semester abroad in England. One of the students I had studied with in the USA visited me in Germany as he was studying abroad in another European country and let me interview him during his visit. Reflecting upon the interview at a later time, it felt to me as if he was the true ethnographer between the two of us simply because he was the one who travelled far from home, whereas I was sitting on my couch. These moments turned out to be immensely important to my positionalities in my research, as I found myself questioning the geographical and temporal boundaries of my field: When and where would my research end? On the one hand, I felt as though I had not been in the 'field' at all, and on the other, it seemed as if I was continuously collecting data, always getting new impulses from people talking to me about my research and never experiencing the 'return' moment of what I thought was classical ethnographic fieldwork.

It is thus crucial for the reflection of my research to first define the 'field' and how the mere idea of it relates to my experience as a fieldworker. It has been argued that the established perception of anthropological fieldwork is a 'taken-for-granted space in which an "Other" culture or society lies waiting to be observed and written' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:2). It is the outcome of a paradox in which anthropologists try to legitimise their field of study by citing fieldwork (and participant observation) as *the* anthropological method that distinguishes anthropology from other disciplines while at the same time trying to deconstruct the notion that 'cultures' are territorially and locally bound (1997:4).

A possible solution is conducting multi-sited ethnography that methodologically follows the movements of people (as well as goods, ideas, etc.) and steers away from the idea that cultures are bound to one place (Klute and Hahn 2007:12). The 'field' itself needs to be thought of as an anthropological construct rather than an existent geographic place:

> The notion of immersion implies that the 'field' which ethnographers enter exists as an independently bounded set of relationships and activities which is autonomous of the fieldwork through which it is discovered. Yet in a world of infinite interconnections and overlapping contexts, the ethnographic field cannot simply exist, awaiting discovery. It has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all the other possibilities for contextualization to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred. This process of construction is inescapably shaped by the conceptual, professional, financial and relational opportunities and resources accessible to the ethnographer. (Amit 2000:6)

While I did not follow anyone's migratory path in the sense of classic multi-sited ethnography, the contexts of my fieldwork did indeed overlap and were interrelated due to the high mobility and cross-border networks of my interviewees and myself as well. As Amit notes, informants will oftentimes be even more mobile than the researcher (2000:12), which further blurs the geographical limits of fieldwork and is traceable in the complex migration biographies of my interviewees (see chapter 6).

Additionally, talking about my thesis topic would usually prompt people outside of my field to recount stories of their own encounters with Chinese students who had names that stood out to them, which gave me new impulses for further research even when I was not

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[3] While it may appear as a duality – face-to-face interviews on the one hand and, on the other, digital, independent-from-location interviews via a tool like Skype as well as other forms of online research (see 2.3), the distinction is not meant to imply mutual exclusion. Overlaps might occur, especially since ethnographic research has shown that the web sphere is embedded in local particularities just as any other space and is therefore neither unreal nor a 'placeless place' (Miller and Slater 2000:4). For example, while there are more options for anonymity, 'people often do bring important aspects of their offline selves to cybercommunication: gender, age, stage in life cycle, cultural milieu and socio-economic status' (Vertovec 2009:49).

officially working in the 'field'. As described in the quote above, not only the surroundings and people in the field but also the ethnographer, their interconnections and resources construct the field.

In my case, this definitely held true: I did go abroad to study and do preliminary research but my fieldwork was largely campus-bound, partly due to the fact that both financial and time management was easier with no additional travel required but also because I already knew many Chinese students. Staying on campus meant that I was personally immersed in the field and the student culture yet perhaps not ideally distanced from my informants as I would call most of them close friends. My positionalities were ambiguous because I was a friend and a researcher, at 'home' while in the field at the same time.

Anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson discuss what they call the '*hierarchy of purity* of field sites' (1997:13; emphasis in original), objecting to the idea 'that "home" is a place of cultural sameness and that difference is to be found "abroad"' (1997:32). Indeed, if one were to follow this logic, I should have found the most differences in the USA when I was studying abroad, whereas in reality, I felt like the boundaries of my field were actually much more fluid there than they were once I continued my research in Germany. During my year abroad, living, travelling and sharing daily experiences with friends who only later would turn out to be interviewees made it easier to access the field but harder to determine its limits. As an international student, I knew the people and issues my informants talked about in their interviews both from first-hand experience and from prior informal conversations.

In Germany, on the other hand, having studied at my university for years, I did not share any of the new impressions and potential difficulties the Chinese students encountered. Not being an international student in this setting, I had to find contacts via friends in international study programmes, social media, and an 'exchange buddy' service that paired up incoming students with local students who would pick them up from the train station on the day of their arrival. I met twelve Chinese students through this service, five of which participated in my research later on. Even though I did become friends with them, our relationships were different from the ones I maintained in the USA because I was in a different position. Established ties and networks required my attention in Germany; I was already embedded in the environment they explored for the first time. I was not familiar with most of the international student experiences they were confronted with in this particular local context (e.g. arrival, building a new social network, notions of cultural difference, homesickness), either, which made the 'field' less accessible in a familiar surrounding than it was in an environment that was new to me as well. In a way, I was a stranger in the 'field at home' but at 'home' while I was abroad, a fact which I will use as an opportunity to argue with Gupta and Ferguson (see above) that being 'away' did not necessarily provide me with more chances to experience difference than being 'at home' did.

The geographic boundaries of my field are only a minor factor in my research. The conversations I had with both Chinese and non-Chinese friends who had experiences in other countries than Germany and the USA cited numerous similar encounters that suggest that my research could have been carried out elsewhere with similar results, especially in light of the high mobility of my informants. Of much greater importance in my research than place are the ways names are negotiated in transcultural and translingual environments. Fittingly, Gupta and Ferguson argue that '[e]thnography's great strength has always been its explicit and well-developed sense of location' but that locations should be regarded as 'sites constructed in fields of unequal power relations' (1997:35) rather than geographical information. In fact, just like the settings I analysed, my 'field' was, above all, a social space (see 3.2), in which I had to sort out my positionalities in relation to my interlocutors and my research objectives.

2.3 Methodology: Data Collection

The main part of my research consists of twelve semi-structured interviews that were mostly carried out in English. In one case, an interviewee was skyping with her mother for the complete duration of the interview and translated what her mother said in Chinese when I needed help. I conducted three interviews via Skype only. The other interviews were carried out face-to-face, usually at my house.[4] All twelve interviews were recorded with the permission of my interlocutors. Two out of the twelve interviews were conducted back to back with the first interviewee staying behind to listen to the second interview, occasionally offering her opinion. This group interview as well as the one in which the mother was involved had a different dynamic than the ones carried out in one-on-one fashion, as they included arguments between the interview participants and gave me some valuable first-hand insights into how names and identities were negotiated among Chinese speakers.

I had six pre-prepared questions that I wrote down in simple keywords so as not to be too fixated on the wording, and inserted these topics into the conversation naturally whenever it seemed appropriate. These topics were basic background information such as place of birth[5] and migration history, initial naming at birth, name changes if applicable, learning and speaking Chinese and/or English at home and at school, international names and the reasoning behind using or not using them, and a situational analysis of which names to pick in which settings. Although the exact wording and the order of these topics varied from interview to interview, I made sure to ask about each at least once.

In most cases, I first approached the topic of naming by asking my interviewees to write down their name(s) in Chinese characters and, if applicable, in Pinyin (拼音, *pīnyīn*), the official Mandarin phonetic spelling. This proved to be a successful method as it was easier for most of my interviewees to not only talk about their names but also show me how they were spelt. Even in the cases where a paper-based approach was not an option (e.g. in Skype interviews), I usually received a message via Skype or Facebook with the name in Chinese script so that I could follow what they were telling me.

Interestingly, as soon as pen and paper were handed over, my role in the interview shifted significantly. I was no longer the interviewer in a potentially intimidating position taking notes while my informants answered my questions. Now, I was a listener and learner as my informants wrote down their names and explained them to me. This shift had a big impact on the way the conversation unfolded, as some interviewees held on to the notepad and continued to write down names and other things that they mentioned throughout the interview. Giving my interviewees free reign over the notepad meant that I was likely to end up with pages and pages of writing that had been done by my interviewees rather than keeping notes of my own; sometimes I did not take any notes at all.

At first, it seemed wrong to not write anything down in an interview situation, but after getting over the initial reluctance I learned to see it as a contribution to the 'rich data' (Charmaz 2006:14) necessary for working with the grounded theory approach. Here, the data determines the emergence of the theory and not the other way round (2006:17). I had less room to immediately interpret what I had heard by writing it down and was able to focus more on the conversation itself, which turned out to be a successful – albeit spontaneously and coincidentally arranged – strategy. It helped me assess what information was most important to my interviewees and ask questions accordingly.

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[4] I met one student on campus for the interview but did not manage to get a good conversation going for longer than half an hour which I assume happened because the room we booked at the university was quite uncomfortable and unpleasant in its design. After this incident, I always invited my potential interviewees to my house so I could receive them in a more welcoming fashion.

[5] For this question, I used an atlas with a map of China so that I would be able to visualise their background, as I have never been to China before. I did not do this in every interview as it was not always possible (e.g. via Skype) and because I only realised halfway through the research what potential this method held. However, it has been observed before that 'innovation can occur at any point during the research' (Charmaz 2006:16).

One last question I made sure to include at the end of every interview was the one of anonymity. I asked this question last because I wanted my interviewees to be able to make a decision based on what they had already told me on the record rather than making an uninformed decision prior to the interview. Given the topic at hand, it is impossible to forgo names at all or to just make up random names that might not represent what was said in the interview – the meaning would be lost. The results were mixed; some students had no problem with me using their name, some had issues with it being used in full, and others wanted to remain completely anonymous. Therefore, I decided to generally anonymise family names and change given names upon request.[6] Names of family members and friends that are mentioned in the interviews are anonymised without exception. Apart from the initial explanations of my interlocutors' names (see 5.2), I will use Romanised forms instead of Chinese characters. As there are several ways to Romanise Chinese names (see 7.1.1), I followed the spelling preferences of my interlocutors (or imitated the style in the anonymised names). Regarding possible multiplicities of names, my informants will be quoted using their preferred or most commonly used name.

To give a complete overview of my data collection, it should be mentioned that I also gathered some data through participant observation. Names not particularly being something to be closely observed, this part of my study is more complementary than essential. What little I could observe included greetings and introductions (most often during international events hosted on campus), emails or social media messages I exchanged with Chinese students, other related practices I learned about in my Chinese class or from being surrounded by Chinese friends (e.g. the use of nicknames or standard form of address) as well as discussions about names that usually occurred when a Chinese person introduced themselves with an English name or when I started talking about the topic of my thesis. These observations were especially valuable for the intersection of Chinese and non-Chinese environments as the interviews primarily gave me the Chinese perspective.

Similarly, my online research that I started in spring 2016 helped me understand the non-Chinese perspective. I had to be highly selective in my inclusion of online material because of time constraints and limited writing space but the articles and comments I perused shed light on the problems that might arise for Chinese speakers in regards to their names and identities in a non-Chinese environment. Thus, complementing my other data with online material was very beneficial to my research. I browsed newspaper articles and blogs referring to Chinese people's English names and examined web tools that were designed to assist Chinese people in the search for suitable English names. I also drew information from social media and asked my interlocutors about the means they used to communicate with others (both abroad and in their current country of residence) and which names they used for their online presence.[7]

As only little information is available on the intersection of naming, migration and identities in a Chinese-International context in academic literature, I had to stay very close to the material I had gathered to ensure proper theorisation. In the following chapter, I briefly outline the analytical approaches I used to examine the findings.

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[6] In some cases, omitting or changing certain name parts, even the family name, was not possible. However, at least one part of each name was changed. For the sake of anonymity I will refrain from pointing out which parts were changed and which were not. Usernames, both the ones used by my interlocutors and the ones I encountered in my online research, will be omitted to ensure proper anonymisation.

[7] Though anthropology is hesitant in including digital approaches (Vertovec 2009:48), emerging theorisation of web-based social life is on the rise and ethnography has been identified as 'the best if not the only way to study polymedia' (Madianou 2015:2). The term 'polymedia' aims to capture the plethora of social media that users can choose from but at the same time points out the specifics of *why* someone will choose certain means of communication in polymedia environments (Madianou 2015:2; Madianou and Miller 2012:8). In doing so, the authors manage to capture the social sphere of technology, which fits this study's theoretical framework and will be mentioned, if only marginally, whenever the use of social media or other web-based technology is thematised in this thesis.

2.4 Methodology: Analysis

What will be presented here are three analytical methods I used to approach my emerging data, namely grounded theory, discourse analysis and moment analysis. Shortly after all my interviews had been transcribed[8], I started coding them, mainly using the grounded theory approaches by Kathy Charmaz (2006) and Cathy Urquhart (2013) as a reference. Grounded theory coding aims to stay close to the language of the interviewees in a 'bottom-up' process in which 'codes are suggested by the *data*, not by the literature' (Urquhart 2013:38; emphasis in original). As suggested by Charmaz (2006:46), I split the process into initial and focused coding. During initial coding, I used the incident-by-incident method (2006:53) and followed Charmaz' style (2006:52) by keeping the codes active and close to the original wording (e.g. 'call*ing* someone by their full name' or 'choos*ing* a fortunate name'). I also paid close attention to common terms that were used by different people in various interviews and added them as '*in vivo* codes' (2006:55; emphasis in original) to mark their seemingly unanimous character.

In the focused coding phase, I compared interview passages and codes to one another and grouped them under more selective and theoretical categories. As Urquhart notes, 'specific themes are emerging […] that will comprise the eventual theory' (2013:49). Furthermore, the process of selecting codes for different groups and categories helped me identify links between certain topics and, most importantly, dominant discourses embedded in the social realities of my interlocutors.

To capture this aspect, I used discourse analysis to highlight the ways names are negotiated among Chinese and non-Chinese speakers. Especially after perusing articles I found online, it became clear to me that Chinese international naming was discussed to a much greater extent non-collegiately than it was in scholarship. Theorisation of the relevant discourses is much needed, and shall be paid close attention to in the empirical analysis, especially chapter 7.

I found that grounded theory and discourse analysis go well together as they both focus on what happens on the small scale (e.g. a point of view, an argument) to then relate it to the big scale (e.g. overarching discourses and theories). Additionally, discourse analysis aims to understand how the big scale in turn influences the small scale. Drawing on the works of Michel Foucault, Sara Mills further elaborates this notion in her monography on discourse and discourse analysis:

> [A] discourse is something which produces something else (an utterance, a concept, an effect), rather than something which exists in and of itself and which can be analysed in isolation. A discursive structure can be detected because of the systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context, and because of the effects of those ways of thinking and behaving. (1997:17)

Thus, when studying discourses, one should pay attention to how they affect arguments, behaviour and actions. However, not everyone contributes to discourse in the same way; it is crucial to analyse how power relations come into play as discourses produce notions of truth and knowledge (Hall 2011:42, Mills 1997:18–22). What this means in practice is that my intention in using discourse analysis is to highlight how names, their meanings and implications as well as possibly attached identities are *negotiated* in dominant discourses. For this, I will draw on the discursive contributions that I mentioned before (interview statements, findings from participant observation, news articles and blog entries and their respective commentary sections, social media and name finding web tools) and assess emerging opinions, reactions, discrepancies and the overall tone of the discussions.

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[8] Only some of the original transcription notations will feature in the interview passages I present later on, such as ((laughing)), ((ironically till *)) […] ((*)), or (unintelligible?). Other transcription notations will be omitted in favour of rendering the passages easier to read.

It is important to keep in mind that these findings are merely patterns and trends which are comprised of singular situations, which, in the study at hand, could be first meetings and introductions, or snippets of observed conversations. To analyse these glimpses into social interactions, I will employ what is called 'moment analysis' (Li W.[9] 2011:1224) in sociolinguistics, essentially an analytic magnifying glass that – much like grounded theory and discourse analysis – allows scholars to look at a small-scale event and contextualise it on a larger scale, of course without neglecting its potential singular occurrence. It is important to include personal reflections of these occurrences in the moment analysis (2011: 1224), which happened instinctively in the interviews as my informants often reflected upon particular moments in which they were addressed or introduced themselves in a certain way.

In line with the core aspects of these analytical theories, I would like to emphasise that I am not presenting – and in fact cannot present – a final say on the matter of how Chinese names as well as Chinese people's international names work, how they are used and how people react to them. As Hall explains, 'interpretations never produce a final moment of absolute truth' (Hall 2011:42). What I will instead try to illustrate in my thesis are trends and discourses of current importance that shape the way people think about their names and identities and give them incentives to act upon those thoughts.

[9] Cited authors of the same family name will be distinguished by the initials of their given names. In this particular case, I opt to write the family name first because the author's name – in accordance with Chinese convention (see 5.1) – appears in this order on his publication. Other Chinese scholars' family and given names are often switched in academic works. In the bibliography, all family names and given names will be separated by a comma to avoid confusion.

3. MOVING THROUGH (SOCIAL) SPACE: ANTHROPOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 International Student Mobility and the Transnational Lens

Mobility studies have been of growing interest in social sciences over the past two decades (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:183). A group of mobile people that is often overlooked in this field are international students (Findlay 2011:165) even though they 'constitute a growing percentage of the world's mobile population' (Bilecen 2014:8). A reason for this could be the temporal limits of international student mobility which makes the phenomenon seem less important than other types of migration (Findlay 2011:165). German scholar Jeannett Martin (2005:20), for example, sets a minimum duration of one year for the stay abroad to call someone an 'educational migrant' (*Bildungsmigrant*[10]). I argue that this restriction only serves to exclude students whose stays are merely shorter, not, however, less international or educational. Furthermore, focusing only on students' migrations that are temporary negates the existence of students who decide to stay in the country of their studies once they have completed their education.

Rachel Brooks and Johanna L. Waters (2013:48–50) similarly discuss in their monography on the internationalisation of higher education whether to use 'student mobility' or 'educational immigration' as a label but emphasise the inevitable overlap of both terms in many examples of their case study. The differentiation between the two is based on the premise that students can be categorised by their immigration status: A student holding a student visa or study permit would be classified as an 'international student' as opposed to an 'immigrant student' with permanent residency status (2013:48–50). However, these definitions rely on country-specific details regarding immigration and mobility requirements and cannot be applied to every case. EU citizens studying abroad in another EU country, for instance, are not required to hold a visa at all (2013:48).

While the terminology certainly needs refinement, it is crucial to note that education is being internationalised and globalised (Bilecen 2014:8) and, thus, mobile in and of itself. These developments facilitate mobility within educational systems and across national borders, which makes it more likely that students would go abroad at one point during their studies.[11]

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[10] The term *Bildungsmigration* for a migration that is pursued for educational purposes is well-established in German academics but cannot be applied as easily in the English language. Although it is more specific than most English equivalents, I do not wish to use the German term as I do not agree with the existing definition.

[11] It has been pointed out that social class and financial background play a vital role in who gets an opportunity to move during their studies (Findlay 2011:164–165). This observation exposes student mobility as

The term 'student mobility' captures this likelihood far better than a term like 'educational (im)migration', which is why I will henceforth use the former.

International student mobility can thus not be defined as a separate category that is fundamentally different from other mobilities and migrations. Whether an international student migrates temporarily or permanently, it *is* a kind of student mobility – as long as the main purpose of moving is to pursue an education abroad.[12] However, student mobility must be understood as an open concept that can and needs to overlap with others. It seems especially fitting, for example, to bring up another key concept of migration studies when talking about student mobility: transnationalism, a term referring to 'sustained linkages and ongoing exchanges among non-state actors based across national borders' (Vertovec 2009:3). Two things that are important for transnationalism then are a) the crossing of *national* borders, demarking it from the more general idea of translocality (Klute and Hahn 2007:11), and b) the emphasis of *non-state* actors to distinguish transnationalism from internationalism (Vertovec 2009:3). While it has proved to be increasingly relevant in recent academics (2009:3), transnationalism is not necessarily a novel concept, as migrants have conducted lives across borders even before this theory emerged in social sciences (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:133). On the other hand, cross-border mobility and communication have become more easily accomplishable due to recent developments, technologies, and policies (Brooks and Waters 2013:7). Understandably, this pushes the topic to the forefront of academic interest.

The emergence of a transnational focus bears special implications for the study of migration processes overall as it rectifies earlier assumptions that migrations take place in a linear manner from the country of origin to a host country, allegedly resulting in subsequent processes of assimilation or multiculturalisation (Scherke 2011:80). As the noted scholars Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller put it, '[t]ransnational migration is a process rather than an event' (2004:1012). From the perspective of transnational studies, the so-called 'transmigrants' are less defined by the movement itself but rather by the ties they maintain to multiple social arenas in different countries:

> They are not sojourners because they settle and become incorporated in the economy and political institutions, localities and patterns of daily life of the country in which they reside. However, at the very same time, they are engaged elsewhere in the sense that they maintain connections, build institutions, conduct transactions, and influence local and national events in the countries from which they emigrated. (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1995:48)

The process of pursuing a (temporary) education abroad is often linked to questions of exchange, liminality, return, and so forth. It seems obvious then that many international students forge and maintain transnational ties in the above-described way, be it to their families and friends who remained in the country they left or to new acquaintances abroad who might stay in their lives even after they return.

Despite these transnational linkages, I will continue to speak of 'international students'. This term is officially used in academic institutions around the globe to refer to their non-domestic student body, and is frequently used by my interviewees, which prompts me to adopt it to remain close to the original terminology. However, its use is not entirely unproblematic: There are definitions that distinguish 'international students' who have crossed borders to study in a host country from 'transnational students' who study in an international programme in their home country (Burnapp, Feng and Zhao 2012:217–218). This dichotomous take on those terms implies that students can either study at home or abroad, even though it certainly is also possible for students to study abroad in a home

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a highly hierarchical business. Moreover, the reach of international student mobility is highly dependent on geographic area and country of origin or current residency (Brooks and Waters 2013:45). Sadly, there is not enough space to discuss the inequality of access to (international) education in depth.

[12] There is a demand for research on student mobility within national borders (Brooks and Waters 2013:9). It thus needs to be noted that the term 'student mobility' does not necessarily imply a crossing of national borders, and generally functions as an inclusive term for all kinds of movements for educational purposes.

country. It does not seem reasonable to make such a clear-cut distinction between the two terms. I would like to propose instead that, despite being called 'international students' for official purposes, *all* students who maintain or forge ties across nation-state borders are transnational students, regardless of their country of study. Of course, 'transnational dynamics do not matter to all immigrants at all time' (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:142), which is why labelling some students as 'international' and others as 'transnational' would not paint a realistic picture. Rather than taking transnationalism for granted, it might make sense to instead look at student mobility through a 'transnational lens' (Bilecen 2014:16; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:142). It enables an analysis of the ties international students have to their home and host countries (as well as other countries they may have connections to through fellow international students and other friends or family members) without making a blanket statement about international students as a homogeneous[13] group.

3.2 Agentic Positioning in Transcultural Social Spaces

There has been a shift in transnational studies from a focus on host countries to an analysis of the complex, interwoven cross-border relations between multiple countries (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:142). Moreover, there is a notion that 'the nation-state container view of society does not capture, adequately or automatically, the complex interconnectedness of contemporary reality' (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1006). In saying this, the authors oppose methodological nationalism[14] to analyse societal practices and processes and instead propose to use theoretical approaches such as the transnational lens as well as social space (2004:1006–1007). The latter is a term coined by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1985:723) who introduced it as a topological view of social relations. He elaborates:

> The social field can be described as a multi-dimensional space of positions such that every actual position can be defined in terms of a multi-dimensional system of co-ordinates whose values correspond to the values of the different pertinent variables. Thus, agents are distributed within it, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of the capital they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the composition of their capital – i.e., according to the relative weight of the different kinds of assets within their total assets. [...] Knowledge of the position occupied in this space contains information as to the agents' intrinsic properties (their condition) and their relational properties (their position). (1985:724–725)

Essentially, Bourdieu considers social environments a coordinate system in which persons assume positions on the basis of a) their accumulated capital and its composition and b) their relationships to other persons who will, in turn, position themselves accordingly.[15] Capital can be categorised as economic, cultural, social and symbolic, the latter being especially important as it denotes prestige and thus bears the power to legitimise, negotiate and acknowledge the other three forms (1985:724). Therefore, capital provides a person with certain assets and advantages in managing their relations in social space.

The sociologist Ludger Pries furthermore identifies 'material artefacts, the social practices of everyday life, as well as systems of symbolic representation that are structured by and structure human life' (2001:8) as constituents of social space. Social spaces can also

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[13] Indeed, scholarship calls for more reflected depictions of international student groups that emphasise their heterogeneity (Brooks and Waters 2013:9).

[14] Advocates of methodological nationalism 'confine the concept of society to the boundaries of nation-states and the members of those states are assumed to share a common history and set of values, norms, social customs and institutions' (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:191). In fact, the mere idea of borders is a construct of our imagination (Pries 2001:3), and therefore cannot be an indicator of difference between the members of those imagined territories.

[15] In other works, the second characteristic has also been called the 'positional aspect' (Parsons 1952:25) or 'social location' (Pessar and Mahler 2001:6).

simply be called '"lived" environments' (Unger 2012:44). Moreover, it is important to note that the positions and coordinates in the web of social relations that make up social space are ultimately linked to power (Bourdieu 1985:725; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1008).

To analyse power relations in social networks, the concept of 'agency' might be of use. The cultural anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner broadly defines agency as the capacity of a person's intentional actions in a given social setting and the consummation of one's personal power (2006:139). Talcott Parsons, who coined the social action theory, notes the following:

> Each individual actor is involved in a plurality of [...] interactive relationships each with one or more partners in the complementary role. Hence it is the *participation* of an actor in a patterned interactive relationship which is for many purposes the most significant unit of the social system. (1952:25; emphasis in original)

Though Parsons does not elaborate his theory in these terms, his argumentation points to a preference of 'positioning' over 'being positioned'. Interpreted this way, his work is indeed very complementary to the concept of agency. At the same time, he considers the network of relationships between actors a 'structure' (1952:25), a term which fits into the ongoing debate of 'structure' versus 'agency' (see Ortner 2006:130; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:139). Agents are, in this light, both able to position themselves (agency) and unable to be completely independent from positions that they are attributed to under the scrutiny of their social environment (structure). Indeed, they act 'from a particular place in a social field of ordered and interrelated points or positions of possible activity' (Holland et al. 1998:44). In other words,

> while all social actors are assumed to 'have' agency, the idea of actors as always being engaged with others in the play of serious games[16] is meant to make it virtually impossible to imagine that the agent is free, or is an unfettered individual (Ortner 2006:130).

Thus, we need to assess the impacts of both individual agency and overarching structure to follow a more realistic approach to human behaviour in social spaces, though Ortner notes (2006:133) that Bourdieu himself did not speak of agency at all.[17] Nevertheless, analysing social space as a societal structure with agency of its subjects in mind seems quite logical. After all, 'position is not fate' (Holland et al. 1998:45), and agency plays an important role in the active positioning of agents in social spaces.

The social space approach is quite an asset to transnational studies as it shows overarching impacts of transnationalism on social life, including the experiences of people who do not migrate but maintain transnational ties nonetheless (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1009). In other words, this approach makes visible all the interconnections and power relations that make up the social reality of both migrants and non-migrants. Many scholars speak of 'transnational (social) fields' or 'transnational (social) spaces' (see Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Pries 2001; Vertovec 2009). The academically pioneering aspect about this concept is the way it challenges the hitherto common notion that social life is restricted to local or national grounds while at the same time acknowledging that nation-states and their borders are not delegitimised in the wake of these emerging transnational interactions (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:130).

However groundbreaking the concept of transnational social space might be, though, national borders played only a small role in my research and were rarely even addressed in the interviews I conducted. In fact, when it came to names and identities, an emphasis was usually placed

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[16] The term 'serious games' refers to social life, explained 'as something that is actively played, oriented toward culturally constituted goals and projects, and involving both routine practices and intentionalized action' (2006:129).

[17] She identifies two possible reasons for this omission: either intention or lack of appropriate terminology in the French language (2006:133).

on cultural and linguistic differences. Therefore, I would like to point to *transcultural* social spaces instead of transnational ones. A keyword here is 'Chinese transnationalism' (see Ong and Nonini 1997), which I will address in chapter 6.1 to explain how (overseas) Chineseness is a transnational identity marker in and of itself and thus necessitates a different terminology for interactions with non-Chinese people. Furthermore, there are conceptual advantages to a choice of transculturality over transnationalism, as this approach challenges the outdated yet still prevalent idea that cultures are synonymous with the nation-state or at least with geographic areas (Lehtola et al. 2015:6).[18]

Of course, this is not to say that transnationalism is a concept to be disregarded. Neither do I wish to imply that none of my interviewees had transnational connections – in fact, I would argue that most of them, if not all of them, were deeply embedded in transnational social spaces – or that the ones they had were not a salient part of their daily lives. The boundaries of social spaces are mutable and almost impossible to define, which means that transnational and transcultural spaces are guaranteed to overlap and sometimes even configure a shared place. A transcultural exchange could happen across national borders but certainly also within its confines. Moreover, the interrelation between the transnational and the transcultural perspective is highlighted by how transnational connections complicate notions of cultural difference:

> [C]ontemporary transnational processes have transformed the way in which cultural diversity is experienced. [...] The politics of difference is no longer only located within local and national contexts and therefore it is highly influenced by cultural shifts produced by the global mobility of people, capital, ideologies, information and images. (Schröttner 2012:25–26)

Similar words have been uttered early on in the emergence of transnational studies in order to urge anthropologists to explain 'a new paradox: that the growth and intensification of global interconnection [...] is accompanied by a resurgence in the politics of differentiation' (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1995:50). It is at this point that culture cannot be fully transcended: People keep coming back to it, drawing on it, and pointing it out, ultimately resulting in an even greater emphasis on cultural difference.

However, though treated by politics as new issues, transculturality and cultural diversity are not sudden deviations from the norm (Schröttner 2012:25; Tamcke 2013:148). In fact, culture itself is so dynamic, such a non-essentialist 'open concept' (Klute and Hahn 2007:15), that it can hardly constitute a norm in the first place. Due to the difficulties of defining concepts like 'culture' and 'transculturality' in a clear-cut way, the analytical lens of the social space approach becomes highly important: We need to examine how agents interact and position themselves in relation to others within the overarching hierarchies of culture and society to understand how these structures are perceived and how they shape what we think of others but also of ourselves. In this context, concepts of identity come into play.

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[18] Just like culture, language is not to be equated with one respective nation-state, either: 'The transcultural perspective challenges the nationalist idea of monolingualism as an ideal. There are about 200 national states in the world, but approximately 6000-9000 different languages, which are also closely connected to different ethnic groups' (Lehtola et al. 2015:10). Chinese linguistic variations are briefly discussed in chapter 6.1.

4. CONCEPTS IN MOTION: NEGOTIATIONS OF IDENTITIES AND NAMES

4.1 Identity Concepts in Anthropology

While the psychological term 'identity' did not enter anthropological discourse until the 1950s, the anthropology of the first half of the 20th century was already concerned with the related notion of personality and how it corresponded with that of culture, usually perceived as mutually influencing concepts in the sense that 'personality was considered to be resulting from the internalization of culture, whereas culture was regarded as the projection of personality' (van Meijl 2008:169). Under the premise of coherence, the new psychological concept of identity was regarded as the view of oneself that is the same as – or: *identical* with – the perspective of others (2008:169–170). Moreover, due to continued anthropological interest in the culture and personality movement, members of one community were expected to form a homogeneous group with identical traits (2008:170). To put it simply, 'the job of the anthropologist was to find the culture' (Holland et al. 1998:15).

However, recent anthropology has seen a turn of conceptualisation of both culture and identity as it started emphasising heterogeneity and mutability (van Meijl 2008:170). As identities are 'vulnerable to change' (Holland et al. 1998:4), they are unable to represent an inherently fixed and coherent constant; they must be (re-)negotiated at every turn in a continuous process of 'self-fashioning' (1998:4). In this sense, the cultural theorist Stuart Hall (2000:16) opts to use 'identification' instead of 'identity' because it designates someone's processual convergence towards shared characteristics of someone else or even another group rather than a fixed comprehensive package. He describes it as the following:

> Identification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality. Like all signifying practices, it is subject to the 'play' of *différance*. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier-effects'. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process. (2000:17; emphasis in original)

What is captured here is the almost inscrutable complexity of identification and its inability to stand for itself: For identities to have a meaning, there must be something else, a constitutive *Other*, to provide some much-needed context. Identities need further

explanation because they do not provide one themselves (Sökefeld 2001:531). Going back to the social space approach, one might also speak of a 'development of social position into a positional identity' (Holland et al. 1998:137). In a more abstract way, Hall (2000:19) uses the above-mentioned metaphor of 'suture' to illustrate this relational character; the act of identification is the merging of a person and a social position by sewing them together. Because of identity's complex, fluid and therefore non-essentialist character, the former anthropological transfer from individual identity to group belonging through shared mindsets cannot hold true (Hall 2000:17) and needs to be re-evaluated. Furthermore, as mobility and migration enable rapidly changing social settings and increasing diversity, we need to consider that identities are 'always multiply constructed in different contexts' (van Meijl 2008:174). It is in this regard that contemporary scholarship emphasises the *multiplicities* of identities, belongings, places and cultures to introduce more dynamic concepts of cultural identifications (Kempf, van Meijl and Hermann 2014:10–13).

There has thus been a shift from the concept of singular, persistent and homogeneous identity to one of plural, dynamic and heterogeneous identities. Most apparent in these approaches to identities is the idea that they have to be actively negotiated in response to a person's surroundings. Accordingly, Holland et al. (1998:271) speak of 'practiced identities' that need to be considered in relation to social space and positional aspects. Moreover, a key concept in their identity theory is agency, which they explain as the ability to 'author' options:

> The world must be answered – authorship is not a choice – but the form of the answer is not predetermined. It may be nearly automatic […], or it may be a matter of great variability […] in a time and space defined by others' standpoints in activity, that is, in a social field conceived as the ground of responsiveness. Human agency comes through this art of improvisation […] to operate in such a diverse yet powerful social universe. (1998:272)

The agentic potential of identification lies in a person's ability to choose the position with which it is, in Hall's words, 'sutured'. Identities are not mere labels to summarise a set of characteristics, they are representatives of personal *choices*. Those choices can be complex and interactive as the plurality of identification implies that one not only adds positions up to a list of identities but rather builds and manages a web of multiple, intersecting identities. However, choices are not always disposable as availability of choices is often regulated by underlying related discourses (Gewirtz and Alan 2008:40). A choice could also be to consciously disidentify[19] with a certain social position as '[t]here may not be a fit between positions and dispositions' (Skeggs 1997:81). To situate this scenario within Hall's metaphor of suture, the discrepancy translates to ripping the stitches.

All of this complexity now begs the question how people cope with their multiple (potential) identities and how anthropologists can analyse these intersections without misrepresenting the assemblage of identities as some sort of crisis (van Meijl 2008:178). Furthermore, since 'identities are constructed through, not outside, difference' (Hall 2000:17), special attention needs to be paid to the transcultural dynamics of identification and how cultural difference might influence the way identities are configured and negotiated in shared social spaces (see 4.3.1). First, though, I will discuss the correlation of identification and naming practices.

4.2 The Anthropology of Naming: Labelled Identities?

As universal as the practice of naming may seem, it can carry a lot of cultural significance. Not uncommonly, names tell particular stories. Asking someone about their name may lead

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[19] 'Disidentification' is the part of identification that concerns itself with 'the construction of boundaries and exclusion' (Gewirtz and Alan 2008:40), denoting that which one is *not*.

to long and detailed accounts of birth circumstances, family relationships or other contexts that might not be visible at first glance. In this respect, 'names seem simultaneously ubiquitous and infinitely changeable in their meaning' (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2009:2). But why do we have names in the first place?

To answer this question, first and foremost, it can be observed that the process of name-giving has been thought in anthropology to be part of a greater need to structure one's surroundings:

> Peoples everywhere have developed symbolic structures in terms of which persons are perceived not baldly as such, as mere unadorned members of the human race, but as representatives of certain distinct categories of persons, specific sorts of individuals. In any given case, there are inevitably a plurality of such structures. Some, for example kinship terminologies, are ego-centered: that is, they define the status of an individual in terms of his relationship to a specific social actor. Others are centered on one or another subsystem or aspect of society and are invariant with respect to the perspectives of individual actors: noble ranks, age-group statuses, occupational categories. Some – personal names and sobriquets – are informal and particularizing; others – bureaucratic titles and caste designations – are formal and standardizing. The everyday world in which the members of any community move, their taken-for-granted field of social action, is populated not by anybodies, faceless men without qualities, but by somebodies, concrete classes of determinate persons positively characterized and appropriately labeled. (Geertz 1973:363)

From this perspective, naming is what turns us into 'somebodies' and, consequentially, what enables us to partake in social life. Without a name, we might stay 'faceless' and uncharacterised – in other words, unidentified. Names can furthermore be indicative of other orientational structures. Membership, socio-economic background, kinship, gender and religion can, among other identifiers, be visible in a name (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2009:3); its bearer's social position and their positional identity is disposable through the name. What does this mean for the joint study of names and identification? Are names simply labelled identities?

Names are indeed often thought to be indicators for identity, which is apparent in the very word given to official personal documents in the English language: *identification*. When we are asked to identify ourselves, the name itself usually does not suffice; what is asked of us instead is visual proof of our legal existence (at a certain place at a certain time), validated by a physical document indicating the name of its bearer (among other identity markers). Legal matters are thus evidently attached to names and render them an important means for official purposes.[20] As anthropologists Gabriele vom Bruck and Barbara Bodenhorn argue, these matters also make a name's very existence precarious:

> That identities can be stolen, traded, suspended, and even erased through the name reveals the profound political power located in the capacity to name; it illustrates the property-like potential in names to transact social value; and it brings into view the powerful connection between name and self-identity. (2009:2)

Indeed, there seems to be little in life that can be attained *without* a name, at least not in the long run. A few examples would be travel, money storing and transactions, education, and employment. However, simply acknowledging the power of names is not complete without also acknowledging that some names seem to inherently hold more power than others. Inheriting a 'good' family name or marrying into a family to obtain a name are practices that make this hierarchy of (family) names palpable. Moreover, given names are often indicative of the relationship between the receiving (named) and giving (naming) party, the latter often a kin or a person close to the newborn, and the naming process often 'expresses as well as constitutes social relations' (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2009:5).

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[20] It is important to note that while it could be seen as a form of governmental control, it is also a way to ensure legal protection (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2009:2–3).

Keeping the relationship factor of naming in mind, it might be interesting to ask what role *meaning* plays in how the name is thought to connect to a corresponding identity. While it has been established already that names can matter to the government as a means of identification in a more legal sense, the particular content of the name does not concern it as much (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2009:3), though there might be regulations as to which names are appropriate or inappropriate to give a child. On a more personal level, though, the wish to give someone (and receive) a '"proper" name (in the sense of being correct as well as being one's own)' (2009:11) might emerge. Moreover, name-givers are never truly 'free' to choose or create a name we wish to bestow on someone else: Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966:181–182) argues in accordance with structuralist theory that name-givers 'class' – either the name recipients or themselves – rather than 'name' by adhering or not adhering to the respective social rules or standards of naming.

These standards with which we calculate a name's propriety depend on context. Discrepancies have been astutely observed by philosopher Saul Aaron Kripke (1980:57–59), who denotes names as 'rigid designators' that attempt to apply a preformed meaning to the referent but always work with specific measurements to do so. In other words, we need context to know what a name means, and we need to be aware that the meaning might change with every slight change in contributing components.[21] To put it more simply, '[t]he sense-creating context has to do with the person, not with any lexical meaning of the name itself' (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2009:7). Whenever we talk about names' meanings, it is thus crucial to ask what a name means *to someone* and in what context.

Names can also be a sign of having reached a certain stage of life, or mark social commencements. In the American Sign Language community, for example, a name sign is bestowed upon someone – not chosen for themselves – by a native signer, thus marking the named person's initiation as a community member (Meadow 1977:240). In this case, it is important to note '[w]ho has the right to assign a name (where, when and how)' as it 'varies considerably across cultures' (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2009:11). The 'new' identity is officially legitimised through the reception of a matching name, and responds to a certain position in the respective social space, giving the name bearer an angle to act from:

> Through this quite remarkable form of *nomination* constituted by the proper name, a constant and durable social identity is instituted [...]. The proper name is the visible affirmation of the identity of its bearer across time and social space [...], indifferent to circumstances and to individual accidents, amidst shifting biological and social realities. This is why the proper name cannot describe properties and conveys no information about that which it names; since what it designates is only a composite and disparate rhapsody of biological and social properties undergoing constant flux, all descriptions are valid only within the limits of a specific stage or place. (Bourdieu 2000:299–300; emphasis in original)

As Bourdieu notes here, while a name signifies identity, it is not equipped to adapt to an agent's social (re-)positioning in varying situations. In a way, even though 'names are thought to have the capacity to fix identity', they also hold the 'capacity to detach from those identities' (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2009:2). In this case, the aforementioned process of disidentification (see 4.1) concerns the mismatch of names and identities. It seems then as if we cannot simply speak of the proper name as an identity label, especially since it is quite possible to have both multiple identities and names.

I would like to summarise the anthropologic theories of names and naming that I have thus far presented by quoting vom Bruck and Bodenhorn when they say:

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[21] Kripke (1980:75) uses a generic example to elaborate his theory: If Adolf Hitler had not been a dictator but someone with an entirely different biography, his name – Kripke only uses his family name but I would argue that the same goes for his given name – would not invoke the same horrific connotations it does while the historic context that he was part of and responsible for holds true.

> Names, then, are many things. Only in a few cases can they be considered meaningless markers […]. What names are in any particular context is clearly connected to what naming as an initial act is thought to do. (2009:25)

All three arguments made in this paragraph, a) that names have multiple functions (in different situations), b) that they can carry meaning at the same time that they do not and c) that naming needs to be analysed in regards to its context-specific intentions, shall be constitutive of my analysis of Chinese and Chinese international names as well as their implications for their bearers' identities in the context of transcultural social spaces.

4.3 Transcultural Dynamics and Pluralities of Names and Identities

4.3.1 Navigating New Social Spaces: Transcultural Identities

If the study of identities means walking a tightrope between notions of sameness and difference, and is usually associated with notions of 'culture' in anthropological history, our attention has to be directed to transcultural dynamics especially. Though it is tempting to speak of established concepts of multicultural and intercultural dynamics instead, I urge to deploy them carefully, as they have been criticised in the past for viewing cultures as separate, homogeneous[22] and enumerable entities that exist *next to* each other, rather than embedded *within* each other (Lehtola et al. 2015:6; Schröttner 2012:24). The idea here is quite similar to the critique of global and international vis-à-vis transnational approaches and enables us to think about the configuration of newly created (cultural) identities rather than accumulated ones. Some call these new identities 'hybrid', the concept of which 'is also linked to the idea of "new ethnicities" (see also Stuart Hall) which can be understood to be a non-static and non-essentialized view of ethnic culture' (Schröttner 2012:22). The term is not entirely unproblematic, though, as it derives from the biological concept of crossing species and has a distinct place in colonial history (Shen 2009:44). I prefer to speak of 'transcultural identities' instead.

At its core, the idea of transculturally emergent identities means learning and unlearning, keeping and discarding cultural practices one comes across during continuous transcultural encounters[23] which take place in various social spaces. (Transnational) migration is seen as a facilitator of the configuration of these spaces and, consequentially, identities (Vertovec 2009:86–90). It makes sense at this point to come back to questions of mobility and especially student mobility as it is the main focus of this thesis. Studies have shown that students develop identities much different from the ones tourists or (im)migrants might have, as they do so in 'an entirely new cultural space' (Brooks and Waters 2013:8).

The international student community can be considered an exemplary stage for such space development as many students abroad find it hard to establish lasting relations with students of the 'host' society and bond primarily with other international students (Bilecen 2014:97–99; Brooks and Waters 2013:152–153), though this is not to say that these friendships are inferior or any less valuable. All of these encounters – whether they are configured within the international student community, with domestic students of the host university, or other people from different cultural backgrounds – build the frame for possibilities of transcultural identifications. In this respect, 'overseas experiences often provide useful resources for "identity construction" within contemporary society' (Brooks and Waters 2013:158).

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[22] Out of this particular point of criticism, 'super-diversity' (Vertovec 2007:1025) has emerged as an analytic concept, aiming to underscore the diversity that can be found within different (cultural) groups that are otherwise understood to be part of a larger, diverse structure without diversities of their own.

[23] The term 'encounter' can be used to designate notions of novelty and fluidity rather than speaking of established transcultural 'relations' (Lehtola et al. 2015:7).

One must not forget, however, that students do not just interact with other students. For example, anthropologists have studied transnational families (see Madianou and Miller 2012) and analysed how families create a sense of closeness that crosses the distance. Since students' education abroad also typically concerns (and is sometimes provided by) their families, their family relationships matter greatly in their day-to-day activities. Additionally, considering the often temporary quality of student mobility and the diversity in international student bodies, many students maintain friendships in their home countries and other places of the world during and after their time abroad.

Creating and maintaining close ties – both to families and friends – might prove to be difficult since places and people of the new environment are usually only known to one party (Bilecen 2014:58). Though people have done the same in times before new technology emerged, the use of polymedia nowadays is the pivotal point of these long-distance ties and creates situations in which one is 'virtually present' (Madianou and Miller 2012:121), connecting social spaces that might otherwise not overlap.

Transnational and transcultural identity configuration is therefore facilitated by the global interconnectedness of social spaces (or potential thereof). In the following, I will assess how this affects naming practices as well.

4.3.2 Locating Names in Translanguaging Space

While names and identities have been diversely studied in correlation, the same cannot be said for joint research on names, identities *and* migration. Anthropologically, the topic has been neglected almost completely, which is surprising, to say the least, as anthropological methodology is predestined to analyse these particular intersections. Moreover, rectification of inappropriate terminology and concepts used in other disciplines is needed.

German sociologists Jürgen Gerhards and Silke Hans have dedicated their work to names and naming in Germany. In some of these works, they focus on reasons for why immigrants in Germany choose to give their children certain names, even using a transnational approach to capture developments both between and within nation-states, and to explain how names circulate over distances and are thus chosen outside of the area of their origin (Gerhards 2005:85–93). Sadly, these studies are unreflectingly based on premises of culture and migration that are justifiably criticised in anthropology. Gerhards and Hans write:

> If migrants draw on names common in Germany, we interpret this as a sign of acculturation into German society. However, if they assign first names that are only common in their home country, we interpret this as a sign of a low acculturation tendency. […] First names are […] equally available to all parents free of charge. First names therefore are primarily an expression of parental preferences, which are not limited by 'hard' restrictions. […] Contrary to other indicators of the assimilation of immigrants, the assignment of names thus measures the degree of a group's *desired* ethnic closure or the degree of *voluntary* acculturation.[24] (2008:466–467; emphasis in original; translated by F.G.)

The use of the terms 'assimilation', 'acculturation' and 'ethnic closure' can easily be dismissed by pointing to the afore-established theoretical framework of this thesis; they

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[24] Original wording in German: 'Greifen Migranten für ihre Kinder auf in Deutschland übliche Vornamen zurück, so interpretieren wir dies als ein Anzeichen von Akkulturation an die deutsche Gesellschaft. Vergeben sie hingegen Vornamen, die allein in ihrem Heimatland gebräuchlich sind, so interpretieren wir dies als ein Anzeichen einer geringen Akkulturationsneigung. [...] Vornamen sind [...] gleichsam gratis für alle Eltern verfügbar. Die Auswahl eines Vornamens ist somit in erster Linie ein reiner Ausdruck der Präferenzen der Eltern, die durch „harte" Restriktionen nicht eingeschränkt werden. [...] Die Vergabe von Vornamen misst also, im Gegensatz zu anderen Indikatoren der Assimilation von Einwanderern, den Grad der *gewünschten* ethnischen Schließung einer Gruppe bzw. den Grad der *freiwilligen* Akkulturation.'

are pregnant with ideas of an equivalence between culture and nation and geographically bound cultures that never merge, or even interact, it seems.

Moreover, Gerhards and Hans presuppose that names are either common or uncommon in a culture (or language) which places them in a binary opposition that has no anthropological or linguistic legitimacy. While the authors do acknowledge that some names, for instance those of religious nature, are common cross-lingually (2008:469), they do not account for the fact that non-migrants also choose names of origins that do not lie within their national confines – a popular German example would be the Italian name Luca, which has been a top 10 contender for boys' names for more than ten consecutive years since 2002 (Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache e.V. n.d.). Gerhards does mention a 'transnationalization of first names' (2005:87) in a different volume but it is defining for the study here that this perspective vanishes as soon as the focus shifts to migrants. Showing them up as either assimilated or separatist, acknowledging only two extreme choices, is essentialist and backward, and completely negates both the possibility of multiple identifications and agency.

Even the aspect of preference, which is mentioned above, is here absurdly connoted with an argument about financial means, not with an autonomous choice. What is not mentioned, interestingly, is the potential non-monetary losses a less privileged name might cost its bearer, for example discrimination on basis of the name's associated origin (Lütkenhöner 2011:16–17). The name choice might then still be restricted or at the very least accompanied by certain risks. As discussed before (see 4.1), what cluster of choices is available to a person might be discursively limited. To argue that a choice of names represents either 'desired ethnic closure' on the one hand or 'voluntary acculturation' on the other needs to be discounted as untenable.

Despite this faux pas, though, Gerhards provides some useful arguments for the transnational circulation of names, explaining how they become known – and thus available as a choice – to people across the globe: a) immigration, b) increased travel, and c) the rise of pop culture and mass media consumption (2003:132). Both migration and travel imply that the circulation of names involves meeting other people, again pointing to the concept of social space and how names are negotiated by the actors embedded in it.[25] Furthermore, pop culture, mass consumption and the popularity of certain contents (e.g. books, TV shows, movie franchises, celebrities' lives) have greater implications for the representation of names in transcultural contexts and will prove to be important for the assessment of how the Chinese students I worked with chose their international names (see 7.2.1).

Nevertheless, Gerhards' observations will not suffice to appropriately analyse the transcultural dynamics of names and naming, which begs the question which approach we *can* use to reach a point from which on an anthropological study of transcultural name negotiations is possible. Since the concepts of both culture and identification seem to have suffered from the same academic misdeeds in the past as the above-critiqued study of migrant names, I would like to propose to use similar concepts – namely social space, positioning, and agency – to help overcome the essentialist character of previous research. Additionally, some sociolinguistic theories might be beneficial to locate the study of names in its greater field of linguistic anthropology. Their meaning aside, names are, after all, words that need to be pronounced, spelt, written, called, etc. in everyday communication and across different languages.

The way one uses language(s) is heavily dependent on context, and 'people usually command a range of alternative ways of speaking, which they vary in response to social situations' (Holland et al. 1998:12). Thus, the theory of social space provides a very fitting conceptual framework for inquiries concerning language behaviour. It has indeed been used by the sociolinguist Li Wei to constitute 'translanguaging space':

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[25] For example, one interlocutor (Vivian, 04/16) recounted that a friend of hers had chosen a new name for herself after coming across a name she liked when she was abroad in Europe.

For me, translanguaging is both going between different linguistic structures and systems, including different modalities (speaking, writing, signing, listening, reading, remembering) and going beyond them.[26] It includes the full range of linguistic performances of multilingual language users for purposes that transcend the combination of structures, the alternation between systems, the transmission of information and the representation of values, identities and relationships. The act of translanguaging then is transformative in nature; it creates a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience. I call this space ''translanguaing [sic] space'', a space for the act of translanguaging as well as a space created through translanguaging. (2011:1223)

In defining 'language' as a process and as a verb rather than a noun (2011: 1223), the theory of translanguaging captures the concept of agency in this approach by showing that people *create* through the use of words: By languaging actively, they have the power to build a social space in which relationships and identities are configured.

Besides mentioning creativity, Li W. denotes *criticality* as a pillar of translanguaging space, meaning 'the ability to use available evidence appropriately, systematically and insightfully to inform considered views of cultural, social and linguistic phenomena' (2011:1223). He enriches his theoretic concept with some examples from his own study with Chinese multilinguals in London. Chris, one of Li W.'s interlocutors, said in a group conversation that he wanted to work as a 白领狗 (*báilǐng gǒu*), which translates to 'white-collar dog' and means 'working for someone's company' (2011:1226). Embedded in this word's pronunciation is a translanguaging pun that Chris' peers picked up immediately when they laughingly told Chris that he was already 'bilingual', referencing the similar pronunciation of the two words (2011:1226). What this example shows is how languages can be used creatively to create an in-between state, the meaning of which will be lost on anyone who is not familiar with all constitutive language contexts. Thus, translanguaging space constitutes a very specific creative social space that can only exist in and between several languages.

Use of a certain language might have varying impacts on how one is perceived by and behaves in front of other actors in their social space (Holland et al. 1998:127–128; Li W. 2011:1228). Reflecting upon the way someone speaks might tell us more about how the speaker expects to be evaluated in that given moment, and implies 'claims to and identification with social categories and positions of privilege relative to those with whom we are interacting' (Holland et al. 1998:127). Additionally, thinking about language on a meta level, being bi- or multilingual and representing[27] it through translanguaging in itself makes up another important part of identification (Li W. 2011:1228).

The act of translanguaging that will be focused on especially in this study is the use of multiple names in different situations, including creativity (creating names), criticality (negotiating their meaning) and contingency in social situations. In other words, the choice of which name to use or which *form* of one's name is dependent on social positions of the speaker and the people they are speaking to within transcultural and translanguaging spaces. First, however, some principles of Chinese naming practices are going to be explored in the following chapters to ensure a basic understanding of the significance of Chinese names and the social contexts they are embedded in that will be required for an adequate

[26] Similarly, one might speak of 'code-switching', a concept which looks at how linguistic codes are used in small-scale interactions between people, as opposed to which language is chosen in a community on the big scale (Li, Milroy and Ching 1992:64). However, the way translanguaging is introduced here as a state between and beyond language at the same time, is very reminiscent of the basic definition of transculturality (see 3.2) and therefore a more suitable addition to the theoretical framework at hand.
[27] I choose to describe it as 'representing' here because the Chinese students Li W. worked with were especially keen to be seen as someone who speaks several languages at all times, not as someone who speaks eloquently in just *either* language when speaking to a native speaker of that same language: 'They want to be able to pick and mix amongst the languages they know [...]. They want to do translanguaging' (2011:1228).

study of how my Chinese interlocutors negotiate their multiple names in transcultural social spaces.

5. FROM FORTUNE TO MEANING: CHINESE NAMING CUSTOMS

5.1 Chinese Name Structure

It is crucial to know the basic structure of Chinese names in order to understand why they cannot simply be translated into or used in other languages without losing parts of the meaning that is embedded within them. To start with, Chinese names are comprised of syllables and morphemes, the family name usually consisting of one syllable (Kałużyńska 2008:43) and the given name of one or two syllables, though there are exceptions, and preferences regarding the number of syllables can vary regionally (Bauer 1959:66–67). Since the family name (姓, *xìng*) comes first and is followed by the given name (名字, *míngzi*)[28] in both written and spoken Chinese, it is confusing to speak of 'first' and 'last' names, and also quite Eurocentric (Zhu and Millward 1987:8). My interviewees used the terms very ambiguously. Some spoke of given and family names; others told me about their 'first' and 'last' names, sometimes in different orders:

> Chan is my first name, and then most people have two words following their surname. (Vivian, 04/16)[29]

> You know, we have, like, the last name which is actually the first character. (Mei-lian, 09/15)

> The forename – my first name – is Huimin. (Huimin, 09/15)

While Vivian talked about Chan, her family name, as her first name, Mei-lian referred to it as last name but pointed out that it actually comes first in the Chinese name order. Huimin used the words 'forename' (which comes close to the German 'Vorname' and might thus

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[28] It might be argued that this order is representative of the higher priority of the family vis-à-vis the individual as names indicate family identity first (E.W. Louie 2008:14) and thus emphasise the family name as the 'obviously [...] most important part of the name' (Zhu and Millward 1987:8). However, family names only played a marginal role in my research and some of the participants even said that the 'family name is not important' (Coco, 12/15) or that it does not have 'any meaning' (Xueqing, 11/15).

[29] My interlocutors (as well as anonymous commenters on the internet) will be quoted verbatim but with small changes in orthography, vocabulary and syntax whenever necessary so as to not disturb the flow of reading. These changes will not be annotated. Additionally, although I interviewed most students only once, I will take into account some information that was shared with me on other occasions, e.g. on social media or in informal conversations, and will thus mark all quotations with the month and the year (mm/yy) in which the information was obtained. All usernames are omitted (see 2.3), which is why quoted comments on webpages will simply show the date, if applicable.

have been used by her peers in Germany a lot) and 'first name' to tell me her given name. In one interview, I was even asked which order I preferred so that they could write it down accordingly. I use the terms 'family' and 'given name' (or their Chinese counterparts) to avoid ambiguities.

As opposed to other languages, the range of commonly used Chinese family names is relatively small: The total recorded number for the entire Chinese history encompasses 6,000 to 8,000 family names (Lu 1989:265) and today, only about 930 of them are in use (Zhu and Millward 1987:9). A range of a hundred family names is used by 87% of the Chinese Han[30] population (E.W. Louie 2008:35). This trend is reflected in my pool of twelve interviewees as well: Seven of them bear one of the nineteen most common Chinese family names.[31] When asked about the meaning of their family names, some of them told me it was just a surname without any special meaning (Sam, 11/15; Vivian, 04/16; Xueqing, 11/15). Most of them just noted that it was their family name, sometimes adding how common (Mei-lian, 09/15; Maia, 01/16) or scarce (Yubai, 11/15) it was. Only rarely did I get a literal translation of the word, and most dictionaries also noted that it was a 'surname' separately from another entry where the actual translation was given. A family name thus carries, in most cases, no literal meaning to its bearer (E.W. Louie 2008:38–40).

There is also a type of family name called 氏 (*shì*), which used to be an entirely different name in early times but is now used almost synonymously with 姓. It never became a stand-alone term for the family name and is usually used in combination with 姓 nowadays, as in 姓氏 (*xìngshì*), or left out completely (Kałużyńska 2008:42). The difference is that 姓 indicates lineage whereas 氏 refers to a maiden name (E.W. Louie 2008:18).[32]

The maiden name has become near redundant in contemporary Chinese society as, upon marriage, each party keeps their family name (Zhu and Millward 1987:13–14). There are cases of uxorilocal marriages in which the family names of the couple are combined (Kałużyńska 2008:42), though hyphenation is not in use at all (Zhu and Millward 1987:14). One note to be made about the intergenerational transfer of names is that though the radical[33] 女 (*nǚ,* 'female') in 姓 might indicate that the family name was once passed on matrilineally, the family name is nowadays typically transmitted patrilineally (Kałużyńska 2008:39–42).

However, there are exceptions to the rule (Zhu and Millward 1987:13), and my interviewee Qiàn told me that she shares a family name with her mother but not her father and her sister:

> I have a sister, and my father did not want that I have the same family name as him. He thinks I'm not in his family, I'm just in my mother's family. [...] But it's not a good thing for a girl, you know? Because you should be named after your father, not named after your mother. If you're named after your mother, it just (represents?) that your father does not like you. Yes. But this is the fact. At first, he didn't want to have me. But my mother insisted. Yeah. But now he loves me very much ((laughing)). (09/15)

Belonging to a family can then be individually regulated via the 姓, and negotiations of gender roles seem to have an impact on the way family names are perceived as well. In the past, some women did not have any name besides their maiden names and their husbands' family names to be referred to as (Kałużyńska 2008:44).

Apart from the family name, though, given names might also imply kinship. Many Chinese names contain a generation name (排行, *páiháng*), a radical or a whole character that is shared with relatives of the same generation, thus marking them as part of one family (Bauer 1959:152).

Mei-lian described the generation name as follows:

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[30] Chinese ethnicities will be discussed briefly in chapter 6.1.
[31] For a list of those nineteen names, see E.W. Louie (2008:35).
[32] 氏 was furthermore used to denominate subdivisions of clans (Zhu and Millward 1987:9).
[33] A radical in Chinese script is a basic character that can be read as a stand-alone but also be embedded in other, more complex characters. In these combinations, radicals usually represent a character's core meaning while the other parts are phonetic complements that determine the character's pronunciation (E.W. Louie 2008:19).

> The name is composed of two characters and then siblings or even cousins would have the same middle character. [...] Me and my sister [Mei-hua] share the same middle character. [...] So that actually [signifies] that we are the same generation. [...] [It] is quite common that we share the middle ones but some families will share the last one, or some families said they would have, like, a family motto which is a poem or something like that, and then every generation, we use one character. Like, old families ((laughing)), they would have every character divided between generations. So, if you see one person and you see the middle name, you will be like, 'Ah, it's my great uncle,' or like, 'Ah, it's my cousin.' [...] But that's old generations, so, like, really, really big families. But nowadays, sometimes, people just pick random names, random characters, they don't really share anything at all except for the last name. (09/15)

What Mei-lian points out here is how the character that appears in both her and her sister's names, 美 (měi), categorises them as siblings, as part of one generation. Because the generation name is shared and does not point out an individual, it is sometimes regarded as a separate name, thus leaving the last – and usually third – character as the 'true given name' (Lu 1989:275). The prevalence of the practice has decreased significantly (Zhu and Millward 1987:15). Nevertheless, at least five of the Chinese students I worked with had a generation name or something resembling such a name. In one case, it was apparently a coincidence that cousins shared the same syllable (Yunan, 01/16). Coco (12/15), who drew parts of her family tree for me to illustrate the way names were passed on in her generation, did not technically have a generation name because those markers are usually different for females and males (E.W. Louie 2008:193), and as a girl, she would not usually get the same name as her male relatives. However, her parents included a syllable in her given name (which is 'Yuanwei' in full) that sounds exactly the same as its counterpart: Coco's 爱 and her relatives' 元, both pronounced *yuán*. While these generation names differ significantly in their written form, their pronunciation is exactly the same and might still serve as a marker for family belonging.

Indeed, homophony is something to be considered especially when studying Chinese names in correlation with names of other languages because Chinese characters lose a great deal of their complexity when transcribed into the Latin alphabet (see 7.1.1). Chinese names cannot be studied holistically without mentioning the great importance of the script and its contribution to a person's identification with their name. A Chinese name is not complete in its meaning without the characters that it is comprised of. Chinese characters can be homophonous in pronunciation, even down to the last tone[34], which means that names are only really distinguishable in Chinese writing (Kałużyńska 2008:37–38). Mei-lian expressed similar thoughts when speaking about her transcribed name:

> My Latinised Chinese name does not really represent any actual naming, it's a mimic of the pronunciation of my Chinese name and it's not even complete because there is no intonation. So it's merely a grasp of my Chinese name. (09/15)

While names certainly need to be transliterated for people not able to read written Chinese, it is vital to know that this form is inherently inferior to its original form because it does not convey the same meaning. In the following, I would like to give a concise overview of how these meanings unfold within a name and how Chinese naming practices are configured accordingly.

5.2 Chinese Naming Practices

While family names exist only in small numbers, 'there is a seemingly limitless number of Chinese given names' (E.W. Louie 2008:43), as syllables can be combined in numerous

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[34] Note that the Pinyin will not be of much help in telling homophonous characters apart then, as is the case with *yuán* (see above).

ways and chosen from almost any suitable word in the Chinese language, which is reflected in the terminology used by my interlocutors. When Huimin explained her given name to me, she said that 'they have a similar meaning, the two words, hui and min; they mean "wisdom"' (09/15). Accordingly, Zhu Bin and Celia Millward write in their essay on Chinese personal names that 'given names […] are chosen for their lexical meaning, and retain their lexical meanings' (1987:16). It is important to understand then that a Chinese name does not only serve the purpose of a categorising label but of a unit that contains combined words, or even phrases, and in which every part might contribute a different nuance to its overall meaning.

Nevertheless, Chinese naming is not a simple word game in which any nice-sounding syllable or meaningful term can be used without consequences. There are rules to be obeyed and conventions to be followed. Indeed, Chinese naming is so complex that there even is an expert industry to which families might turn if they need help picking out a name for their newborn. These experts can be called 'fortune tellers and name masters' (Kałużyńska 2008:37), 'numerologists' (H.H. Li, Hsieh and Chang 2016:228) or 'astrologer[s]' (Duthie 2007:66), as they pick out a child's name with special care regarding birth circumstances and, ultimately, fate:

> According to your birthday and your family, your birth place […], they can make a prediction for your future. If you have this name, maybe you'll be more fortunate in your life, when you're born. […] Someone has a special job to do that. They'll make a prediction […] according to your faith, according to your birthday, according to your, yeah, something like *feng shui*[35]. (Qiàn, 11/15)

> We have a very long history of fortune telling […]. You need to give them your birthday and the time of your birth and then they will – they have this old book and then they will just calculate […], they will just, you know, make up a whole – it's a bit like Western horoscope. […] And then they will just make a graph of your whole life about whether you are smart, whether […] you'll be successful in your life, how many siblings you will have, how many kids you will have in the future, when you will get married, things like that. Like, everything. […] Sometimes they are for real, sometimes they're not. […] And some, they will calculate that […] in your birth chart, you don't have enough of the wood element. So, […] they will choose characters with more wood. […] We calculate the […] strokes; the numbers mean something as well. So there are fortunate strokes and there are unfortunate strokes. (Mei-lian, 09/15)

A Chinese name is often thought to be more than *just* a name. It also serves as an indicator of a person's predicted destiny and fate as well as their social future. These predictions are less based on the sound of the words but rather on its written form. As indicated in chapter 5.1, the character is the ultimate distinction of Chinese words. Additionally, it has powerful numerological implications. The total stroke count in characters and names amounts to lucky and unlucky numbers (H.H. Li, Hsieh and Chang 2016:228).[36]

Naming practices adhere to the harmony principle of Yin Yang (阴阳, *yīn yáng*) (Bauer 1959:57) and the five-element theory (五行, *wǔ xíng*), as implied by Mei-lian when she says that some names might need more wood. As 'each Chinese character corresponds to one of the five elements (i.e., metal, wood, water, fire, and earth)' (H.H. Li, Hsieh and Chang 2016:228), they may provide an element that is missing in the birth chart. The way the characters 'correspond' to the elements is that they contain the element characters as radicals. The character for wood – to remain close to the original example – is 木 (*mù*) and can be part of many characters, for instance as the upper radical in the family name 李 (*Lǐ*).

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[35] The principle of *fēng shuǐ* (风水) is used for objects' geographical positions to come together in a 'harmonious living space' (H.H. Li, Hsieh and Chang 2016:231). The similar principle for Chinese naming mentioned here by Qiàn is called *bāzì* (八字) which takes into account birth circumstances (2016:228) and is also used for match-making (Vivian, 04/16).

[36] 'For example, the first character in the [automotive company] name "吉利" (pronounced as *jili*, meaning "good luck") consists of six strokes and the second seven; the total number is 13, which is considered lucky' (Li, Hsieh and Chang 2016:229; emphasis in original).

The above-mentioned principles are merely a few selected rules that help compose the complex Chinese naming system. There are other noticeable conventions and trends in name choices that shall be elucidated at this point. Scholarship on Chinese anthroponomastics has already documented many of these conventions, some of them drawing on a collection of writings 'composed from earlier sources sometime in the fourth century' (Riegel 2013) called *Zuozhuan* (左传, *Zuǒ Zhuàn*) in which conventions such as naming a child after birth circumstances, desirous virtues, outer appearances, important objects, and similarities with the father as well as taboos, such as geographic names (mountains and rivers), state names, names of diseases or animals, are mentioned (Kałużyńska 2008:46–47).

According to Zhu and Millward (1987:16–17), there are eight categories of potential names: 1) success and fame, 2) intellect and morale, 3) prosperity, 4) longevity, 5) attractiveness, 6) symbolic names (e.g. names of animals or objects associated with a certain quality), 7) a desire for more children, and 8) names denoting past events. There are numerous other methods such as naming after dream sequences, (grand)parental emotions before the birth or words, lines and phrases from poems or proverbs (Kałużyńska 2008:50–52).[37]

My informants' names suit the compilation of rules listed above. For instance, Xueqing told me how her name was inspired by her birth circumstances:

> 雪 (*xuě*) means snow and 晴 (*qíng*) means sunshine. [...] My mother [...] told it to me this way: When I was given birth, it was snowing heavily in winter but the minute after I was given birth, there was sunshine ((chuckling)). Yeah, she told it to me this way. I don't know whether it's true. (11/15)

Another Chinese friend of mine told me once how his parents named him 'rain' and 'ice' because they were in different regions of China and thus experiencing different weather conditions at the time of his birth. Others were named according to family relationships and generational bonds. For example, Yubai's full name is 李与白 (*Lǐ Yǔbái*) which means 'Li and Bai' or 'Li together with Bai', Li and Bai being the family names of his father and his mother respectively.[38] The name shows that he is the child of both of these families. Coco's name points at her standing in her generation: Her name 爰犪 (*Yuánwěi*) is a combination of her generation name (see 5.1) and the character 犪, which she explained as light in the spring that makes the plants grow faster.[39] It seemed important to her to include that 犪 was also similar to another character pronounced as *wěi* (尾) with the meaning 'tail', a symbol of her being 'the youngest of this generation' Coco, 12/15). Here, even though the homophonous character is not actually included in her name, it still contributes to its overall meaning.

Most of my interviewees had names with auspicious qualities that revealed wishes the child's families had for its future, as for instance Sam's Chinese name 俊华 (*Jùnhuá* in Pinyin, officially spelt *Chunwah*; see 7.1.1) that he translated to me as 'fabulous Chinese person' or 'fabulous Chinaman' (11/15). The name was given to Sam by his maternal grandmother to remind him of his Chineseness (see 6.1). Huimin (慧敏, *Huìmǐn*) and Vivian (颖璇, *Wing Suen*[40]) have components in their name that mean 'smart' (in Huimin's case, both characters convey this meaning), reflecting their parents' wish for bright daughters. The dictionary definition of Suen is 'beautiful jade'; however, Vivian said it meant 'happy person' (04/16).

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[37] This compilation is in no way meant to be holistic as the mentioned aspects are mere excerpts taken from works that explain Chinese naming in much greater detail than is possible in this thesis.

[38] This name only unfolds its whole meaning when called out in full. This is, to my knowledge, a bit of a rare case in Chinese as most family names do not contribute to the lexical meaning of the name. However, it is not at all unusual to be called by one's full name: It is considered proper etiquette to do so in a formal setting, and teachers address their students using their full name (Mei-lian, 09/15; Yunan, 01/16).

[39] Moreover, Coco had to change the second syllable of her given name because she needed a legible and writeable character for her passport to study abroad and the second character was not available on the computer. Her new name is pronounced the same, the second syllable replaced by a homophonous character.

[40] *Wing Suen* is the official Hong Kong spelling of Vivian's Chinese name. The six Cantonese tones are not included in this form of Romanisation. There is an alternative Romanisation system initiated by the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong (see D.C.S. Li 1997:492), in which Vivian's name would be transcribed as *Wing⁶ Syun⁴*, thus indicating the sixth and the fourth tone.

Siyang's mother wished her child happiness to move on from two prior miscarriages. Therefore, she named her child 斯阳 (*Sīyáng*) which means 'this' and 'sun'; Siyang explained that her mother intended for it to mean that 'this child is always under the sunshine' (01/16). Happiness and luck are also themes in other names, like Maia's Chinese name 吉 (*Jí*, spelt *Zhe*), which she often uses as ZheZhe[41], meaning 'double lucky' (01/16). Qiàn's parents were told that Qiàn would 'have a happy life' (11/15) if they gave her the name倩 (*qiàn*), which means 'beauty'. Mei-lian has a name denoting pleasant appearance as well: 美 (*měi*), meaning 'beautiful', and 蓮 (*lián*), meaning 'lotus'.

Yunan also has a plant-related name: The second character, 楠, (*nán*), is Chinese cedar, 'a type of tree […] [that is] very expensive and famous and good quality' (01/16). The first half of her given name is 彧 (*yù*) which translates to 'elegant' or 'accomplished' and thus places the name in the category of auspicious naming. Another prime example of this is Qián 前 (*qián*) who explained the name to me with her mother[42] present via Skype:

> Q: My name in Chinese means 'forward', 'moving forward', […] [conveying] wishes that I can always be […] 'looking forward', 'never going back'.

> M: Hope… future. Your future is hope. (04/15)

Here, the core element of auspicious names is captured in the additional comment made by Qián's mother: She *hopes* for her daughter to move forward, to have a good *future*. It can thus be observed that appropriate name choices are of great importance as Chinese names are thought to bear immense consequences for a person's life. Whenever a name is changed, its bearer's entire life can apparently change accordingly. For instance, Qiàn told me that her mother thought she brought bad luck onto herself by changing her name in her twenties:

> Q: It's the same pronunciation but it's not the same character. […] It both means jade. […] It means beauty and purity. Naïve ((chuckling)). […] The first one is cuter. It will give people a lovely feeling. […] Maybe if the first one is a cute girl, then the second is a, yeah, is a… woman. Child, woman. Like that, you know? […] But she thinks the first one was better for her because she thinks the second one brought her bad luck ((laughing)). […] Because they have different strokes. When they are combined with your family name, the total stroke number maybe does something with your fate […] so when my mother changed this to this one, the strokes of the total name changed. Maybe it means her fate will also change.

> F: Okay, and what kind of bad luck would she get […]?

> Q: With her family, with her love, yeah. […] There is some old saying in China that […] your fate is determined the moment you are born. And it will be changed, maybe, by some special things that happen in your life. She thinks when she changed the name, [her] luck went down, down, down ((laughing)), like that. So she thinks the name changing is the reason of her bad luck, her life. (11/15)

Name changes in Chinese society have been quite common throughout the ages (Bauer 1959:51). Many interlocutors told me that they either knew someone who changed their name or underwent a name change themselves. Opinions regarding name changes were quite varied. Not

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[41] She prefers to spell her nickname jointed but with capitalised syllables. Others reported as well that the last syllable of their name was often doubled to form a nickname. Zhu and Millward call this type of nickname 'childhood names' (1987:19). One can also use 'Xiao' (小, *xiǎo*, 'little/young') in front of the last syllable (e.g. Yubai à Xiao Bai) as a common nickname (Zhu and Millward 1987:19), which was confirmed in my interviews. In southern Chinese regions, a typical form of address is a vocative "Ah" in front of the last syllable (E.W. Louie 2008:49–50). Vivian, for example, is called 'Ah Suen' by family members (04/16).
[42] In a few cases, such as this one, it is necessary to mark different speakers. Other than M for *mother*, I use the first letter of the given name (e.g. Q for Qián, F for myself).

everyone was warned by their mothers to 'be careful' (Qiàn 11/15) when changing their name. Siyang, for example, told me that she would have liked to change her name because the first syllable was hard to pronounce even in Chinese and she did not have any special attachments to her name per se. However, she reasoned that changing a name can also be a tedious bureaucratic matter and, as she was about to start her education abroad, she did not want to jeopardise that plan by creating passport issues. Apart from that, her mother wanted to seek professional advice regarding Siyang's *bāzì* but found that it was a costly endeavour because 'the whole process is expensive […], 1000 or 2000 [Yuan[43]]' (Siyang, 01/16).

Two types of name changes are to be distinguished: a) those that are done for a desirous new name and b) those that are done to rid oneself from an unwanted previous name (Bauer 1959:53–54). The person who determines whether a name needs to be changed or not is not always the name bearer themselves. Qián told me, for example, that her name used to be Xinwo. Her mother initiated a name change because she had a colleague from work whose given name was Xinwu and his family name was the same as Qián's family's as well, 'so the pronunciation was, like, so similar, and so people were, like… joking about our names. So my mom thought it wasn't, like, really respectful for him' (04/15). Being done out of respect for her mother's co-worker, this name change does not necessarily fit either one of the above-listed types, though it probably falls under the second category. Despite regulating appropriate name usage in social settings, though, name changes are said to bring about improvements in someone's life:

> Names actually can influence your career, your life in a certain kind of way. There are stars who, when they first started their career, they had this name, and somebody may have advised them to change it to another name that is more pleasant to the ear and easy to remember. So after they change the name, actually, some people really... do a better job than they did before because they have better – no, not necessarily better, but names that *may* promise the better career prospect. (Xueqing, 11/15)

It is interesting here that Xueqing mentions the advice that preceeds the name change. Indeed, while it is certainly possible to initiate a change on one's own terms, some people reach out to fortune tellers just like they do when picking out names for a newborn. In these cases, fate is again a factor to reckon with, as many people turn to a fortune teller when considering a name change (Qián, 04/15). Just like the process of picking out a name in the first place, the choice of a new, improved name then is a matter of philosophy, numerology and social convention.

Though many of the research participants mentioned fortune tellers as an important source for Chinese names, their relevance seems to be decreasing. Qiàn told me, for instance, that many people changed their names 'more casually, more easily' (11/15) as less and less people went to fortune tellers. Vivian explained that people did not consider numerological influences anymore because 'meaningful names are more important than fortunate names' (04/16). This notion came up quite a few times in my interviews, which brings me to an analysis of a trend towards 'unique' rather than 'lucky' names and how it changes name-identity relationships.

5.3 A Trend towards Unique Names?

When Yubai told Qiàn and me how his full name combined both of his parents' family names (see 5.2), our reaction was very enthusiastic. On my part, the enthusiasm stemmed from an interest in how Chinese allowed such unusual combinations. Qiàn's reaction was two-dimensional: On the one hand, she was delighted that it (possibly) showed the love

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[43] 元 (*yuán*) is a unit of the Chinese currency Renminbi (人民币, *rénmínbì*). 1000 or 2000 Yuan amounted to between 130 and 270 euros approximately in September 2016.

between Yubai's parents and that the name might have 'some deep meaning' (11/15), on the other, she was awed that Yubai's name was so rare that he had only one namesake in all of China:

> YB: There is a very [...] interesting, like, software in the internet and you can type in your name and the system will find how many people have the same name with you. And there are only two people in China with (my name?).
>
> Q: Wow! That's cool! [...] I think there are millions of people called the same name as me ((laughing)). In China, yeah. (Yubai and Qiàn, 11/15)

Having a rare name seems to be of great significance as it evidently elicits quite a heavy response from Qiàn. She immediately compares the situation with her own, stating that she has 'millions' of namesakes. Earlier, in the part of the interview that was focused on her, she told me that even though she thought it was pretty, she did not like her name that much because 'many girls have the same name as me, you know, so maybe I want to have [one that is] more special' (11/15).

Having a special name and sharing a name with many people is then something mutually exclusive, a notion that was thematised quite a lot in my interviews. Yubai himself, even though adamant that he did not care for the fact that his parents had perpetuated their relationship through his name, later on stated that he had never considered changing his name because it was so 'special' (11/15). Huimin explained to me that people in her grandparents' generation had a lot of children and thus no 'special meaning of their names' (09/15), suggesting that the more children one has, the more complicated it gets to give every child an individual name. Vivian said that she liked her name a lot because 'at least one' of the characters was 'uncommon' (04/16). And Xueqing told me:

> I think that for a Chinese, a name is really important... unlike foreign names.[44] […] The chances are very small that a lot of people will share the same name so for them to have their own name is kind of their identity. So, names are very important for their life […] in the Chinese society. (11/15)

According to Xueqing, one's identity is directly attached to the feeling of having a rather singular, defining name, of the name being one's *own*. It is interesting to analyse some other interview excerpts from this angle, especially a passage from my conversation with Coco, who accidentally, and quite tellingly in this case, misconstrued the meaning of the word 'identical' when she told me why she liked her Chinese name so much:

> This name is the only Chinese name in China. The only one. [...] Nobody has the same name as mine. Yeah. It's, like, an identical, and ever since I attended school – from when I was six years old and I went to primary school – nobody could read my name correctly ((laughing)). [...] Yeah, so, they're impressed. My name leaves a very, very deep impression on their memory, so everybody can remember me because of this identical name. [...] Yeah, I like it. (12/15)

What she means here by 'identical' is probably something to the extent of 'identifying'. In stating the singularity of her name by using the word 'identical', she indicates that the name more or less serves as her identity, and points to the fact that she is quite proud to have a name that nobody else uses. It leaves a 'deep impression' on others because it is so unusual. Because of it, people remember *her*, not just the name, but her as a person.

Relatively complicated names like Coco's are mentioned by several other interlocutors as names with 'beautiful pronunciation' (Qiàn, 11/15) and a 'deep meaning' (Qián, 04/15; Qiàn, 11/15). People with these names seem to be associated with a certain educated background:

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[44] The implications of this comparison will be further discussed in chapter 7.

> That name may be really hard to write and sounds so, I don't know, weird and strange, but... if you meet such a person, you think, 'Oh, his or her parents must be so well educated to give him or her such a name.' So it is very... *unique*, yes. (Xueqing, 11/15)

The primary message conveyed in Xueqing's words is that even though these types of names are difficult to read and write as well as strange-sounding, they are thought to be something special. After all, beauty in a name can also come from pronunciation (Qiàn, 11/15, see above) and exceptionality, which seems to be increasingly important in contemporary Chinese society, as has been observed by several of my interviewees. Huimin expressed this when she told me that 'more and more people have *beautiful* names and very *special* names' (09/15). As for name frequency, her own name had to be expanded at the time of her birth; her parents had picked Hui but were told that 'too many people have the same name' (09/15) and that it was better to add another syllable.

The wish for more distinctive names has come a long way from older naming conventions that suggested that names needed to be as inconspicuous as possible to ensure a long life. Sometimes, it included giving people condescending names so that the gods would think it was not 'worthy of attention' (E.W. Louie 2008:46) and spare its life. Moreover, it was said that people with similar names were protected from premature death because 'the god of death [would] be confused' and would not know 'which one to pick' (Vivian, 04/16). However, nowadays, Vivian argued, people 'really want to have unique names, like, "I don't want to be the same", or something like that' (04/16).

Having common names was indeed a noticeable facilitating factor in dislike of one's name in my interviews. The less unique the name was, the more likely it was for its bearer to express some kind of contempt. Qiàn, for example, said that she was not happy with her name:

> Yeah, I like beautiful names. My name is not so beautiful. It's a simple name. Very simple. So I want to have a beautiful name. Something like... Yubai ((laughing)). (11/15)

Qiàn's desire for a more beautiful name brings us right back to the rarity of names like Yubai's. Though she says it jokingly, it is evident that his name left a mark, a lasting impression – something that seems to be a well-liked factor in recent Chinese naming practices.

To summarise, Chinese naming practices, with all their established rules yet continuously changing trends, are complex and connected to social contexts. They convey a highly personal meaning and can constitute an important part of someone's identification. Since both script and pronunciation are of immense importance, Chinese names are anchored in the Chinese language and only quite abstractly usable in other language contexts (see 7.1.1). Therefore, having a Chinese name seems to be a distinctive feature of *Chineseness* itself, a concept that shall be introduced in chapter 6 for a better understanding of how Chinese students experience transcultural social spaces, especially during their studies overseas, and how these experiences then translate to naming practices that emerge within these social spaces (see 7).

6. NEGOTIATING CHINESENESS IN TRANSCULTURAL SOCIAL SPACES

6.1 Transnational Chineseness: Being Chinese, Being 华人 (*huárén*)

Not having done fieldwork in a specific location, what glues my research together is that all of my informants are Chinese. Nevertheless, my group of research participants is quite diverse: Whereas the majority are citizens of the People's Republic of China (PRC), some of them come from politically separate areas like Hong Kong or Taiwan or from places not predominantly Chinese. The time my interviewees spent in their country of study as well as their pursued degrees and their mother tongues[45] vary a great deal.

Of course, it would have been possible to limit myself to one sub-group, e.g. only Mandarin speakers or permanent migrants, or to leave out students who were not from the PRC. However, I felt that excluding someone based on their language background, migration history or geopolitical area of origin would mark them as less Chinese than the others. This seemed to neither do right by them and their interview statements nor my subsequent analyses of transcultural dynamics and how Chinese names are used across borders. These struggles led me to delve into readings about the concept of *Chineseness*, which I will show solves the problems mentioned above by complementing the theoretical approach of transcultural social spaces and at the same time providing a suitable framework for the later analysis of what it means to use or not to use Chinese names in said spaces.

What *is* Chinese then? It should be established first that the term is highly ambiguous, as it can be applied to matters of nationality, ethnicity, people, language(s), and so forth (Leung 2013:204). In the context that is to be discussed in the following, it most accurately describes people who *feel* Chinese. This feeling might be related to issues of nationality, ethnicity or language but does not rely on these alone. Chineseness, just like other forms of identities, is actively and discursively constructed.

In Chinese discourses, '[t]ies to a native place are inherited' (A. Louie 2004:46) so that even after generations, a shared locality of origin establishes a sense of belonging. It comes as no surprise then that a connection to China – even if it is merely imagined – can be of immense importance for Chinese identification. My interlocutor Sam comes from a Malaysian Chinese family that migrated to Malaysia from Southern China about a century ago. As his parents were working abroad at the time of his birth, he was born

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[45] These included English, Dutch, Mandarin, Cantonese, and a bit of Hokkien, though Chinese local variations are not taken into account here as they were not thematised in the interviews.

in the USA but spent most of his youth in Malaysia before going back to the USA for his education. His recount of his first and only visit to mainland China shows the role it plays as an identificatory pillar in his life:

> I went [to visit the mainland] in 2013. My granddad had taken it to his head to go over and explore Beijing, and, this time, to invite me, my brother and my mom. So we all tracked out with my [grandfather and] grandmother and we had a splashing time, saw all the great sites, my grandmother's face was just aglow with patrio-... no, nationa-... not nationalistical... ethnic pride, I guess, if you will. I was very interested in most of these things, too, and there was a keen sense […] that this was a motherland, not the communist state but just the land itself and the people. Yeah, I have been there once. It was a very good trip. (Sam, 11/15)

Sam instinctively felt that he was exploring 'a motherland' and that he had a connection to the place and its people. However, he clearly distances himself from the PRC's political affairs by excluding Chinese communism from the list of things he was drawn to during his trip. Perhaps, this differentiation stems from the politicisation of (overseas) Chineseness as an identity that usually entails loyalty to the Chinese government (A. Louie 2004:52–53). Fittingly, Sam struggles to describe his grandmother's emotional expression at seeing mainland China, starting with 'patriotic' and 'nationalistic' before finally settling on 'ethnic pride'.

The word 'ethnic' here implies a shared, singular Chinese ethnicity, though that is technically not the case. Official Chinese ethnicities amount to 56 groups, of which only one, Han ethnicity, can be considered a majority (Leo 2015:123). However, Chineseness is so important to many (overseas) Chinese that questions of ethnicity are often neglected in favour of merely calling oneself Chinese (2015:117). Being Chinese is neither a question of ethnicity nor citizenship, a notion hard to put into correct words, which is also observed by anthropologist Andrea Louie who went to China as an American-born Chinese teacher and researcher:

> It soon became obvious that I was in many ways a walking contradiction […] who fits neither into the category 'foreigner' (*waiguoren*) nor 'Chinese' (*zhongguoren*[46]). 'Racially' I was Chinese, a 'descendant of the dragon' (*long de chuan ren*), by virtue of my 'black hair and yellow skin.' […] The terms in English – Chinese, overseas Chinese, and Chinese American[47] – did not reflect the complex racial, legal, and political subtleties contained within the Chinese terms […]. (2004:15; emphasis in original)

Some of my interviewees shared these feelings. Mei-lian (09/15) recounted that many foreign-born Chinese teaching English in Taiwan were frowned upon because people were confused by their Asian appearance. Not looking the part or passing for something but not the other was a feeling that many expressed in their interviews. Sam told me that he could 'pass much better for a well-read Asian American but […] can't pass for being an overseas Chinese person' due to his linguistic weaknesses in Mandarin and 'East Asian literature and thought and philosophy' (11/15). Similarly, Maia (01/16), who was born in China and adopted into a Dutch American family as a baby, told me that people often asked her where she *really* came from or complimented her on her English because they just assumed that she was not an American citizen. Chineseness in this sense is then also measured by appearances, linguistic accordance and education in East Asian matters, both self-reflectively and in relation to others. In Sam's case, even *overseas* Chineseness means having to meet certain (Chinese) standards, which is interesting given the foreign

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[46] The term is connoted with nationality and political definitions of Chineseness (E.W. Louie 2008:65) since 国 (*guó*) means 'nation-state'.
[47] This term is not to be read as a compound word but as a combination of an adjective (*Chinese*) and a noun (*American*) (E.W. Louie 2008:63), as are all similar terms like 'Asian American', 'overseas Chinese', 'Malaysian Chinese' or 'Dutch American'.

experience implied in the term. The hardship of meeting expectations notwithstanding, Sam certainly does identify with being overseas Chinese and told me it was something he 'bear[s] with a lot of pride' (11/15).

A. Louie mentions 'overseas Chinese' as a label (see above); however, she lists it as an English translation that does not fully capture the Chinese nuances in the terminology. She then brings up emic terms like 华侨 (*huáqiáo*, Overseas Chinese sojourners), 华裔 (*huáyì*, progeny of Overseas Chinese) and 美籍华人 (*měijí huárén*, Chinese people with American nationality) (2004:15). Another term occurring commonly is 海外华人 (*hǎiwài huárén*, Chinese people living overseas) (Ong and Nonini 1997:9). They all have one character in common: 华 (*huá*), meaning 'Chinese'. The first term listed above, *huáqiáo*, is often considered problematic as it suggests Chinese citizenship and a temporary stay abroad even though many overseas Chinese are not or no longer citizens of China (Wang 1993:926–927). In other words, *huáqiáo* implies 'Chinese extraterritorial rule' (A. Louie 2004:15).

In this sense, many scholars prefer to use terms other than 'Overseas Chinese', for example 'Chinese overseas' (Ma 2003:40; Wang 1993:926) or, in a specific context for post-1980 migration, 'new (Chinese) migrants' (Thunø 2007:3). I prefer to use the term 'overseas Chinese' because it occurred in some of my interviews and did not, to the best of my knowledge, have any negative stigmas attached to it. I will follow Malaysian Chinese scholar Jessieca Leo in her approach of applying the term with the controversy in mind and therefore spelling it 'with a lower case "o" as an adjective' (2015:147) instead of capitalised as a fixed category that is connoted with *huáqiáo*. Leo uses the term 'overseas Chinese' because it is what she usually calls herself and, 'regardless of what one calls oneself or what others call you, it is still possible to negotiate identity in different situations or construct and elastic identity' (2015:147). I am in favour of this argumentation as it fits my stance on identification and allows me to use the original wording of my interlocutors without adding to the political controversy.

Another term frequently used is 华人 (*huárén*). It too is one that I have encountered in my interviews (Sam, 11/15; Vivian, 04/16). It serves as an indicator of shared Chineseness. Sam reflected his Chinese identification in relation to others by saying, 'If they happen to be Chinese – *huárén*, if you will – I mention that I'm an overseas Chinese person' (11/15).

What is to be taken from this politically tense discourse surrounding appropriate terminology is that Chineseness is still heavily influenced by ideas about mainland China but cannot be construed via citizenship as Chinese people are not necessarily Chinese citizens but people that define *themselves* as Chinese wherever they might live or belong to in the world. It is in this regard that anthropologists Aihwa Ong and Donald M. Nonini (1997) introduce 'Chinese transnationalism' to capture the way Chineseness is configured beyond national confines yet still in relationship to nation-state conceptualisations. Chinese transnationalism, or rather *transnational Chineseness*, is a suitable concept then, especially since Chinese migration is and has been so common that considering it a new phenomenon would be downright false (Ma 2003:2; Thunø 2007:2). Moreover, Chineseness is negotiated between several topolects[48] of Chinese, mainly forms of Mandarin and Cantonese, but within the same writing system. A super-diverse, simultaneous sense of unity and disparity is thus present in linguistic variations as well (E.W. Louie 2008:71).[49] Defining Chineseness is a highly ambiguous task as 'Chinese' cannot

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[48] The use of 'topolect' or 'regionalect' instead of 'dialect' has been favoured by some scholars (see Leung 2013:206–207; E.W. Louie 2013:364–365) to correctly translate the Chinese term (方言 *fāngyán*, regional speech) and to avoid the notion that a dialect is something socially inferior to a language.

[49] Locating Chineseness within, across and beyond borders also gives us a chance to recognise the difficult standing of regions within China, such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, or autonomous regions such as Inner Mongolia, and include them in the concept. My interviewees mentioned several cultural differences to and within mainland China, from stigmas connoted with uses of Traditional vs. Simplified Chinese (Mei-lian, 09/15; Vivian, 04/16) to administrative differences (Yunan, 01/16; Vivian, 04/16) to the availability of social media (Coco, 12/15; Yunan, 01/16) to distinctions of rural and urban life (Qián, 04/15) to family name differences (Qián, 04/15; Yunan, 01/16). These differences are so present in people's minds that several students encountered difficulties when I asked them whether they had studied or lived abroad before, not sure whether they should classify a semester in Taiwan as a domestic or international exchange (Qiàn, 11/15; Coco, 12/15).

be used as a blanket identity (Leo 2015:129). It 'differs among the Chinese in different places' (Ma 2003:32). Hence, Chineseness, and especially a notion of Chineseness that is always tied to or even revolves around mainland China as a reminder of the Middle Kingdom (Ong and Nonini 1997:9), should not be perceived as a generic identity inherent and essential to everyone of Chinese descent. There are many who disidentify with Chineseness or at least distance themselves from a notion of a culturally holistic entity:

> I'm not getting on well with lots of Chinese […] because when I was growing up, […] I kept criticising Chinese culture. But now I'm not criticising, I just think, 'Yeah, there is some reasonable, some good parts in it, but some are bad.' (Coco, 11/15)

> I love many mainland Chinese people but there is certainly some cultural baggage after the revolution and that communist history, if you will, and there's a sense that a lot has been lost… so the romantic part of me and certainly the romantic part of my grandmother like seeing us as political exiles – ((mockingly passionate till *)) tossed away from our great and beloved homeland, thrown to the dogs of our enemies ((*)) – but that's not entirely accurate. So I'm not quite a political exile […]; I feel like I'm carrying something incredibly important, incredibly heavy, with no understanding of it, very much wishing I might find someone who does understand these things and can translate them back to me. (Sam, 11/15)

With this in mind, Chinese identification needs to be seen as a 'relative concept' (A. Louie 2004:9) which is quite appropriate, as 'China is so big and so complicated' (Coco, 11/15) and, as Sam describes above, Chineseness can sometimes not be understood fully and needs translation. It is tied to other agents in social space, as Coco feels like she does not get along well with other Chinese and Sam connects his romantic feelings for China with his grandmother who is important to his idea of Chineseness. These ties are reminiscent of theories of identification which emphasise interactive negotiation between social actors.

As Chineseness seems to constantly be in motion, it should be fairly logical that many Chinese have 'malleable multiple identities that they use as coping strategies […] at different places that intersect with one's lifepath' (Ma 2003:32). Sam dissected this multiplicity of Chinese identities within himself quite fittingly:

> I feel all three parts, being Chinese, being Malaysian Chinese and being American Chinese, in equal measure. I *feel* that. I'm much better at *being* American and I'm much better at passing for it without slipping. I'm very bad at being just overseas Chinese, and it immediately shows just through linguistic weaknesses, and in terms of being Malaysian Chinese, I can mimic the Pidgin English […] in a Malaysian context, and that's not what I like but […] what I would *like* to be, or what I *feel* myself to be doesn't often translate to actions, deeds or linguistic skill. (11/15)

The most striking part for me here is that both 'Malaysian' and 'American' are followed by 'Chinese' immediately, neither configured the other way round (e.g. Chinese American) nor quite standing by themselves until Sam mentions that he can pass for an American much easier than for one of the aforementioned identities. His Chineseness seems incredibly important to him, even though he struggles to keep up with the challenges that come with it.[50] As he said, picking up a shoe-shopping simile often used by his mother, '[Chinese culture] doesn't fit but somehow, this is meant to be my shoe', as opposed to his 'other context, as Malaysian, as American, as a Christian […]; all of these things fit […] yet, they don't feel like my shoe'

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[50] I want to point out that these internal struggles are not meant to imply that Sam, or any other research participant for that matter, are 'forever in identity crisis or waiting for an "epiphany about being Chinese," as one intern put it' (A. Louie 2004:194). Still, configuring one's identity and, more importantly, phrasing it in an interview situation without using essentialising words is not easy. Sam pointed out during the interview that the situation was 'actually kind of new' for him because he 'never really put it in so many words' (11/15). I therefore would like to note that I do not wish to imply that my interlocutors' identifications are either crisis-inducing or written in stone but rather scrappy glimpses into moments and situations in which identities become salient.

(11/15). Sticking with the shoe-shopping image, Sam essentially tries on several of his salient identities and sees if and how they suit him, possibly also in relation to other people's 'shoes'. Attaching meaning and identifying with being Chinese is a highly relational process:

> Meanings of 'Chineseness' are diverse, and [...] are crosscut by a wide range of practices and shifting, multi-layered boundaries [...] as a cultural category beyond the borders of the Chinese nation-state [...]. But in another sense, diaspora identities are not only formed in relation to (and perhaps in tension with) the Chinese nation-state but are also responsive to transnational forces as they are manifested locally. Chineseness takes on local forms and is reactive to other conceptions of Chineseness. (A. Louie 2004:191)

This train of thought brings us back to how Chineseness is configured transnationally and in relation to many local mouldings of Chineseness. When considering interactions between Chinese and non-Chinese people, we are looking at *transcultural* formations rather than transnational ones. Transnationality is, after all, already embedded within Chineseness.

The transcultural approach is not common practice. Chinese transnationalism is rather thought to facilitate the emergence of a 'third culture' that bridges differences of being located here and there, 'aris[ing] when groups face problems of intercultural communication at first hand and confront the necessity of continually moving to and fro between different cultures' (Ong and Nonini 1997:11). While appealing as a concept, I would argue that the transcultural lens fits the issue better as it implies fluidity and mutability rather than the development of a separate cultural third. The transcultural sphere goes beyond a cultural third, acknowledging that culture is transcended by the multiplicity of cultural identities while at the same time recognising the in-between feelings of having parts of plural cultures united within oneself (see 4.3.1). In the following, I would like to discuss this complex issue with a more specific focus on overseas Chinese students in the transcultural social spaces configured in the context of student mobilities.

6.2 China's Position in International Student Mobility

Scholars observe a long-lasting legacy of Asian student mobility (Thunø 2007:19), and China's increasingly important role as a main country of origin within this context is not one to be underestimated. While most international students come from countries in East Asia, the PRC provides the majority of the East Asian international student body overall (Brooks and Waters 2013:45), reaching a record high of 523,700 Chinese students going abroad in the year 2015 (ICEF Monitor 2016).[51] Top destination countries for Chinese students abroad are the United States, Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Canada (Unesco Institute for Statistics 2016). The United States hosted 260,914 Chinese students in 2014, Germany placed ninth on the list with 19,441 Chinese students, and in both countries Chinese students represent the largest group of international students (Unesco Institute for Statistics 2016).

Documented reasons for the continuously high number of Chinese students overseas include China's economic growth and the subsequent emergence of wealthy families that can afford to let their children go overseas to study, and the acquisition of social experiences, abilities and language skills that are in high demand in the international and domestic job market (Brooks and Waters 2013:62–65). The wish to acquire language skills abroad

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[51] The number alone does not convey whether these are just students from the PRC or from contested, autonomous and special administrative regions as well. Taking into account that overseas Chinese are most likely not included and that the number only records students *going* abroad in that very year ICEF Monitor (2016), the actual number of Chinese students beginning *and* continuing to study abroad might be much higher. Indeed, the Unesco Institute for Statistics (2016) reports that 712,157 Chinese students were internationally mobile in 2014, including students from autonomous areas and listing special administrative regions Hong Kong and Macao separately as a study destination for Chinese students. Data from Taiwan was inexistent.

might sometimes be connected with insufficient foreign language teaching at school. For example, Qiàn expressed frustrations with her level of English as the way she was taught was 'always grammar, [...] always reading the text book, [...] no practicing your oral English. [...] Everything is repeated again, again, again; [...] no more big improvements in English, [what matters is to] just pass the test, yeah' (11/15). There are other options, like enrolling in international schools, though Qiàn told me they were rather expensive.

The college level education also seemed to be under critical scrutiny. Siyang mentioned that the American college system was known to be superior to the Chinese model:

> My mom [...] cares about education and she knows that Chinese education is not that great because [...] before your high school, your life goal is to get into a good university, and once you get into the university, you don't have to study, you're done. She thinks that that's not a good education system. [...] We decided on America because [...] Chinese people, they know America has the best education system, I don't know why, but they just know it. [...] So that's why I came to the States [...] four years ago. (01/16)

The notion that Chinese youths' lives often revolve around getting into a good university was attested to by Coco when she explained that to be able to pursue higher education Chinese students had to take the college entrance exam, the 高考 (*gāokǎo*), which is so central to Chinese education that failing it means that one 'will have little chance to live a better life' (12/15). Though Yunan said she did not think Chinese universities were that competitive, she did tell me that some types of universities were indeed hard to get into. One reason for restrictions in admission might be an excess demand for spots in academic programmes that cannot be met by Chinese universities (Brooks and Waters 2013:46), thus possibly making the pursuit of an education abroad more attractive for Chinese youths.

6.3 Transcultural Encounters: Chinese Students on Campus

When I told people in Germany about my research topic, sometimes their eyes would widen and they would say something to the effect of, 'Isn't it crazy how many Chinese students are walking around campus these days?' While probably only meant as a light conversational remark and, of course, also a quite correct observation of the upward trend of Chinese students' presence on campus, this statement allows us a telling glimpse into the ways Chinese (and other international) students are perceived by others – as people who are *not normally* there, who must have some kind of special purpose to be studying *here*, in Germany of all places.

I encountered this inquiry only in Germany and cannot account for whether I might have stumbled upon the same conversation in the USA. However, when I asked Sam if he thought he was able to live out his Chinese identity freely at his American college, he laughed and immediately replied with, 'Heavens no, [a college] of 85-86% white [students]. I feel very conscious of being Chinese there, or rather saying it too loudly' (11/15). While I know Sam to be very involved in many student activities and social groups on campus, both predominantly and non-predominantly white, his Chineseness is not necessarily something he likes to flaunt.

On the other hand, he said he could 'never receive the benefits of being, basically, in many respects, a naturalised American' because 'there's a terrible sense of being an ambassador' (11/15) and of being stigmatised as a typical good Asian student or as inherently unaware of American culture. This stigmatisation as a 'foreign student' (11/15) for him meant either being exotified and receiving too many questions about his life abroad or having to act overly American around others, resulting in him not thematising his Chineseness much as he did not 'feel too safe saying [he was] Chinese except with people who understand [him]' (11/15). Being understood was tied to feelings of mutual experience. Maia too felt more comfortable with people who were not 'Americanised':

> Where I lived it was really, really American but the people I hung out with were not American. [...] I'd say, 95% of the town was American and then 5% were kids [...] [of] people who had come to study in America [...]. So they were, like, American citizens but they [...] had that same thing of being raised by parents who weren't Americanised so they had that in-between [...]. I had mostly Pakistani and Indian friends, and then the only Chinese friends I ever had [were] [...] the ones from Malaysia, and then there was, like, one Japanese family. [...] And that still carries into college. It's kinda weird because my mom will ask me, like, 'So, Maia, do you have any American friends yet?' [...] I think I've had one American friend, or a couple of American friends, in college and the rest are all international students. (Maia, 01/16)

Maia implies that despite the small percentage of non-American children in her area, she felt a stronger connection to those who had the same 'in-between' transcultural feeling as her – a Chinese child adopted into a Dutch American family. This feeling seemed to be shared by other informants. Siyang stated, for example, that she had the impression that she could not become friends with Americans as easily as with international students, at least at the beginning of her studies abroad.

The international student community, as diverse as it usually is, is a good place to meet like-minded people who are going through similar experiences of being new, foreign, and in that in-between state of too-little-too-much. Some interviewees expressed annoyance at being around too many co-nationals, though, and rarely attend events for international students as they 'don't want to meet Chinese people [there]' (Coco, 12/15). They hope 'to meet more people to feel different things, have more experiences' (Yunan, 01/16).

When I coded my interview material, I was surprised at the amount of comments people had made about being an international student on campus and wanting to be recognised as such (Qián, 04/15; Huimin, 09/15). Others wished to appear as a member of the domestic student community (Siyang, 01/16). What was surprising was not the content of these statements but more the question of how I got to that topic during the interviews. Interestingly, in many cases, asking for what certain names meant to a person also indirectly meant asking for social settings, as names would be rendered near irrelevant without other people around to call them out. The topic of naming was usually tied to identification which then again was tied to social space, and thus most conversations – automatically, possibly subconsciously, and not in so many words – led to reflections of positions in one's social network.

In general, regarding their representations of identities, most students seemed to follow two basic strategies when meeting people in transcultural social spaces –to try to appear as either someone who was the *same as others* or someone who was *different from others*. Of course, most strategies were much more nuanced, and in many cases representations shifted over time. Sam shared this personal policy with me:

> I'll try to make people assume that I'm as much like them as possible... until I know them better. And so I go great lengths in order to appear like I am a kin with someone, if you will... you've heard me speak, I have several accents of English, if you will, three or four, [...] and I try my best to create those lines but as much as possible, I disguise the fact that I'm truly very, very different from almost anyone else anywhere in the world. (11/15)

A certain (linguistic) behaviour was necessary for Sam to actively make sure he could belong later on. Yet, he said it would not last forever, implying that increasing levels of friendship and trust might change the way he would represent himself. Similarly, Maia mentioned that while questions about her adoption come up fairly early in conversations, she would not tell people her full story immediately and instead wait until she got to know people better: 'It just depends on how much I know them. It, like, goes in stages' (Maia, 01/16).

Self-representation thus is dependent on transcultural perceptions of sameness and differences and subsequently on whom one meets where, when, and in what setting. Keeping this in mind, I will follow up this introduction to the transcultural dynamics

my interlocutors encountered in Chinese international student life with an in-depth assessment of how they chose, used and negotiated their names and identities in the social spaces they frequented.

7. AT THE TRANSCULTURAL CROSSROADS OF MIGRATION, IDENTITIES AND NAMES

7.1 Dynamics of Chinese Names in Non-Chinese Spaces

7.1.1 'My Name Spelt in Latin Letters': Abstracting the Chinese Name

Something that is most likely to happen to Chinese names in a non-Chinese setting is that the family name and given name are swapped or simply put into an order more similar to the new language context. Sometimes, this creates bureaucratic hassles:

> On papers and tests students write their last name first with no comma following it (e.g. *Jui Ying Li* instead of *Ying Li Jui);* hence we spend a lot of time looking for the wrong name when we are recording grades. (C.B. Martin 1987:88)

The frustration and confusion from the perspective of the teacher here stem from his expectation of an American-style name order that his Chinese students did not follow. Therein lies a potential nuisance for the teachers but certainly also for the name bearers as they have to constantly explain themselves.

Apart from the name order, though, the transcription and toneless pronunciations rid Chinese names of at least part of their meaning. As Mei-lian put it, her Romanised name is 'merely a grasp' of her Chinese name (see 5.1). Despite this problematic representation of Chinese names in Latin script, Chinese characters are bound to be transcribed at one point, especially when means of registration are involved, for example documents for travel and migration. Transcription spellings might differ from country to country, not necessarily following the Pinyin, and might vary regarding the order of names:

> In Malaysian passports or Malaysian documents in general, when they see that you're Chinese, they'll put your Chinese first name last [...], [so it is] your English name, Samuel, and Lim and Chunwah... in the American system it's Samuel Chunwah Lim and I'm always fucked up when I'm trying to type in passport information for flights and [have to decide,] 'Which one do I use? Holy shit.' ((laughing)) That sort of panic is very real for me and I often make mistakes. (Sam, 11/15)

The varieties of spellings are apparently confusing for all parties involved. Evidently, the official spelling of Sam's Chinese name (*Chunwah*) differs quite a bit from the Chinese (Mandarin)

Pinyin (俊华, *Jùnhuá*), which is not unusual. For example, the surname Li might be transcribed as Lee, Lei or Lay in the USA (E.W. Louie 2008:119), even though there have been attempts to reach a consensus on Chinese (American) name spellings in the past (2008:117). A trend towards using the PRC's official Pinyin transcriptions went along with changes in political ties between the USA and the PRC in the 1970s, and thus many Chinese names are nowadays spelt according to its Pinyin form (E.W. Louie 2013:368), which is evident in the majority of names I encountered in my research. There are no standardised methods to treat Chinese (given) names that have one or more syllables, either. For example, according to American-born Chinese scholar Emma Woo Louie (2008:83), there are several Chinese American spelling conventions for disyllabic names:

a)   joint (e.g. *Chunwah*)
b)   separated (e.g. *Chun Wah*)
c)   hyphenated (e.g. *Chun-Wah, Chun-wah*)
d)   as syllabic initials (e.g. *C.W.*)

These spellings are ultimately subject to personal taste or regional particularities. Most of my interviewees' names are spelt with joint syllables. Vivian's Chinese name Wing Suen is written in separated syllables while Mei-lian uses hyphenated spelling with a lower-case letter following the hyphen, which is a common transcription for Taiwanese names (E.W. Louie 1991:233).

But since E.W. Louie's works are about Chinese American names, her analysis of name styles (2008:82–92) includes names consisting of Western components only or incorporating a Western given name into the Chinese name, like it is done in Sam's case (see above).[52] There are more decisions to be made in cases where both a Chinese and a non-Chinese name are given to the child, for example whether the names are used as first or middle names. Maia's full name, for instance, is Maia Elena Zhe Dykstra, Elena and Zhe first and second middle name respectively. Sam's mother, on the other hand, was adamant that both Samuel and Chunwah were registered as first names to avoid 'a sort of precedence' (Sam, 11/15).

Even though no other research participants besides Maia and Sam had permanently migrated to or were born in a non-Chinese country, there is another person among my interlocutors who has an officially registered English name: Vivian. Her parents decided to name her Chan Vivian and to not include her Chinese name Wing Suen in the transcription of the name. According to Vivian, this is considered a bit peculiar by some, even though having an English name is not all that uncommon among residents of Hong Kong (D.C.S. Li 1997:494). Vivian found her name 'so much cooler' (04/16) that way. Nevertheless, having to state her full name sometimes turned out to be a quite difficult task:

Most of the people [...] [would have a name] like Chan Wing Suen Vivian... but mine is just Chan Vivian, that's it. So it's a little bit weird. And then people are really surprised, like, even my teachers. When I write 'Chan Vivian' on my homework [...], they will ask, like, 'What's your full name?' And I'm like, 'Chan Vivian!' 'Full name, like on your ID[53],' and I'm like, 'Chan Vivian!' ((laughing)) (04/16)

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[52] This is, of course, not limited to the American Chinese community. Yunan (01/16), for example, has distant relatives in Germany and told me that they gave their children a combination of German and Chinese names.

[53] When I asked Vivian more about what her name looked like on official documents, she eventually got her purse and showed me her Mainland Travel Permit, a Chinese identification card that allows citizens from special administrative regions to travel to the mainland. On it, two lines were reserved for the name, once in Simplified Chinese (as opposed to Traditional Chinese on her Hong Kong documents) and once in its Romanised form, which is also 'regarded as your English name' (04/16). However, for purposes of proper distinction, I will speak of Romanised Chinese names when it comes to the transcription of the Chinese name, e.g. Wing Suen, and a name like Vivian will be referred to as a non-Chinese name, international name, or English name.

Her given English name was not thought to be the full name appearing on her documents which implies that the Chinese name is connoted with official matters whereas the English name is an additional, informal one.

This thought stems from the fact that many Chinese have an English name that does not appear on their documents. Besides Maia, Sam and Vivian, the remaining nine research participants have (or used to have) international names as well, albeit non-registered ones. To assess the reasoning behind having (informal) non-Chinese names in addition to the Chinese one, it is important to understand the discrepancies between what Chinese names convey in the Chinese language and script as opposed to what they lack in a Romanised form. Moreover, apart from the meaning embedded in the written characters, proper pronunciation is crucial. As mentioned before, Mei-lian felt her Romanised Chinese name was not 'complete because there is no intonation' (09/15). Similarly, when I asked Vivian if she would object to people calling her Wing Suen instead of Vivian in Germany, she replied that 'it's not correct ((laughing))! They add their accent… so it's not the same' (04/16).

Vivian, being given an English name at birth, had a set alternative to use. In some other cases, false pronunciation led to embarrassing situations, like when Qiàn's family name was mispronounced during a bank appointment in a way that made it sound like a Chinese obscenity. While this might, of course, happen to anyone with a name quite uncommon in the language environments they frequent, in the Chinese context, it is *another* layer added onto the existing mismatch between the Chinese name – including its original meaning – and its Romanised form, due to transcription and lack of intonation.

It is certainly possible to get used to it. Mei-lian said it was 'really weird to see [her] name spelt in Latin letters' (09/15) at the beginning but that she feels comfortable with it now. She also got quite used to the Cyrillic form of her name when she studied in Russia for a semester. Many other students decide to use an alternative name to navigate non-Chinese social spaces, and, if applicable, Chinese social spaces[54] as well. The social spaces relevant to my research were mostly campus-related, though some of them extended into off-campus work spheres as well, and were, in some cases, connected to family life or social media.

What can be inferred from the gathered data regarding social spaces on campus (such as classrooms, student groups, on-campus jobs, different circles of friends, etc.) is that many Chinese students are prepared to use more than one name to handle transcultural encounters. The phenomenon is not necessarily new as international Chinese students' habits of picking non-Chinese names in addition to their Chinese one have been observed as early as the 1980s:

> Several of my students selected an American name they liked and added it to their own, thus appearing on the class roll as *Hong Li-Chun Lily, Sheu Pei Ling Joyce, Tan Siew Yin Christine, Tsin Ching Clen Jessica*, etc. (C.B. Martin 1987:88)

The additional name almost reaches a formal status when it appears on the class roll. Nowadays, at least to my knowledge, this is done very seldom in university, possibly linked to new registration technologies with lists generated by computers. Instead, alternative names are rather subject to oral communication. Coco, for example, simply told her German teacher to use her international name to address her because there were so many Chinese students in the class that Coco figured it would be 'a headache for her to figure out those Chinese names' (12/15).

However, while the option to state an alternative name is a possibility, it is not necessarily suitable for official matters. As Coco said in regards to sending her professors emails, 'I always use my Chinese name in the Pinyin way because that is how I'm shown in the [school's registration system]' (12/15). Even if an international name is available, the Chinese name cannot be completely shed as there is still a need for it in certain official

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[54] These spaces might include, for example, international companies in Taiwan (Mei-lian, 09/15), most of Hong Kong's everyday life (Vivian, 04/16) and Chinese work spaces like foreign-invested business or professional life in general (see Duthie 2007).

matters. The question then arises in which situations and for what purposes international names are used instead, which shall be analysed in the following chapter.

7.1.2 'How Do You Even Say This Name?' – Why Names Are Added to the Mix

A question that I encountered frequently when I would talk about my research or observe a meeting between a non-Chinese person and a Chinese student using an international name simply was, 'Why?' Why would someone go as far as choosing a seemingly random name so completely different from the Chinese name that it did not seem like the same name at all? Why is it so popular among Chinese people to simply pick a non-Chinese for themselves instead of a simple nickname and how does it help them navigate their social environments?

In many cases, the answers project what is referenced in the previous chapter: Pronunciation. When the Chinese name is difficult, providing people with an easier option seems less complicated and efficient. For example, Siyang told me that a mutual friend of ours found that his Chinese name was 'hard for people to pronounce' (01/16) and started using the international name Luke instead. In fact, I thought that Luke's given name actually was Luke for a majority of my stay in the USA until I was told otherwise. Maia, on the other hand, actively tries to teach people her Chinese name Zhe:

> They kind of ask me, they'll be like, 'So… how do you even say this name? […] And then I'll tell them how to say it and they often don't call me that because they can't pronounce it – but the ones who can, then they do. (01/16)

Qiàn too repeats her name over and over again until people learn it, though the attempts are often fruitless. In fact, when Yubai told me that his classmates in the Sinology programme knew exactly how to pronounce his name and even called him Li Yubai, Qiàn was in awe and told him that she thought he was 'so lucky' (11/15).

Sam, having lived on several continents and in various linguistic settings, is quite used to people mispronouncing his Chinese name and uses his English name more frequently because 'Sam [is] easy, everyone [can] work on that and pronounce it without mangling it' (11/15). Evidently, the option to use his given English name is just as much a benefit for others as it is for him since he does not have to listen to false attempts at managing to get his Chinese name right. In this regard, Coco said as well that she would rather be called Coco than hearing people pronounce her Chinese name 'in a very strange way' (12/15).

Siyang had similar issues with her Chinese name because the first syllable of her name has a distinct sound that is hard to pronounce even for herself. While she does usually use her name abroad, telling people to call her 'See-yang' or 'Sigh-yang' to make it easier, she also uses several international names to avoid misunderstandings:

> I even used the name [of an American friend] when I bought coffee. You know, it's quick, like, then I don't have to… you know they have to write the name on the cup ((laughing)) […]. I just tell them, 'Oh… Sarah.' So, there's just so many moments like that where I use American names. (01/16)

Thus, situations in which international names are used can be fleeting moments, a setting in which the name is a means for impersonal labelling, e.g. the customer's name on a coffee cup. Not confusing the baristas with complicated names is, again, beneficial for all parties involved. Siyang essentially uses her friend's name to order coffee because it's the most efficient option. The use of an international name seems to be highly contingent, then, and is not necessarily a life-long commitment.

However, others use their international names a lot more consistently, and not merely on a whim. To find out what the reasoning behind this consistent use is, it can be telling

to look at situations in which international names are *not* used. For instance, Xueqing, who studies in an international programme in Germany and goes by Cindy there, recalled situations in which other Chinese students had difficulties being told apart by their non-Chinese classmates:

> Apart from me, all my Chinese classmates choose to go by their Chinese name and the other students just confuse them. And when [the other students] go to talk with [the Chinese classmates], they will need, like, one or two minutes to try and remember their names. So, they all encounter such difficulties addressing them, I think. At that point, they will ask them, 'So, what's your English name again?' ((laughing)) Yeah. (11/15)

The Chinese names here seem to be so difficult that it is just not possible for Xueqing's Chinese classmates to get it to stick. In a similar case, Huimin's landlady just called her by her family name Ma because her flatmate's name also started with 'Hui'. Having two names starting with the same syllable was too confusing for the woman. While it did not bother Huimin that she was addressed by her family name instead of her given name, this incident shows how Chinese names are perceived by non-Chinese interlocutors as complicated and almost impossible to learn or remember. Given that most Chinese students anticipate this, the fact that they have an English name 'just for people to remember' (Yubai, 11/15) them is not very surprising.

Other studies, too, have found that Chinese names are thought to be hard to remember. Sometimes the difficulty is tied, once again, to pronunciation, as a research participant in Paul McPherron's study of names at the fictive China Southern University (CSU) stated: '"My Chinese name is hard to pronounce. People just remember that I am X-boy, not my Chinese name."' (McPherron 2009:526). However, in an article on Chinese students' English names in a British classroom setting, Rachel Edwards found that many instructors had no trouble pronouncing their students' Chinese names but still thought their English names were 'far easier to remember' (2006:95). In Laurie Duthie's work on the use of Western names among Chinese business professionals, one interlocutor said that Chinese people remembered Western names more easily than Chinese names as well 'because there are so many characters that can be used to create given names, but Western names tend to be pre-designated' (Duthie 2007:69).

Furthermore, not using a Chinese name might be an act of avoidance rather than impudence. For instance, one of Mei-lian's Russian teachers was afraid that by mispronouncing the Chinese names, he might accidentally insult his students or say something indecent or offensive. Mei-lian said that 'he'd hate to embarrass us in that way' (09/15), indicating that here, international names are used out of respect, not out of a lack thereof.

Adopting an internationally usable name seems to present the convenient alternative: a name easy to remember, pronounce, and likely free of embarrassing misunderstandings. It facilitates 'better interaction or communication' (Yunan, 01/16) by symbolising belonging, and presents an array of possibilities for its bearer. At the beginning of her studies, Siyang felt that she could not be friends with Americans because she did not have an English name. Acquiring an international name, she thought, would 'help [her] interact with Americans' (01/16). Other than paving the way for friendships, Siyang also identified work-related situations as instances where she would use an English name. When she got a summer internship that required her to constantly be on the phone, she decided to introduce herself as Amy:

> We had to make seventy, eighty – or even more than that – like, a hundred calls a day, so... it's hard to talk to people when it's not face to face, so it's hard to really listen to people over the phone. So I used Amy like that. I just thought it was easier. [...] Because we had to make connections with marketing communication people from the non-profits, so they had to – it helps me to make the connection with [them] when I use the name Amy. (01/16)

Calling herself Amy on the phone was not connected to some sort of wish to be addressed as Amy on a daily basis but was more of a necessity to fulfil her work duties more efficiently, underscored by the fact that all of Siyang's co-workers called her by her Chinese name and were aware of the fact that Amy was not her 'real' name (Siyang, 01/16; see 7.4.3 for a detailed analysis).

It has become common in Chinese work spheres, especially in large cities in mainland China as well as Taiwan and Hong Kong (Qiàn 11/15) to use English names, for example in case one is 'contacting Western people' (Vivian, 04/16), communicating with co-workers and superiors in international companies (Mei-lian, 09/15; Qiàn 11/15) or simply to appear as a 'modern Chinese' (Duthie 2007:74). Most of the time, people use their international name in combination with their Chinese family name (Mei-lian, 09/15; Qián, 09/16), thus being known in the office as Crystal Hu, Helena Wang, and so on.

According to Vivian, most employees (in Hong Kong) would have *both* a Chinese and an English name to appear more 'professional or something like that […] because, after all, you have different age groups of customers' (04/16). She implies on the one hand that using only one of the two might be unprofessional in certain social settings, and on the other that name usage also depends on what age group one is addressing. Given that people of her generation are primarily known by English names in Hong Kong (see 7.1.1 and 7.4.3) and that her parents use English names at work, she is probably referring to people of higher age, possibly her grandparents' generation.

It is also fairly common to use English names in Chinese university programmes and activities that either involve the international student body or are related to a foreign language. Xueqing, for example, said that her classmates in her English programme in China 'all used foreign names' but that they would never use the English name after class. I asked her what would happen if a Chinese classmate were to call her Cindy outside of the classroom; she laughed and said she would think something along the lines of 'What's the problem with these people?' (11/15). In other, more transcultural spaces, though, Xueqing uses her English name regularly. For instance, she had to use Cindy in her rugby team in China because she had a lot of foreign teammates who 'will never address you with your Chinese name' (11/15). She insinuates here that she might use her Chinese name if the other rugby players were more inclined to use it, making it clear that her decision depends on positions of other agents in her current social space.

A large number of students also implied that they most used their international names on social media. Facebook was commonly mentioned as a place where either an international name was used or the Chinese name in different order, e.g. Mei-lian Lin or Yunan SU (the capitalised letters marking the family name). A non-official, international name was used in two cases, both with the respective Chinese family name. Yubai was the only one to spell out his name in Chinese characters on Facebook. In some cases, the Chinese name was indicated in brackets, either in Romanised form or in Chinese characters.

The reason why Facebook, and, to an extent, WhatsApp and Instagram were mentioned so often is that their use is largely prohibited in mainland China, making it a more transcultural social space than other means of communication that might be used in predominantly Chinese spaces. Examples of Chinese platforms would be, for example, Weibo (often said to be the Chinese equivalent of Twitter), or the online-based messaging application WeChat. Some used an English name on those platforms as well. Huimin, for instance, told me that a Chinese friend of hers loved her English name Tanya so much that she started using it not only in the USA, where she studied, but also on 'Chinese Facebook and Chinese Twitter' (09/15).

Yunan uses her international name on Chinese social media but her Romanised Chinese name on Facebook. She believes it is 'not a good habit to use your real name' on Chinese websites but less serious in Romanised form in non-Chinese spaces because it is impossible to deduce 'what exact Yunan it is' (01/16) without the characters.

It can thus be argued that the use of Chinese and English names respectively is largely dependent on the social space one enters and frequents. It is primarily a transculturally effected *availability* rather than a simple determination or deadlock of identification.

However, clues to certain identifications are still embedded in many international name choices. It is thus interesting to analyse what thought process goes into either the choice or creation of an international name.

7.2 Best English Names? The Know-How of Choosing an International Name

7.2.1 'She Changed Her Name to Marcy': Chinafying the Transcultural Name Game

As the use of non-Chinese names among Chinese people has been observed to be so common and wide-spread, there are several practices of interest concerning the question of how such a name comes into existence. Is it randomly chosen, picked with care or established over a long time? There is no definite answer to this question; non-Chinese name choices occur in various forms. However, my research accounts for some common trends that I will illustrate here.

To start with a rather creative example, Yunan told me that her international name is Soda, though she does not use it at all apart from social media and among friends. When I asked where she got this name, she told me it had been her nickname since primary school. The Chinese word for 'soda' is 苏打 (*sūdá*), the first character incidentally also being Yunan's family name. Her family name 苏 was not easy to read when she and her friends were younger. Since the first word they learned that contained this character was 'soda', it became her nickname and, later on, her online alias and international name.

Yunan's case is not the only one where an international name is picked according to the sound or spelling of the Chinese name or nickname. Popular examples of this would include John and Jean (Duthie 2007:65), Lulu and Lily (Edwards 2006:100; Yubai and Qiàn, 11/15), or Rose (Yubai and Qiàn, 11/15). Sometimes, an international name might also be a direct translation of the Chinese name, as, for example, Jade (Duthie 2007:65). Nowadays, some Chinese parents intentionally give their children Chinese names that are similar to an international name (Huimin, 09/16).

Incidentally, all of these examples are essentially an act of translanguaging; the layered or even hidden connection of the international and the Chinese name would not be clear if two language contexts were not simultaneously present. At the same time, the space in which we need to locate these naming practices is quite obviously transcultural: A wish to apply to more than just one cultural setting is embedded in this double naming and without either setting, the relationship between the names would not be recognised as a hidden bond or even wordplay. Those names thus transcend language and cultural context.

However, for these same reasons, some international names are thought to be unfit to use as they are reminiscent of (local) Chinese slang words (Duthie 2007:64) or can easily be turned into insults and obscenities; the name Charlotte, for example, could sound like 'kill her' (杀了她, *shā le tā*) (Li W. 2011:1227) if pronounced the right – or rather the wrong – way.

Language was also part of a different, particularly common factor in my interlocutors' naming decisions, namely in the sense that their non-Chinese names were acquired in foreign language classes, a step meant to ensure that students 'get a certain association to a language', according to Mei-lian (09/15). While she was able to choose her English name (Irene) by perusing a dictionary with her sister and her Russian name (Ирина/Irina) from a list her teacher handed out in class, other teachers just gave out names:

> My elementary English teacher just, like, randomly assigned names to us. He said, 'You're Mary, you're...' So I'm Cindy. (Xueqing, 11/15)

> Before I went to middle school, I had [...] an extra English class, it was just for fun, not a real English class. [...] At that time, the teacher gave everyone in class an English name. (Huimin, 09/15)

> Primary school [is where] I got my first English name [Shirley]. [...] My teacher gave it to me. (Qián, 04/15)

In most cases, it seems like teachers just picked the names at random, though Qiàn's story regarding her French name suggests that her teacher was guided by a particular inspiration:

> My French teacher saw me and said, 'Oh, I think you're so cute, just like an almond, so I give you that as a French name.' ((laughing)) Yeah, it's called Amandine. (11/15)

However, none of these names were necessarily a bond for life. Xueqing still uses Cindy today but other students dropped the names or moved on to different ones. In fact, it is not uncommon for Chinese students to have several non-Chinese names. Siyang, for example, has used at least five different ones in the past: 'I have so many, actually, I don't remember ((laughing)).' (01/16) The ones she does remember include Claire, Adele, Catherine, Caroline and Amy, all of which she picked on her own. One factor in Siyang's name choices was the consummation of American TV shows when she started college:

> Catherine was my first English name, I think. From *Vampire Diaries*. [...] Yeah, you know, like, when Damon and Stefan [...] call Catherine 'Catherine', I don't know, it's – I just thought it's [...] such a cool name and such a sweet name. When the guys called Catherine, I was just like, 'Oh, I can be Catherine! And then someone can call me Catherine like that.' ((laughing)) (01/16)

The way she talks about Catherine and her admirers indicates that she associates certain circumstances with the fictional character and aspires to take part in those circumstances by adopting the same name. Catherine is not the only name she got from TV: As Siyang told me during one of our previous informal Skype conversations, she also used the name Caroline from the same show (06/15) and briefly called herself Claire from *Modern Family* as well (01/16). Other students mentioned characters from movies or other big franchises that they or friends of theirs liked, resulting in names such as Jack from *Brokeback Mountain* (Yubai, 11/15) or Winnie as in *Winnie the Pooh* (Vivian, 04/16). In one particular conversation about my research, someone told me they knew a Chinese guy called Donald who apparently liked *Donald Duck* and even wore a lot of sweaters with the famous character on them. Yunan briefly considered using Sabina as an international name in Germany because she had read a Czech novel in which the protagonist was called Sabina.

Popculture thus seems to influence the students' choices, which explains the rise and fall in popularity of certain names (Gerhards 2003:132). For instance, Coco implied that Elena, another name from the aforementioned *Vampire Diaries*, was much-used among her peers due to the show's fame:

> C: Lots of them will name themselves after some famous people. Like Kristen Stewart. She's famous among Asian girls. And Elena is the one – You know Nina Debr...
>
> F: Dobrev, yeah. [...] From *Vampire Diaries*, right?
>
> C: Yeah, yeah! *Vampire Diaries* is so famous. (12/15)

Other famous people that were inspirations for international names in Coco's peer group were Queen Elizabeth, George Washington[55], Martin Luther King, Britney Spears and Justin Bieber (12/15). Coco does not exclude herself from the list, either: Her own international name is based on French fashion designer Coco Chanel on whom she did some research prior to choosing the name. She liked that 'Coco Chanel never married a guy and every guy she met would give her

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[55] Interestingly, Coco was acquainted with both a George and a Washington.

some inspiration in the creation, of, like, perfume or some other designs' (12/15). It also went well with her preference of names that are 'not so… girl-ish' (12/15).[56]

Though Coco was satisfied with her name choice in general, she expressed some frustrations in our interview concerning the popularity of the name among Chinese people:

> I really liked Rebecca before I chose Coco as my name but lots of people use Rebecca. And lots of people use Catherine. Yeah, so I just gave up. But then I found out [that] really a *lot*, lot, lot more people choose Coco ((laughing)). I thought […] it can only be used as a nickname, that nobody would pick it as their formal name or something like that. […] But there are simply lots of Cocos [here]. That's a problem, because when somebody asks me for my Facebook and just writes 'Coco Wu', they're like, 'Oh, so many people are called this name!' (12/15)

Interestingly, this stance on name popularity mirrors the one discussed in chapter 5.3 in which a name is thought to be more valuable the less people bear it. It also seems to be less practical as several Chinese students in Coco's area apparently chose the same name for themselves, which made it harder for others to distinguish them (on Facebook).[57] Practicality, however, can also lie in a name's simplicity:

> One of my best friends, her old English name was, like, Mar… it's a long one, it's, like, Marslalalalala. And then – her father is a little bit old, he's like 70 right now, but then, back in the days, when she told her father that she wanted her name to be Marblahblahblahblahblah, […] her father twisted it […] to a slang in Cantonese but pronounced, like, similar to that. And then she was so unhappy and that's why she changed her name to Marcy ((laughing)). Because her father didn't know how to pronounce it! Yeah. It's funny, though, […] because her father literally called her '咩料?' (*mē líu*), which is like, 'What's up?' but […] it's a slang, it's not really polite. (Vivian, 04/16)

Vivian herself cannot remember the exact name her friend Marcy picked at first, thus underscoring how difficult it was to pronounce and remember, especially for Marcy's father who made the name sound like an inappropriate slang and thus rendered the name unsuitable for Marcy. Choosing an international name for oneself then might become a task of walking the tightrope between a name that is desirable (and thus potentially popular among friends), memorable, easy to pronounce and still somehow fairly unique. The irony of this balancing act, especially concerning the latter part, is captured in Vivian's words, 'I believe if you [search the web and] type, like, "unique English names for girls or for guys", there's a list of names that you can choose from' (04/16).

Though websites that help with name choices are in use (see below), some Chinese are not satisfied with picking a name from a list. Aiming for singularity, they choose common names but with varied spelling; Logan can become Login, for example, and Megan can be spelt Megin (McPherron 2009:526). In other cases, only parts of names are used. Duthie, for example, interviewed a man who named himself after David Beckham but chose to just go by Beck so that the name would not be categorised as common or forgettable (2007:66).

These small changes clearly draw on Chinese naming practices. A student in McPherron's study thought that it would be '"ungraceful to copy other's [sic] name"' and wanted a '"unique and special"' (2009:526) name instead so that it would represent no one else but her. Another stated the following:

> 'Frankly, a name isn't just a name, it could bring good or bad affection [sic] to you. Choosing an English name can be very serious.' (2009:527)

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[56] However, it was not necessarily her wish to choose a name that was completely non-indicative of its bearer's gender, either, as she stopped using her previous English name Jean because it was pronounced differently and used as a man's name in French.

[57] I was not spared from the confusion of these doublings, either. Other interlocutors also knew a Coco. When they told me about her, at first I confused her with the one I had already interviewed. I had to clarify which one she was by asking for both girls' Chinese names, at which point it turned out that I knew the second Coco as well but had never heard her international name before.

Even though international names cannot be scrutinised by means of stroke number or inclusion of elements, they still seem to be connected to issues of destiny and fortune. International name choices are 'Chinafied' and embedded in naming processes that were once exclusively Chinese but increasingly transcultural and translingual. Even collective naming strategies such as the kinship-indicating generation name (see 5.1) can influence Chinese international naming. Vivian's father, for instance, liked 'matching names' (01/16) and named Vivian's sister Gillian so that their names would rhyme and share a syllable.

I also encountered the phenomenon of 'Chinafication' elsewhere: Siyang linked me to a Chinese English naming website (逸名网 2009) because she had found one of her early English names, Adele, there.[58] When Vivian and I tried the website's name search tool during her interview, she told me that one of the boxes one could fill in asked for a 'wish' regarding one's future English name, e.g. beauty, friendliness, or elegance. When a list of potential names emerged, each name was also accompanied by its original meaning ('beautiful' for Linda, for example) and a transcription into Chinese characters (as would be done for characters' non-Chinese names appearing in movie subtitles). Furthermore, the website advertises that they help pick names that are 好听 (*hǎotīng*, 'good-sounding'), which is another principle of Chinese naming strategies (Gao 2013:171). Thus, it is equally required of Chinese and international names that they are pleasant to the ear.

Evidently, the intricate process of choosing an ideal, extraordinary name with a distinct meaning does not only apply to Chinese naming but to Chinese international naming as well. However, this is only apparent to someone with basic knowledge of Chinese naming. Without it, one might assume the choice of a non-Chinese name to adhere to the rules of the new language environment. Thus, some of the picked names might seem like an inadequate choice for formal use, though they are very common for a Chinese context. How the notion of inappropriateness in a Chinese international name is discursively created in transcultural social space and in a public arena will be explored in the following chapter.

7.2.2 Having to 'Deal With "Water" In Your Office': Discourses of Discomfort and Assertion

Another complex topic in Chinese international naming is the aspect of *appropriate* naming, in this case not referring to whether one uses or does not use an international name in the first place but determining which forms of international names are deemed acceptable or unacceptable.

This is a topic that, while not heavily explored in academic literature yet, has been at the forefront of news reports, blog entries and internet forum inquiries about Chinese people's tendency to acquire an international name. Under headlines such as 'Hong Kong Loves Weird English Names' (Man 2012), 'Hello, My Name Is "Yes," and Other English Names in China' (Morris 2014), 'Hilarious English Names Chinese People Choose' (Everington 2015), and 'Chinese People's English Names - Is There a Method to the Madness?' (Brennan 2015), names that are deemed funny, inept, inappropriate or otherwise unusual are listed and analysed, and, in some cases, joked about. Names of this category mentioned in the articles include popular examples like Seven and Eleven (often used together for a joke about the convenience store), Never Wong, Watermelon and Cinderella.

The comment sections are similarly filled with examples of names people have encountered over the years, including stories of related situations. Under one of the articles (Everington 2015), a commenter recounts how a woman named Water changed her name because of the commenter's reaction, concluding that '[i]t's actually funny when kids have such "cute" names, but when you have to deal with "Water" in your office, it becomes

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[58] This is by far not the only web-based English naming service. One that will be analysed in more detail in chapter 7.2.2 is a website called BestEnglishName.com (2015) that was celebrated in numerous news media outlets. Apparently, there also is a smart phone application called Anglicizer, which is, sadly, either no longer available or not accessible in Germany.

weird and awkward…' (no date). The unconventional name elicits good-natured reactions when the bearer is a child but causes problems when it occurs in a work environment. This suggests that discourses of social position and appropriateness are at work. Having to 'deal with' unusual names in the work sphere crosses the line from humour to severity, embedded in a discourse of discomfort and respectful treatment at a work place. What is most interesting here is that Water felt inclined to change her name when the reaction to it was negative – something that was thematised in other articles as well, for example when a blogger told a student's father that he could not name his son Semen (like the footballer David Seaman), the consequences of which he described in the eChinacities.com forum:

> Moral of the story – For [sic] little Simon, I have irrevocably altered the trajectory of his English-language life arc for the better. Alas, my good deed will probably go unnoticed, but I can go to my cold, unforgiving grave knowing that I prevented a little Chinese boy from being called Semen. (Brennan 2015)

While it is a potentially entertaining story to tell, the underlying implications of Brennan's actions are interesting to analyse. He essentially portrays himself as a saviour whose 'good deed' will not be appreciated but who managed to spare a Chinese child from inevitable ridicule. Paradoxically, he contributes to said ridicule, even if not directly aimed at the child, by retelling the story on the internet. Moreover, he creates a clearly hierarchical power relation between the knowledgeable non-Chinese and the uninformed Chinese person.

But how uninformed are these naming decisions really? How are these names negotiated from an emic perspective? The only names that could be considered a bit unconventional in my research were Qiàn's French name Amandine and Yunan's nickname Soda (see 7.2.1). The former, a common name in France as a diminutive of Amanda, might not elicit any surprise; however, as Qiàn got the name from her teacher as a reference for her almond-like cuteness, it was chosen out of a similar intention as most of the other names circulating in the aforementioned articles – as a unique, specific, catchy word that describes the bearer's qualities or references a preference or story. Yunan, too, had an original story for her nickname Soda, and would be very likely to end up as a joke on one of those above-mentioned websites, were it not for the fact that she never introduces herself to 'foreigners using this name because it is funny ((laughing))' (01/16). Obviously being aware of the reactions she might get as a consequence, she uses the name strictly as a nickname among Chinese friends from school and as a username on websites. Vivian also recalled some names she had heard in Hong Kong:

> Some of them are really weird from my perspective. Someone would call themselves Black or, like, Shadow. I know someone who's called Key ((laughing)). And then I'm like, 'Why are you called Key?' and then he's like, 'It's cool.' I'm like, 'Okay.' (01/16)

Interestingly, Key in no way indicated that he had any intention to change his name because of Vivian's reaction, and Vivian apparently did not ask any further questions. Instead, she simply accepted his explanation.

Coolness was mentioned in relation to another name as well, when Yubai told me about a classmate of his called TK, an abbreviation of Timekeeper. Trying to explain the name choice to me, Yubai said that 'maybe he thinks it is very… cool ((laughing)), very handsome' (11/15). The English names that are chosen by Chinese people thus often have different connotations in Chinese circles than they would have in an English-speaking context, which creates tension in transcultural social spaces. Each agent speaking from their respective positions, influenced by language background, internalised discourses and other factors, evaluates names under different premises. While a certain name might be thought of as 'cool' from a Chinese perspective, there might be other connotations in another language context.

When Qiàn heard Yubai's story about TK, she laughed and commented, 'Insurance company!' (11/15) She was making a joke about the German health insurance company

'Techniker Krankenkasse', abbreviated TK. If anyone not familiar with the German context heard this joke, they would not be able to fully grasp its punchline. In saying this, Qiàn was undoubtedly performing an act of translanguaging, proving that social, cultural and language context are of great importance for the negotiation of a name's meaning.

The fact that transcultural encounters involving Chinese people's English names can turn out to be quite tense is very palpable in the news articles one might find online. The topic has received special coverage from early 2015 onwards. This surge of interest can be traced back to a new website that emerged at that time, called BestEnglishName.com and created by American entrepreneur Lindsay Jernigan living in Shanghai. In her introductory video on the website's homepage, Jernigan explains the need for this website and how it works:

> I got the idea for this website from working with some colleagues that had strange English names, talking to my Western friends who were always joking about their colleagues and people they had met with strange English names. I realised that there might not be a very good resource available for Chinese people looking for an English name, so I decided to create this website for people like *you* looking for an English name. At BestEnglishName.com, you can read about hundreds of English names for free. You can also read about Western naming culture, learn more about how we came up with these names, why we use them, read about celebrities' English names, also stories about me and my friends and how we got our names. You can take a quiz that will automatically generate five English names – just for you! And you can even book a consultation to talk to *me* about *your* English name. We help anyone looking for an English name, from mothers looking for the right name for their newborn child to managers at a multinational company. Our website has already helped thousands of people, and now, we look forward to helping *you* and many more find *their* best English name.[59] (BestEnglishName.com 2015)

The discourse of 'weird' names is here used to create a business dedicated to eliminate the symptom of ridicule Chinese people might face with a 'strange' English name by providing them with 'better' options, if not the 'best'. Of course, this suggests that some names are just not appropriate and need to be changed, discursively negotiating the (dis)comfort that names might cause. Thus, just like Brennan (2015), Jernigan is taking a position of power by suggesting her website is the single best resource a Chinese person could use to find an English name, in effect delegitimising other websites and applications that already exist (see 7.2.1) and denying Chinese people's ability to make up their own English names.

When I showed Vivian the introductory video on BestEnglishName.com, she thought it was cool but dismissed the website's usefulness for a market in Hong Kong immediately. 'I think the market is only in China' (04/16), she told me, explaining that residents of Hong Kong were fully emerged in an English context due to the former British rule. The implication that China is in more need of help than Hong Kong is interesting considering that Vivian too spoke of acquaintances in Hong Kong who had 'weird' English names earlier in the interview.

In the teaser for the article 'Hong Kong Loves Weird English Names' (Man 2012), the author observes that '[t]hey're becoming more common, and they're not getting any less odd' and proceeds to explain as to why these names might be increasing in numbers, citing Hong Kong linguistics scholars David Li and Stephen Matthews in the process. The latter is quoted saying the following:

> 'It started as an inadequate knowledge of English, but if you see an unusual name today, it's because (Hong Kongers) are taking charge of their own language, not because their language abilities are not good [...]. People feel they can do what they want with English. If you tell Decemb or Februar that theirs are not English names, they'll say, "I don't care, it belongs to me." In a way,

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[59] The video content was transcribed as part of the transcription of Vivian's interview (04/16). Spellings might differ from the video's subtitles. Emphasis has been added at my own discretion.

they're asserting their Hong Kong identity... (The English language in Hong Kong) is no longer a symbol of British influence, but part of people's identity.' (Man 2012)

An additional discourse of assertion emerges, in which the 'weird' label is accepted and detached from embarrassment or awkwardness. People from Hong Kong, and possibly people with 'weird' names in China, Taiwan and Macao as well, identify with names that they actively *make* their own, defying hierarchical discourses of discomfort. Furthermore, these names pose an interesting case of resistant discourses as they reveal postcolonial power relations hidden in something as mundane as naming practices.

Indeed, most articles about Jernigan's website put her on a pedestal for 'declar[ing] war on the "farcical" western names being adopted by young Chinese' and 'vowing to liberate her clients from monikers that include Lady Gaga, Washing Liquid and Furry' (Phillips 2015). Phrased this way, the alleged support young Chinese receive by way of consulting BestEnglishName. com becomes a 'war' of 'liberation', implying dependency on a higher authority and thus a patronising postcolonial attitude. When names are either marked as 'good' (好, *hǎo*) or 'bad' (坏, *huài*) (Liu 2015), the website becomes a clear device of regulation and control rather than a search tool for English names.

Additionally, individual negotiations of names are completely neglected in favour of discourses conveying notions of discomfort, regulation and sheer offense. When Jernigan is quoted saying that her 'biggest pet peeves are the names "Sapphire", "Candy", and "Cherry" because they are "stripper names"' (Liu 2015), there is no space to argue that Sapphire, Candy or Cherry might still like their names even after learning what they meant to other people. In fact, they might already be aware of said connotation and treasure the name despite the reactions it might elicit.

Hence, names can mean one thing to someone and another to someone else as they are 'rigid designators' (see 4.2) that cannot be taken out of context. It does make a difference, then, whether names like Sapphire, Candy and Cherry are used by someone who thinks they are strippers' names or by someone who connects them to special and unique meanings that are most important in the naming processes they are familiar with.[60]

That this disidentification with a certain contextual aspect of a name is possible, can be seen in the way Coco negotiated her international name's meaning when her friends told her they thought the name was 'like a prostitute's name' (12/15). Even though she confirmed that it was a common association, she said she was not bothered by it because 'it's just a joke' (12/15). For her, Coco derived from Coco Chanel and not from tropes of prostitution. Rising above concerns voiced by others, Coco's own, quite agentic interpretation of the name made it possible to refuse a name change. In which ways agency and empowerment can be hidden within strategies of name usage shall be explored in the following chapter.

7.3 Between Agency and Ambiguity, Assertion and Adaption

7.3.1 'My Name Should Be Unique': Agentic Uses of Names

As has been discussed before, the perception that a Chinese name will not be accepted is apparently wide-spread, underscored by statements like Xueqing's about her rugby teammates who would never address her with a Chinese name (see 7.1.2). Mei-lian said in regards to Taiwanese international companies that 'it's also at some point peer pressure [...] [when] almost everyone speaks English and then no one really understands Chinese' (09/15). Edwards' research also accounts for many cases in which teachers, both Chinese and non-Chinese, forced their students to have an English name (2006:95). However, the

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[60] Referencing the names Cherry and Olivia, for example, Coco told me that most Chinese girls 'like to pick some words that look juicy or fresh, something like a young girl' (12/15).

amount of pressure on someone to acquire an international also varies depending on context and individual perception:

> Before I had my first foreign teachers, every teacher called me my Chinese name. Nobody asked us to have an English name. Yeah. Even now that I'm abroad, they don't ask me to have an English name but I guess it's very [...] difficult for them to figure out how to pronounce my Chinese name. So I just tell everybody, 'You can call me Coco. It's not a problem.' (Coco, 12/15)

The foreign teachers Coco refers to were Australian and though they learned the Chinese names of their students, Coco still felt that it was easier to use her non-Chinese name to avoid mispronunciation. Even though she uses Coco as a name, she has never been in a position where it felt forced, not even abroad, which refutes the notion that she was under any kind of pressure. In stating this, she claims agency for herself, making the offer of an international name her *choice*, as opposed to an act of compliance.

In her behaviour we can also detect an act of prevention, as she – speaking from experience, no doubt, but, nevertheless – *assumes* that people will not master the correct pronunciation of her Chinese name. This was a common theme in most classroom-related situations mentioned in the interviews. Maia, for instance, would like to be called by her Chinese middle name sometimes but always appears on the class roll as Maia:

> When they take roll call in the beginning of the semester, they will always say, 'If there's a different name you'd rather be called, just tell me,' but I let them just call me Maia because it isn't on the paper, it only says my first and last name, so they would get really confused by it. So teachers always call me Maia. (01/16)

She too predicts confusion as a possible outcome of her interjection, albeit granted, and rather goes by Maia to avoid miscommunication. Interestingly, though, just like Coco, the agency lies with her in this moment, not with the teacher. It is hinted at in her wording when she says that she *lets* her teachers call her Maia. The power of *choosing* to be addressed this way is tangible in this statement.

In both cases, even though the authority of the teacher is not necessarily undermined (Edwards 2006:98), Coco and Maia assume positions of power by giving their teachers the 'easy way out' in the form of a less difficult name. However, the difference between the two is that Coco states a name that deviates from the way she appears on paper, while Maia more or less just drops the topic completely. Compliance and agency are here discursively negotiated in similar, yet nuanced ways.

Agency can furthermore be found in the name choice itself. While many Chinese students keep the names that they have been given in school or elsewhere, other names are chosen freely and often quite creatively (see 7.2). Though Cindy did keep the name given to her by her English teacher, she acknowledged that she, like other classmates, would have had a chance to get a new name because, later on, teachers would not assign names anymore. From then on, 'it's up to you to give yourself your own name' (11/15). This process of creating a new name (and identity) is perceived by many Chinese as vitally different from receiving a Chinese name from their families (Duthie 2007:73).

However, identification with a new name is not desired by everyone. Many people choose to *not* acquire an international name or stop using a previous one and go by their Chinese name instead. Out of my twelve interviewees, three had official non-Chinese names and eight had at least one international name throughout the course of their life.[61] Only three of them used these names on a fairly regular basis, one of them using several names in different situations. Two more students had international names but used them only seldom. The remaining three of eight who had international names were openly against using their international names and had either never really used them at all or stopped doing so at one point. When I asked those students why

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[61] The remaining person is Yunan, who uses Soda as a nickname rather than as an international alias. She thus presents an ambiguous case.

they chose to go by their Chinese name instead, some of their answers were remarkably similar. For instance, both Huimin and Qián said that they wanted their position as international students and particularly *Chinese* students to be reflected in their names:

> Actually, when I use my Chinese name, I *want* people to know that I am a Chinese. I think it's a special thing that you have a unique name, not the same English name [as others]. (Huimin, 09/15)

> I think a name represents people's, like – not only their own country's culture, it also represents their character, I don't know why. You know, it's unique for a person. So I don't want my Chinese name to be, like, hidden [...]. You know, also I feel like, because I'm a foreigner, I'm an international student, my name should be unique, I don't care. (Qián, 04/15)

Using their Chinese names rather than an international one thus clearly visualises their positions within their respective transcultural social spaces. Once again emphasising the 'quest for uniqueness' (McPherron 2009:526), both Huimin and Qián feel like openly priding themselves in their names means they are setting themselves apart from other students and, ultimately, claiming their Chineseness in an agentic and determined way.

Mei-lian, too, used her Chinese name rather than her English or Russian name. While she acknowledged that her Chinese name might be hard for people to memorise, giving in was not an option for her, which she made quite clear in several statements during the interview:

> I think it would generate some difficulties for them but [...] if I impress them enough, they have to remember me. And if they don't want to remember my name, I don't really think that I need to spend time with them at all. (09/15)

> Some people will still ask [for an international name] [...] but I guess I will just deprive them of that convenience. (09/15)

> Now I would just force all the foreigners to pronounce my Chinese name. (09/15)

Mei-lian proves to be quite assertive in her insistence on the Chinese name and fully expects others to address her as Mei-lian, regardless of the risk that they might not be willing or able to engage in proper conversation with her as a consequence. People who cannot meet her demands are, in her words, 'not really worth the effort at all' (09/15).

Contrasting this dismissal of international names with the peer pressure mentioned at the start of this chapter, it becomes clear that we can find agency in this attitude as well. However, as the students enter new social spaces, they might be required to re-evaluate their positions and, inevitably, their agency. Qián just recently took a semester off college to intern at a big company in her hometown in China. When she started working there, she was asked to give them an English name for registration because 'the company prefers you have an English name for some reason' (09/16). For the first time since high school, Qián picked up the name Joyce again and now appears in the system as Joyce Q Li. Despite her earlier wish to never hide her Chinese name, it is now merely an abbreviation in her work name. Evidently, the change in location – and hence change of social space – put her in a new context where re-negotiations of her positionalities on the subject were required. It is interesting here that she felt more inclined to insist on her Chinese name abroad but less so in a work environment at home. It is certainly imaginable that the wish to perform one's Chineseness might recede in a less transcultural environment, once again going back to the paradox of cultural emphasis and 'politics of differentiation' (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1995:50) that arise in times of transcultural interconnection (see 3.2).

Mei-lian showed reluctance at the thought of having to change her name for a work-related context but seemed unsure of how assertive she would continue to be if it ever came to a dispute over her lack of an international name, saying that she might 'try to make

their lives easier' if they were absolutely sure that her name was 'too much for their brain' (09/15).

To summarise, agency can be found in many actions concerning personal naming preferences, whether it involves giving out a name that one deems more helpful in transcultural communication or that will cause less confusion, creating a name from scratch, claiming both Chineseness and uniqueness, refusing to use a certain name, and asserting name ownership. However, it might be necessary to take a look at different (transcultural) social spaces to get a grasp of the full scope, since agency is not all-encompassing but rather configured in negotiations *between* people with different positions in their currently shared social spaces.

That international names are somehow subject to discourses of both agency and compliance, depending on individual positioning in social space, accentuates their capacity to empower and disempower at the same time. The ambiguity in agency can be present in the earliest interaction between two people – introductions. How people introduce themselves is incredibly important for their interlocutors to know which name to pick for later interactions.

7.3.2 'You Can Call Me Catherine If You Want': Ambiguous Introductions

When I first started emailing back and forth with Yubai because I was supposed to pick him up from the train station on his first day in Germany, his name was written in Chinese characters where he appeared as the sender and spelt out in Romanised form in his signature. Even though he told me I could call him Jack alternatively, I stuck to the name he gave me first and with which he signed his emails to me.

However, when we skyped, I felt inclined to ask which name he preferred. He told me Jack was fine. Afterwards, he started signing his emails with Jack and I switched my form of address as well. I was a bit baffled, then, to learn in our interview two months later that I was virtually the only person who called him Jack, as he had never used this name before coming to Germany and had a circle of friends that consisted of either Chinese people or students of the Sinology department. He had told them that Jack was an option but given their knowledge of the Chinese language, they all picked Yubai, anyway. After hearing this, I immediately switched back to Yubai, embarrassed that I had not even insisted to address him that way once after thinking that he preferred Jack.

A positive outcome of this miscommunication, though, was that I started looking more closely at introductions. The way people introduce themselves at a first meeting can be defining in the way their names – and name options – will be perceived by others. Huimin told me that while her international name is Jenny, she has never introduced herself that way and does not know anyone who addresses her by her international name. Others make it very clear in their introductions that their Chinese name is so complicated that it is better to go with the international name instead. Coco thus introduces herself to non-Chinese strangers with the following words: 'Hello, I am Yuanwei, and you can call me Coco because my Chinese name is very complicated.' (12/15)

Xueqing, on the other hand, openly asks people if they would like to hear her Chinese or English name, ready to adapt to her interlocutors' preferences:

> Usually, they will like to hear both and I will try my Chinese name first. And, usually, they respond with, 'Aaah… so, English name.' I will go, 'Okay, Cindy.' ((laughing)) Normally, (I will just be?) Cindy after they hear my Chinese name. (11/15)

In this case, the difficulties Coco predicts even before she introduces herself hold true for Xueqing in the way that most people forgo her Chinese name in favour of the easier English name. But providing people with an option does not always mean that they will take it. Siyang experienced her own experiments with English names quite differently. For an on-

campus summer job, she tried introducing herself to everyone in the office with an English name for the first time:

> I thought about [how Siyang is] hard to pronounce, so I […] told people, 'Oh, you can call me Catherine' ((laughing)). And they were like, 'No, that's not your name, like, it just doesn't feel like your name.' So I stopped. Yeah. That's the first time I really tried to have an English name but people didn't give me the chance, so… ((laughing)) […] I think, at first, I told them, 'Oh, my name is Siyang.' And then they were like, 'Oh, Siyang.' And then I told them, 'Oh, you can call me Catherine if you want.' […] The people in the office, they were very chill, so they were like, 'No, that's not your name.' […] I was just like, 'Oh, okay ((laughing)).' Like, I won't even try […] to have an English name now. (01/16)

Her co-workers seemed to be confused to be given a choice when it was obvious to them which one was Siyang's actual name. Her introduction made it quite clear that Catherine was merely an alternative. However, that Siyang then felt like she was not given a proper chance to try out her first English name puts the provision of an easier option into a completely different perspective. Seen from this particular angle, her introduction becomes ambiguous: On the one hand, she introduces herself firmly as Siyang and provides Catherine as an alternative, on the other, she is taken aback when the idea alone that she could bear this English name is dismissed. Though she recalls the memory quite nonchalantly, even laughing at some parts, the realisation that Catherine was not thought to be a suitable name seems disappointing to her.

But what constitutes a 'suitable' name in the first place? What discourses are at work when we deem a name right or wrong for a person? Interestingly, the notion that a name was just not fitting was mentioned in quite a few interviews, often tied to expectations of appearances and cultural identification. In the following, I will assess how our preconceptions of cultural attachments to names and related discourses of Chinese international naming shape our expectations of Chinese identity-name relationships.

7.4 Transcultural Balancing Acts of Negotiating Names and Identities

7.4.1 'Oh, She's Asian': Preconceptions of Names and Cultural Expectations

Even though first meetings and introductions often only last seconds, they can tell us a lot about someone's expectations by looking at their reactions throughout the interaction. Names are interesting in this context as they are in many cases the very first thing that will be exchanged during a first meeting. Furthermore, reflecting upon introductions in a later conversation or, in this case, an interview, might give us insights into how a certain name choice was supposed to influence first impressions.

When I asked Siyang what she thought people's first impression of her might be when she introduces herself to people, her immediate reply was, 'Oh, she's Asian' (01/16). She explained that while some might think that she is Chinese specifically, she might also get confused for a Korean because the first syllable of her name is a bit similar to the names of some Korean students on campus. As we continued our conversation, it became clear that she hopes to be perceived as a lot more than simply Asian:

> F: Is it important to you that they know that you're Chinese […]?
>
> S: I don't know. To be honest, […] I think I would prefer if people first thought of me as an Asian American. […] Why? Because I think that that means they confirm […] that I speak excellent English. You know, […] I want people to think of me like I'm good at speaking English now, like… yeah. I don't know. It's just something that my parents always emphasised, like, 'Practice your

English speaking skills, they'll help you to find jobs in the future.' So that's important to me now. If people think that I speak poor English, I will feel really sad.

F: And do you think the name has something to do with it?

S: My name? [...] Definitely. They will think it's an Asian name. (01/16)

For Siyang, a confirmation of her fluency in English is implied in someone's reaction when they categorise her either as Asian or Asian American. Being perceived as Asian is less desired by her than being thought of as part American, as the relevant discourses seem to automatically connect someone's Americanness with a native fluency in English.

As the international student community at her college was made up of international students, half-American students as well as students that were called 'third-culture kids' (TCKs) because they grew up in a culture (or several cultures) different from their parents' culture(s), examples of what Siyang hoped to be perceived as were abound, and some international students were indeed confused for Ethnic American or a TCK.

However, perceptions also work vice versa, as interview passages with my Chinese American interlocutors confirm. Maia was once told by another student in a group project that he was glad that she at least spoke English. Since his statement obviously acknowledges her fluency in English, and Dutch names are very common in the area where Maia lives, his conclusion that Maia must be foreign has to stem from her appearance. Indeed, taking her appearance out of the equation, Maia is not prone to be perceived as Chinese or Asian at all:

I emailed [the Dutch professor] before I came on campus and he had never seen a picture of me. So I emailed him and my email was maia.dykstra [...]. We're emailing back and forth in Dutch, and then I show up to class and he sees me for the first time, and he was really confused as to who I was [...]. I found out from my friends that he was like, 'Oh, this girl with that really Dutch name is coming, like, her mom's Dutch, she's coming to class and I bet she looks so Dutch, like, you'll be able to see what a real Dutch person looks like.' And so when I showed up being Asian, he was so confused and he asked me if I was in the right class. And then, when I answered back in Dutch and said, 'Oh, I'm Maia Dykstra', he was really so surprised. So, I thought that was funny ((laughing)). (01/16)

Seeing only the Dutch name, Maia's teacher had not pictured an Asian-looking student at all, resulting in a confusing first face-to-face meeting and very telling of what is typically perceived to be a Dutch look. Additionally, Maia recounted a similar situation in which she introduced herself to her Chinese teacher using her Chinese name and was immediately spoken to in fast, fluent Chinese because the teacher was new at the college and possibly thought Maia was a teaching assistant, even though she was there to learn Chinese, not to teach it. In this case, Maia's appearance matched the name she gave her teacher, and met the expectation that she must be Chinese.

'It's weird, like, you're Chinese, why do you have an English name?' was a question that Siyang (01/16) encountered often in discussions about her own or her peers' English names. This demand for congruency can be frustrating, as aptly stated by a commenter under a blog entry (VOA Student Union 2013) on why Chinese students should stick to their Chinese name: 'Do I need to be English to be given an English name?' (08/13) What these stories show very clearly is that names are seldom free of cultural attachments and thus ultimately tied to what we categorise as an accurate visual representation of said cultural attachments. Especially in transcultural social spaces, these cultural expectations are hard, if not impossible, to live up to. Sam eloquently described how he feels about his attempts to keep up with those expectations:

I don't want to be that guy who runs around [...] trying to tell you the song of their people ((laughing)). I'm always a little disarmed by people like that because it feels like throwing your identity in front of everything else as a person... it erases who you are, both to your viewer and to

yourself, as in, I wanna be Sam first. [...] All the other things that are part of my being fit together, as in, yeah, I like men, yes, I do speak a little Mandarin, yes, if you give me a choice between good Chinese food and good Italian food, it will always be Chinese... but they're just parts of a greater whole, and these labels are ultimately very synthetic and often very forced. (11/15)

While Sam evidently values his Chineseness a lot (see 6.1), he finds it tiring to have to respond to cultural expectations that come with him being perceived as Chinese, Malaysian, American or a mix thereof, and feels 'disarmed' by people who do respond to them eagerly. It is interesting that Sam contrasts concepts of (cultural) identity with what or who one is 'as a person'. He says he wants to 'be Sam *first*', which, in combination with what he follows this statement up with, might be interpreted as wanting to be perceived as a person with preferences and tastes like everyone else and only *then* adding cultural identity. In other words, he wants those expectations to vanish so that there is room for personal connections and interactions instead of 'synthetic' 'labels' that mantle his personality.

However, names and appearances might taint the first impression in a way that it does not make much of a difference as the outcome is usually confusion, anyway. Maia, for example, identified two possible reactions people would have whenever she introduced herself using her Chinese nickname ZheZhe on the one hand or as Maia on the other:

In some way, I feel like if I said my name was ZheZhe to people, they'd be like – they wouldn't know how to say my name but it would make sense with them because it sounds foreign and I look foreign, but when I say my name is Maia, they kinda give me a funny look, like, 'Wait, did you make that name up? Or is it real?' Something like that, yeah. (01/16)

What Maia expresses here by saying her name either 'makes sense' or elicits a 'funny look' is the deeply internalised relationship between names and outer appearance and, consequently, names and cultural belonging. The latter is perceived to not go beyond the 'one nation, one culture' line of thinking. Whichever name she picks, she feels scrutinised, immediately denoted as a foreigner or a liar, as neither name is perceived to be her 'real' one.

7.4.2 'I'm a Cindy': Clashing Discourses of 'Real' Names

The question whether Maia's name is 'real' or 'made up' reveals a dichotomy that seems to occur repeatedly in discourses concerning multiplicities of names. People can have aliases, pseudonyms, artist names or change their name to represent a new identity – but more often than not, that name does not seem to suffice on its own. For instance, a Chinese commenter who replied to a question (Anonymous Inquiry 2014) on the webforum Quora observed that 'locals want to know your "real name" all the time' (12/14).

A commonly voiced 'problem' related to the question of realness is an uncertainty of how to address or speak about Chinese people with several names when a common ground for communication is not given. For example, to create such a common ground for her housemates, Coco changed her name on Facebook from the Romanised Chinese form to Coco because she felt it was 'really inconvenient' (12/15) for them to find her Chinese name when they wanted to tag her in a post or send her a message. Maia ran into similar problems once because she uses her first name for many social media accounts but her Chinese middle name for other applications that she uses with Chinese friends primarily. She texted a friend on the messaging application Line and got back a 'Who is this?' (01/16) when he could not figure out that Zhe and Maia were the same person.

Even more confusion arises when someone uses more than one international name or changes their permanent international name, which is not uncommon for Chinese students because name changes occur fairly frequently in Chinese contexts (see 5.2), and even more so because 'it's not [the name that] is on your official ID card or something, so

[…] you don't feel it is very serious to change it' (Qiàn, 11/15). Qiàn's answer was similar when I asked her why she only rarely used her international name in Germany. Laughing, she told me that it was not on her official ID and that she could not submit homework with an international name on it. She imagined that if she did, her teacher would look at it and ask, 'Oh, who is that girl?' (11/15)

What is a 'real' name then? Is it the one on our documents and papers? Does a name have to be official to count as our *actual* name? I would argue that while this might be a common response, notions of 'real' and 'false' can also be *created*. After all, Vivian has both a Chinese and an English name on her documents, even though her full name would be complete with just one of the two. It cannot be argued that either one is not her 'real' name.

Ideas about ambiguities like truth, realness and normality are shaped by discourses (see 2.4). It will thus be crucial for an understanding of how Chinese students' names are negotiated in transcultural social spaces to explore what values are attached to the notions of 'real' names in the discourses relating to Chinese international naming.

For instance, while Siyang introduced herself as Amy on the phone during her summer internship (see 7.1.2), she used her Chinese name around her co-workers 'in real life' (01/16). When Mei-lian talked about the difficulties of not finding herself represented in the Latinised Chinese name (see 7.1.1), she said that, at the beginning, 'you might even identify more with your fake English name' (09/15), despite it merely being a functional device. She views the international name as purely expedient, excluded from actual representation, and even 'fake'. This notion is supported in an entry on a blog dedicated to helping international students adapt to their American university experience. In said blog

Screenshot of the Alias Award, which Siyang showed me when we skyped (01/16). Her family name and the abbreviation of the company name are censored.

entry, a Chinese student wrote an opinion piece to urge other Chinese students to use their 'real' names instead of 'fake' English ones:

'As we have been told, Americans emphasize individualism. Name [sic] is a piece of their identity, so no matter how hard their name is to pronounce, they want others to remember their real name, not a fake, easily-pronounced one.

The reason Chinese students often pick an English name is quite understandable – we don't want to correct people again and again on how they pronounce our name, and we all believe that it helps Americans remember our name. But in fact, using an actual name may be more socially-acceptable [sic] – it is a sign of showing our sincerity.

There were many times when someone I met at party or other random social situations asked my name, and I said "Catherine." They seemed a little surprised and asked again to confirm.

"Catherine?" "Yes." The questioning in their eyes made me feel like I was lying, and being dishonest can never result in a good relationship.' (VOA Student Union 2013)

Two discourses are contrasted here: the Chinese discourse of wanting to avoid mispronunciation and wishing to be remembered vis-à-vis the American discourse of identity, individuality and honesty. An identity, in this sense, is *the* core essence of one's being, symbolised by the name. By giving out a non-Chinese name, the Chinese student feels like she is 'lying' and even fears that it might put a strain on her relationships to potential friends because dishonesty is not valued highly in the USA.

She thus gives the American discourse more weight in her reasoning to stick to her 'real' name than its Chinese counterpart, even though it does not necessarily solve the problem many Chinese students encounter with their Chinese name. One commenter called for more differentiation because she felt that she had been lumped together with every other Chinese student. She disliked the way the Chinese given name came first when she used it in an English-speaking context and much preferred her English name that she had been given since birth, ending her comment by saying that '[p]eople should have the freedom to choose their own identity' (08/13). Evidently, the discourses that surfaced in the blog entry and its comment section clashed quite strongly.

These discourses are not only present in such particular moments but rather in the very idea of the existence of a 'real' name. Using a name, any name, seems to be under immense scrutiny when it comes to the Chinese students I interviewed. In some cases, the notion of dishonesty even led to being embarrassed while using the international name around others:

> Still, when I made the calls, when I said, 'Hi, this is Amy calling from [the non-profit service]', I felt embarrassed to say it […] around my co-workers, you know, because that's not my real name. […] They just thought it's funny, like, 'You're the only one in the office [who does this]. After a whole summer of you talking to thousands of non-profits, they know you – like, who you are as a person – as Amy.' So… it's just funny. (Siyang, 01/16)

Despite her co-workers' amusement, Siyang kept using Amy on the phone for better communication. The benefits of efficiency had to outweigh the disadvantage of being embarrassed as it did not stop her from using this name. That her co-workers found it strange is also evident in the 'alias award' that they gave Siyang at the end of her stay as part of a job tradition. The paper states that it is '[a]warded to Siyang because she has successfully convinced thousands of non-profits that her name is Amy', the aspects of lie and reality clearly embedded in the word 'convinced'. Though Siyang's name is not *really* Amy, the award seems to say, she somehow managed to *pretend* like it was on the phone. In this regard, international names are considered to merely be 'borrowed identities' (D.C.S. Li 1997:505).

Not excluded from this discourse herself, Siyang agrees that Amy is not her 'real name'. In fact, she told me at one point during the interview, that while she *uses* American names, she does not really *have* one. When I could not follow her logic, she explained that she has never had an international name that she 'kept for many years' (01/16), always changing it from one name to the other and using them for pragmatic reasons. Therefore, there are layers of possession and action in a name – *having* it and *using* it.

The question arises, then, whether Siyang would think differently if she used one international name over a longer period of time. Xueqing, for example, has had her English name Cindy for over ten years and started using it actively about seven years ago, when she first went to college. In our interview, she recounted how her connection to Cindy became so strong that she could not change her English name after a while:

> I picked up Cindy again [when I went to college and started playing rugby]. At that point, I was actually thinking of changing it to another name because Cindy sounds like […] I don't know, an old-fashioned name? I'm not very familiar with the meanings of foreign names, so I'm a little

bit confused whether Cindy is a good name for me but I still haven't changed it. […] Actually, I once asked another man who was on our Rugby team. He advised me to change it to Rachel and I thought it was better than Cindy but I still didn't change it because the name has been with me for so many years. It's okay, just Cindy […]. And now I just think I'm a Cindy ((laughing)). (11/15)

Over time, her name seemed to become a part of her until Xueqing simply felt like a Cindy and changing it was not an option anymore. It does not seem to be a 'borrowed' identity at all. After all, as she clearly identifies with her English name, it seems unreasonable not to consider it just as real as her Chinese name. Nevertheless, when I asked her which name she would use if she published something, she told me it would be her Chinese name because it needed to be more complicated than Cindy, again treating the international name under the premises of Chinese naming practices (see 7.2.1). Xueqing concluded that if she published under the name Cindy Zhou, she would not 'feel like that's a real name' (11/15).

We cannot separate feelings of realness and falseness regarding names from prevalent discourses of identity, pragmatism, (dis)honesty and established naming practices. Furthermore, if we are to look at transcultural social spaces, it is important to locate those discourses in relation to each other to understand how they perpetuate cultural expectations and conceptions of 'real' names. In contrasting these discourses, the complexity of opinions on Chinese international naming becomes a cluster of differently positioned identities within social space, discourses and cultural alignments.

7.4.3 'This Name Means Me': Contrasting Names, Negotiating Meaning

As highlighted in previous chapters, a multiplicity of names to go with Chinese identities can lead to outcries of confusion and discomfort as well as demands for honesty, and reveal mantled hierarchical relationships. What these dominant discourses do not usually account for, however, are personal valuations of what a name means and which sentiments it conveys, how it relates to interpersonal emotions and socio-cultural backgrounds – in short, how someone identifies or disidentifies with their name(s). After all, asking someone for their 'real' name is by far not the same thing as asking them for their preferred name, in the same way that thinking someone's name is inappropriate or downright atrocious does not mean that they cannot like it.

I was interested in how my interviewees felt about their names, whether they liked them or if they had ever thought about changing a part of their name. The answers to these questions were diverse, from Vivian daydreaming about a made-up English family name that she thought fit her personality to Qiàn wanting a longer and Yunan a shorter Chinese name (measured in syllables in both cases). Maia said she wanted to change the order of her names so that Zhe would be the first and Maia the middle name. Zhe was quite important to her. It had not been part of her official name until she applied for citizenship in the USA by the age of sixteen. She added it then because her first caretakers at the orphanage had given her that name and she wanted her full name to 'represent the melting' of her 'looking Asian and being born in China but then being an American' (01/16). However, the official name change came with social implications:

I actually asked my mom if it was okay if I would add it because I didn't want to offend her by saying, like, 'Oh, I don't like the name you picked for me, can I have a different one?' So I asked first before I added it […]. Because people knew me by Zhezhe and people call me that, it felt right to actually have it as legal part of my name. (01/16)

It was important to Maia not to give her mother the impression that she was ungrateful for the Dutch name she was given at birth and thus proceeded with a lot of care when it came to adding her Chinese name once she obtained her green card. That Maia wanted

to add her Chinese name did not cancel out her feelings for her Dutch name, though. She likes Maia as a name and has personal attachments to it. For example, there is a Dutch soap with a similar brand name, which always made Maia's grandmother say that it had to be the best soap in the Netherlands. She claimed it was named after her granddaughter. Maia remembered this story with visible delight. In both of her given names, there is an abundance of social positions to be found, from her deep emotional connection to her origin in the name Zhe to the kinship to her mother and grandmother that she feels when thinking about her Dutch name.

Vivian recalled a very similar scenario about wanting to change her name to Elizabeth or Summer. When she asked her father, he asked her if she was crazy and told her that it would be a huge bureaucratic ordeal, so that she did not change it in the end. When I then asked Vivian whether she had ever thought about changing her Chinese name, she said, 'I won't rename myself in Chinese, only in English' (04/16). The Chinese name for her had a very personal importance because it made her feel close to the people who used it:

> Outside of my comfort zone, it's always Vivian, Vivian, Vivian. Like, the teacher calls you Vivian. Your group mates call you Vivian, so I think... if you call me by my English name [...], it's like I'm in an outside mode [...] but then, with the Chinese name, it's just – it's just at *ease* ((laughing)) [...]. For example, if I meet my friends' family, then they'll ask me, like, 'What's your Chinese name?' Even if I said, 'I'm Vivian', or something like that. Yeah, and then they'll start calling you the last character, and then it makes you feel so comfortable. It's so close, like, you feel *closer*. [...] I don't even know all of my friends' Chinese names. Like, you only know their Chinese name once you're to a level where you're really comfortable with each other, you'll be like, 'What's your Chinese name?' Like, something like that. (04/16)

In Hong Kong, English names are widespread in daily use not only for interactions with non-Chinese speaking people but among Hongkongers as well (D.C.S. Li 1997:494). In this context, it is interesting to see how people have to actually *ask* for a Chinese name that has such a special value in social relationships. By being only used by family and close friends – or, in stark contrast, for official matters – the Chinese name becomes a marker for intimate relationships, identifying people one feels comfortable with as opposed to mere acquaintances. It is not a matter of 'real' or 'fake' names but a matter of positioning in social space.

The use of the Chinese name on a more intimate level can be traced to past times in which the 'original standard name, given in infancy and considered as a private and sacred one, [was] not to be freely used by others' (Kałużyńska 2008:45). While the daily use of the given name is more common these days, especially outside of Hong Kong, some interview passages underscore the notion that the Chinese given name is considered very personal.

Apart from Vivian's insights from a Hong Kong perspective, others were very protective of their Chinese names, too. In a Facebook message to me, Sam wrote:

> It's strange. On one hand, my English name is my common name, the name I know myself to be. My Chinese name feels like a title – or a promise – or a badge of identity. Like the way we have normal dishes for normal dinners, but when guests come we take out the silverware. And while I don't use my Chinese name much, and feel awkward pronouncing it, it's just as much a part of my name. (05/15)

That his Chinese name is a bit troubling in pronunciation became clear in our oral conversations as it often took him a few tries to get the tones right. Despite these difficulties, though, the Chinese name is special to him in that it ties him to his Chineseness – it is a 'badge of identity'. The comparison of normal dishes and silverware is also quite telling, as it shows how Sam is a name for everyday use but Chunwah is for social spaces that involve likeminded people, most often *huárén*. It is in these spaces that he feels that Chunwah is safe to use as a name. In our recorded interview, he said that his Chinese name is not his

'direct address' like Sam is but almost a 'secret name' like in a fairytale, and something he will always '*guard* closely' (11/15).

The value of the Chinese name thus cannot be overlooked, even if a person primarily uses their international name for everyday use, as both Vivian and Sam do. We cannot judge a permanent use of international names as a sign that Chineseness is discarded. Just because a name is not used much, it does not mean that it is not treasured; in fact, it might mean quite the opposite, as a name not being used by everyone might indicate that it is reserved for special use around loved ones.

Moreover, I observed on many occasions that students who introduced themselves with international names – especially those with additional names and not official ones – gave their new acquaintance *both* names (see 7.3.2). Though this might suggest in some cases that one of the two names is just a means to an end, some students I asked really did not mind being addressed by either name. Both Yuanwei and Xueqing said that they were quite okay with being called Coco and Cindy respectively, be it during their time abroad or even in China. However, Xueqing said she felt like she was treated with more respect when people actually tried to learn her Chinese name. Coco liked it when people called her by her international name but she too did not fully disconnect its use from her Chinese name. In fact, she was adamant that they would be used in – unspoken but binding – combination:

> It's really okay if you call me Coco. It's okay. But you have to know that Coco is Yuanwei Wu. That's all. [...] I just want [people] to know the girl behind this name. Yeah. That's all. I don't care how they remember it. Maybe... when they talk about this girl behind them and they call it Yuanwei, or they call it Coco – it's okay, but I just want them to know that this name means me ((laughing)). That's all, yeah. (12/15)

Evidently, the simple use of an international name alone does not necessarily mean a Chinese student does not want their peers to also remember their Chinese name, no matter how much more memorable the international name is. The connection to their Chinese name is important, and might be even more important when the same international name is used by a lot of people. Xueqing told me that she might 'meet a lot of girls who are called Cindy' (11/15) but that there are less chances of running into someone with the very same Chinese name, again emphasising the value of uniqueness in Chinese naming.

Since Chinese names might be disliked for being too common, it seems logical that those Chinese students who expressed annoyance with their overly common Chinese names in their interviews would be the ones to choose an international name to be addressed with instead. However, even though Coco's Chinese name was very rare in China and made her feel memorable, she was known to many friends in China and abroad as Coco. Qiàn, on the other hand, did not like her Chinese name because so many girls had the same one, but did not really use her international name. Siyang was not very fond of her Chinese name either and had many international names for different uses, but said she did not know yet whether she would ever want to get a permanent one. Huimin said that altogether, she felt like names were just something to 'help people call you' (09/15) but did not have an international name even when people did not remember her name well.

Therefore, a direct connection between a strong dislike of a Chinese name and the acquisition of an international name is not necessarily given. As indicated by the data gathered in this research, it is likely that names need personal connections to be actively identified with. Though frequent use of a name does not *have* to contribute to how much a name is valued, as explored above, it still *might* be an important factor: Vivian's wish to change her English name diminished with time because 'when people call you Vivian for so long and then they know you as Vivian, you slowly don't want to change it because people are like, "Vivian suits you!"' (04/16). On the other hand, she said that new acquaintances sometimes told her the opposite (that Vivian did not seem to fit) which shows that names and identifications are continuously negotiated between different people in different situations.

For instance, Sam, whose grandmother chose the name Chunwah for him to always remind him of his Chineseness (see 5.2), had to actively negotiate the meaning of his name to make it feel right for him. As it literally translated to 'handsome Chinese', Sam felt like it was 'a very hard name to live up to' (11/15) It was not until he had a conversation with a friend about it that the name took on a bit of a different meaning for him:

> I asked another Chinese speaking friend who spoke very fluent Mandarin and she said, 'Well, it doesn't just mean handsome.' [...] I was very happy, I was like, 'Okay, so what does it mean?' She said, 'Glorious, great…' And I'm like, 'Magnificent…? Fabulous?' – 'Fabulous! Yeah, fabulous works, too!' Yeah, so I guess that my Chinese name means, 'fabulous Chinese person' or 'fabulous Chinaman', whatever you'd like to call it. (11/15)

Conferring with someone who had more linguistic insight was quite important for Sam's indentificatory process and led to a more suitable translation of his Chinese name as he felt more comfortable with being – or aspiring to be – fabulous than handsome. Meanings and identifications are thus always subject to negotiation and valuation, driven by personal feelings attached to a name. They are rigid designators dependent on context.

The contexts of most importance for the tensions analysed in this study are transcultural social spaces. How names and identities are negotiated within these environments and how situational use is calculated in relation to social space will be explored in the following.

7.4.4 'I'm All Those Things at Once': Multiple Names and Identities in Transcultural Worlds

The fact that the Chinese name is of significant, albeit often hidden, value to most of my interviewees, is not to say that non-Chinese names are not important at all. Sam, who has two official names and is aware of how he would be perceived differently with one or the other, acknowledged in the interview that having an English name is considered a 'status symbol in the world hierarchy' (11/15). Mei-lian even went as far as to call it 'a sense of vanity; it's even a sort of symbol that you actually speak English because you have an English name but actually that's not really the case' (09/15). In Mei-lian's eyes, the English name serves as a marker for language skills that one wishes to portray by way of carrying a language-specific name. In this regard, international names can be considered symbolic capital (Edwards 2006:97) as they signify the speaker's positions in social space and a sense of belonging.

This notion is not limited to non-Chinese names. Sam said that he uses his Chinese name as 'a way of saying, "I too am Chinese [...]", and it's kind of a way of saying, "I mean to be friendly", almost' (11/15). The Chinese name thus serves the purpose of marking his Chineseness and representing it in Chinese social spaces when necessary. Whenever Chineseness is not deemed necessary, mostly around non-Chinese speakers in transcultural social spaces, he introduces himself as Sam. Xueqing too explained to me that she will go by Cindy in situations where no other Chinese person is present but by Xueqing *and* Cindy whenever she finds herself in a mixed environment of both Chinese and non-Chinese people. This contingent use of names 'depends on the situation' (Xueqing, 11/15).

Moreover, identification with a name might also change in accordance with new positional arrangements in social space. Mei-lian said, for example, that 'how you identify with names is actually largely associated with the society, the community you are interacting with' (09/15). However, the cultural aspects of those communities do not necessarily determine individual identification. Accordingly, Mei-lian recounted the identificatory journey she made from the moment she learned English to the time of our interview, saying that she identified with her English name and her Russian name in early language-learning contexts. However, there was a clear break in her story, marked by a shift to transcultural social spaces: 'And then I went abroad. I would say, actually, it's my experience abroad that [made me] really identify with my Chinese name.' (09/15) Again,

the paradox of differentiation in transcultural environments, rather than unification (see 3.2), can be observed here, since Mei-lian started identifying with her Chinese name in a *non*-Chinese environment.

Therefore, we need to keep in mind that identification is largely unpredictable. It might follow certain patterns but is, ultimately, a personal and social process for which we cannot lay out a basic structure. In this regard, using names and representing identities in social spaces through those names is highly ambiguous – for an outside observer and the name bearer themselves. In a very significant interview passage, Sam essentially illustrated what putting a name to his identities in transcultural space felt like:

> S: In the English-speaking world or Europe, I'm very quick to say that I'm American. It's a very conscious choice and I get this; I understand that I'm lying to a degree. [...] It's often just very hasslesome to say that I'm Malaysian Chinese American and explaining exactly how I was born and usually when... even when I do that sort of spiel, at the end, [they're] just kind of like, 'So you're *basically* x?' I don't know anything about 'basically' but I'm all those things at once. I'm like the trinity, just less cool, yeah.

> F: Okay, and when you say 'lying', do you mean to yourself or to others?

> S: Oh, definitely to others. I'm very aware that I don't really know what I am. Everyone else likes names, and I like names too, I'll be the first to admit it. So I give them the name that probably allows for the most communication and the most sense of recognition, you know? (11/15)

Sam's words in this passage were quite significant to my understanding of identification and use of names because they showed the ambiguity of identification and other people's need to break this ambiguity down to a simpler category. Any of his respective category choices seems to instantly turn him into a liar, though Sam has no doubt in his mind that he is lying to others, not to himself. Not knowing who he is constitutes an important part of his identity. For Sam, there is no 'basically'. He is everything 'at once', highlighting the multiplicity of names and identities that can exist within one person. It is not a question of salient identities but of a combination of identities.

To cope with this multidimensionality, Sam picks names (and identities) very contingently, trying to aim for the one that will ensure 'the most communication and the most sense of recognition'. The latter is especially important because it implies a shared – or maybe imagined – denominator. Using a name then becomes a process of trying to give people something to recognise. Evidently, showing Chineseness, language skills, sameness, difference, memorability, uniqueness, creativity and, simply, one's identity through a name is possible, though highly sensitive in regards to the dynamics of transcultural social space.

8. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I presented a study on the intersection of migration, identification and naming practices, using a combination of anthropological frameworks to discuss how overseas Chinese students negotiate their names and identities contingently in transcultural social spaces. I highlighted the multiplicity of layers that coat each specific decision to show how agentic and reasoned the choices are. The data suggests a continuous discursive evaluation of social situations, transcultural expectations and personal preferences. Chineseness and inherently Chinese naming practices are important in shaping name-associated identities and are represented not only in Chinese names but in additionally given or chosen non-Chinese names as well.

When I presented some early results of my research at an anthropological student conference in spring 2016, an audience member asked if one could conclude that there were two emerging trends in Chinese international naming – those who had an international name and thus expressed a wish to not be perceived as Chinese and those who refused to bear an international alias, claiming their Chineseness by way of the name. The idea of an inherent dichotomy is quite reminiscent of the previously refuted duality of 'acculturation' versus 'ethnic closure' suggested by Gerhards and Hans (2008:466–467; see 4.3.2), as it suggests that one can either embrace their Chineseness or distance oneself from it through claiming a more non-culturally specific identity. To put it bluntly, I would fail my gathered research material if this was the notion I conveyed in my analysis.

Firstly, the findings suggest anything *but* a dichotomy, instead showing remarkably complex negotiations and identifications taking place whenever a name choice is made. While it is true that some Chinese students refuse to use any other name than their Chinese one and that others willingly adopt a non-Chinese name, none of these general decisions are necessarily final. Qián, for example, was adamant to not use any additional name abroad but complied when her Chinese employers asked her to provide them with an English name. Others, like Mei-lian and Huimin, are very assertive in their preference of their Chinese name. On the other hand, some students tried having an international name but were unsuccessful in their attempts because it was not perceived as their 'real' name. For Siyang, this meant sticking with her Chinese name among most long-term acquaintances.

She still uses multiple international names for shorts encounters that require efficiency and pragmatism.

A whole other group of students I interviewed has both Chinese and non-Chinese official names, meaning that there is not necessarily a precedence of one over the other. This also holds true for those Chinese students with non-official, additional names who told me that either form of address was welcome. Some, like Coco and Xueqing, identify strongly with their international name while treasuring their Chinese names at the same time. Sam and Vivian use their English names in daily life but feel deeply connected to their Chinese names that are reserved for loved ones and close friends. In transcultural encounters, the choice is often made according to whether new acquaintances are *huárén* or not. Hence, naming and uses of names are an open-ended process, dependent on the situation and social space one is faced with, and constantly negotiable.

Secondly, several factors might contribute to a specific name choice, only one of them being the wish to show or to not show Chineseness. Reasons for the adoption or the use of an international name vis-à-vis a Chinese name or vice versa might include, for instance, convenience and efficiency of communication, avoidance of mispronunciation and miscommunication, as well as a wish to symbolise a certain asset or quality in a given situation. This list is hardly exhaustive. Reasons are diverse and usually highly dependent on discursively influenced expectations and wishes of both the person and their interlocutors in transcultural social space. One's awareness of said space, personal identification, agency, and certainly also a knowledge of relevant discourses – such as notions of 'real' and 'fake' names connected to discourses of discomfort, honesty, authenticity, professionality, postcolonialism, assertion, and so forth – are, among other contributing factors, what ultimately shapes the name choice, though it is, once again, not a decision written in stone. Thus, it is not possible to simplify these greatly nuanced choices by breaking them down into two categories.

Thirdly, and lastly, Chineseness is not necessarily absent when the Chinese name is. Examples have shown that international name choices follow very specific rules just like Chinese naming practices, resulting in a 'Chinafication' of non-Chinese names, such as picking a certain word for its lexical meaning and adopting it as one's name. Chinese international naming can be considered an act of translanguaging in this regard, as non-Chinese names and words are chosen in accordance with Chinese values and practices, rendering the name a matter of all constitutive language contexts. It cannot be fully understood in just one language.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the Chinese name does not simply vanish when international names are used. Names are used for different people in various social spaces, and Chinese names are likely to be valued for carrying feelings of shared Chineseness, belonging, closeness, respect or uniqueness.

Indeed, in many cases, uniqueness is a prevalent requirement for both Chinese and non-Chinese names, as having a singular name helps people remember the person behind it, might mark Chineseness and indicate creativity or a certain identificatory aspect of one's being. Whether a name is used for convenience or memorability, it helps creating, in Sam's words, 'a sense of recognition' by way of which names and identities are more easily navigated in transcultural social spaces.

Names are very important because it's the first *impression that people have of you. If you have a name different from others, then people can remember you very well.*

Huimin (09/15)

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