# Performing Asian Selves for the Teacher Other: Insights from Asian International Students' Autoethnographies

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*This article explores (re-)naming experiences of 41 Asian international students (AISs) framed in autoethnographic essays—one of the major assignments in a first-year multilingual composition in a US university. While the finding of the current study generally echoes earlier studies on the strong impact of teachers on Asian international students' (AISs') (re-) naming practice, the situated nature of autoethnography allows us to understand the different* *ways teacher behaviors affect students' naming choices. Using a reflexive thematic analysis approach, the study categorized teacher naming behaviors into three: authoritative, misguided, and sympathetic. Among all these three behaviors, it is worth noting that AISs encountered teacher authoritative behaviors more often than other two types of behaviors. The article ends with the pedagogical implications of the study.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

On June 21, 2020, the New York Times reported a naming incident in which a mathematics professor, Mathew Hubbard, emailed a Vietnamese college freshman, requiring her to "anglicize" her Vietnamese name because it "sounds like an insult in English" (Taylor & Morales, 2020, p. 1). Phuc Bui Diem Nguyen, who has an English name 'May' but intended to use her official Vietnamese name in college, replied that his suggestion sounded "discriminatory" and would file a complaint with the school Title IX office if he could not call her by her ethnic name. Rather than learning how to pronounce the Vietnamese name, Professor Hubbard insisted. He believed that her Vietnamese name sounded offensive in English—which he described as "my language— and proceeded to justify his request by emphasizing the need of a minority student to accommodate dominant/host culture: "If I lived in Vietnam and my name in your language sounded like Eat a D--, I would change it to avoid embarrassment" (Steinbuch, 2020, p. 1). Professor Hubbard eventually did apologize and was put on leave while the college investigated the case.

The incident described in the New York Times above represents one of naming discomforts faced by Asian International Students (AISs) mediated by classroom teachers. Kohli and Solórzano (2012), who studied teachers' naming mispronunciation

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in K-12 settings, consider teacher mispronunciation of ethnic names, either deliberate or unintentional, as a case of racial microaggression and can have a lasting impact on students' well-being and self-perceptions. They suggest teachers to "do our best to learn the names of our students, no matter how long it takes or how far it is outside our comfort zone" (p. 19). These suggestions seem to be made based on the assumption that teachers are adept at practicing and memorizing students' ethnic names. Unfortunately, this assumption is not entirely true. Studies on Chinese and Taiwanese (international) students clearly show that many AISs use English name because instructors cannot pronounce their ethnic name correctly (Chen, 2016; Diao, 2014; Edwards, 2006).

One of the findings of Kohili and Solórzano's (2012) study that merits further exploration is how teacher behaviors affect students' naming choices. Regrettably, to my knowledge, studies focusing on teachers' naming behavior are very limited. These limited studies found that AISs' use English names to form a positive relationship with teachers (Edwards, 2006) and to avoid unnecessary humiliation due to teacher's mispronunciation (Chen, 2016; Diao, 2014). In light of this gap, the present study will contribute to the effect of teacher naming behavior by studying naming incidents written in 41 Namestory essays—an argumentative essay assigned in in first year L2 composition classes. It aims to address the research question: How does teacher classroom behavior affect AISs' naming choices as constructed in Namestory essays? 'Teacher classroom behavior' here refers to any prompting that teachers do to assign or suggest a particular name. In the next section, I will review existing literature on how classroom teachers affect students' naming choices.

## 2. THE ROLE OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS IN EXISTING (RE-)NAMING STUDIES

Existing studies on AISs' renaming choices have pointed out the significant role of classroom teacher behaviors. However, currently, there are only a handful of studies focusing on the ways (classroom) teacher behaviors affect students' renaming choices. Early studies on Chinese students' naming choices show the correlation between English names and English learning.

Although teachers have recently been encouraged to be more inclusive and value students' ethnic names, other studies present a more complicated picture. These studies found that teacher's English name prompting was believed to be a good practice since it aids classroom interaction and avoids humiliation for both students and teachers (Burke, 2001). Teachers can identify students through their English names easily, and students can also easily recognize when a teacher calls them. Additionally, Li (1997) and Edwards (2006) explain that expecting students to have an English name is a familiar practice since having multiple names is a part of Chinese culture. Li further explains that in Chinese culture, renaming is a way to mark "different stages of [a person's] life" (p. 500). Studies by Edwards (2006), Chen (2016) and Wang (2009) show the close

correlation between English name and English learning. Some students in Chen's study (2016) even insisted teachers require students to have an English name to accelerate students' acculturation process to the English learning environment. These students even strongly believed that teachers who insisted on calling their birth names as wrong and inappropriate.

In addition to preserving a familiar cultural practice, some students perceive English renaming as providing them with a space to recreate and "refashion" (McPherron, 2009, p. 526) identities and projecting transnational mobility (Diao, 2014). Students in McPherron's (2009) and Wang's (2009) studies, for example, were excited when asked to choose an English name. Yet rather than opting for conventional English names, they preferred (English) names that were personal, unique, or creative, reflecting identities meaningful to them.

When requiring students to have an English name, several studies caution teachers not to appropriate students' English naming choices since it might have negative effects on students' sense of identity. Edwards (2006) cited an example of a female student who was asked to choose an English name by an American male teacher in China. She chose 'Helen', but the teacher disapproved because it reminded him "of Helen of Troy who was very beautiful, and since she was not beautiful, it would be inappropriate for her to have the name Helen" (p. 95). Then, he suggested the name 'Ellen', and that was the name she used. It is unclear from Edwards' study if the incident of Ellen is common or an isolated one, but Edwards rightly asserts this practice is "disturbing" (p. 95).If the teacher in Edwards' study appropriates the student's English name to her physical attribute, 'appropriation' can also mean 'correcting' students' chosen (creative) English name so it resembles mainstream Western names. Several students in McPherrons' study (2009) strongly advise against this. Rather, teachers need to take students'(creative) English names "seriously" (p. 527) before attempting to correct or adjust it to their ideas of appropriate English names. Even initiating discussion on students' non-mainstream, unique, and/or playful English names might be discouraging and even silence "the types of creativity and re-appropriations of English" that critical approaches to learning often seek to encourage as well as shame the kind of identities students would like to project.

The studies reviewed in this section agree on the significant role classroom teachers play in students' naming choices. While studies on teachers' naming behaviors in K-12 settings seem to encourage teachers to refer to students by their ethnic names, studies on international students' renaming practices seem to paint a somewhat different picture. These studies seem to agree that teacher English name prompting is not necessarily negative for several reasons. First, it reinforces familiar cultural practice in Chinese cultures where people tend to have multiple names throughout their lives. Second, many studies illustrate that having an English name assists student learning. However, despite the benefits of having an English name, students appreciate teachers

who give them agency when choosing an English name even if these English names do not align to traditional English naming conventions.

# 3. METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Participants

The study analyzes 41 autoethnographic writing, which I called 'Namestory', collected from three sections of ENG 109—a first-year L2 composition. ENG 109 is a four-credit course and designed specifically for international students. The data for the current study was collected in the Fall of 2018 where I, the researcher, was also the instructor. The university is a mid-size public university located in Ohio, USA. In the current study, all the participants were F-1 visa holders from China and Vietnam and had intermediate to advanced English proficiency. The majority of the participants (39 students) were from China and two were from Vietnam.

## 3.2 The Namestory Assignment

The Namestory assignment was the first major assignment (MAs) where students analyzed their naming choices in the US as a rhetorical act in a 500–750-word essay. Students were given three weeks to complete the assignment. Similar to other MAs, the Namestory assignment approached writing as a process, so they received feedback on their drafts from peers and the class instructor before submitting the final draft.

Generally, the Namestory assignment is modeled after autoethnographic research which places the researcher as the object and subject of research (Adams et al., 2015, p. 9). In the second language writing classroom, Canagarajah (2012) asserts that autoethnography can also be a writing tool to understand the literary practices and language learning experiences of multilingual student writers.

Since autoethnography might be a genre that many students are unfamiliar with (Canagarajah, 2012), I provided a common guiding question: Which name(s) should international students use when studying in the US? Students are expected to produce a two-paragraph essay. In the first paragraph, they retold the incident in narrative form describing the contextual details, conflict, and resolution. Then, they analyzed it by identifying the reason why such an incident happens and if there is anything they could do differently.

## 3.3 Researcher Positionality

My interest in the topic is a personal one. It is originated from the experience of my mother, a Chinese Indonesian, who was 'forced' to change her Chinese name due to the assimilation policies of Soeharto's 1966-1998 reign (Bailey & Lie, 2013). Changing her Chinese name "The Bwee Hwa" to an Indonesian name of a similar meaning "Rosiana" did not come easy for her. She often shared with me the difficult process of selecting an Indonesian-sounding name and then, trying to 'fit' herself with the name. She also needed to create a new signature with the new name and practice it. When she showed me her signature, I remembered not liking it because it was so simple and easy to falsify. She said she did not care since it was not hers anyway. Although publicly she was 'Rosiana', she was 'The Bwee Hwa' to her families and relatives. My father still called her by her Chinese name until the day she passed away.

My mother's experience of changing names is an example of how renaming oneself to align oneself to the authority figure can be an act of silent resistance (Bailey & Lie, 2013). Therefore, when I began teaching in the US, I was struck by how seemingly easy my students traded their ethnic names for English names. I was curious to explore how the process of changing names for them and most importantly, how the authority figure—the classroom teachers—affect their naming choices. Driven by my curiosity, I developed a unit focusing on the common writing theme 'multilingual students and naming' which was the impetus for the current study.

To provide a safe space for students to explore their naming positions, I did not articulate my position when I introduced the Namestory assignment. Rather, I told them that I was more interested in how students framed evidence to support their claims. When giving feedback to students' drafts, I was also careful not to indicate that I preferred one claim over another. I remember continuingly reminding myself of my position as a writing teacher and of the need to craft my feedback on the way students used rhetorical moves to support their claims, rather than personally criticizing their positions.

My interest in the current research topic is based on the intersection between my mother's and my international students' lived experiences. Both of them are similar in the way they use renaming as a strategy to survive, resist, or even, 'please' an authority figure. My mother took an Indonesian name to survive the Soeharto's regime while AISs choose an English name so teachers can identify them easier and therefore, aid their learning. By embarking on the current research project, I intended to understand how I can better accommodate AISs' (re-)naming practice so they can feel more welcome in my classroom.

## 3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Upon obtaining IRB approval, I distributed a consent form to students in the three sections of ENG 109 in Fall 2018 to obtain permission to use their Namestory assignments for the current study. This permission includes the use of their chosen other (English) names, but their real names were represented with pseudonyms. Out of 55 students, 48 gave their consent to use their assignments. Of these 48, only 41 mentioned teacher figures affecting their naming practice, so I focused on this data set. In analyzing the 41 Namestory essays, I drew on reflexive thematic analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Braun and Clarke explain that reflexive TA differs from other versions of TA in that it focuses on the "subjective, situated, aware and questioning" (p. 46) nature of the researcher.

I began the process by reading and rereading students' writing to develop themes. I focused closely on students' narratives on how they perceived teachers' responses, initiations, and/or behaviors toward their naming choices. In reading these incidents, I specifically paid attention to the way students constructed the incident: the manner in which teachers initiated the (re)naming choice, any reasons mentioned, the articulation by the teacher, students' responses to teacher naming-initiation, the (emotional and cognitive) dilemma they felt, and their interpretation of the incident. The process resulted in three emerging themes referring to teacher behaviors which are authoritative teacher behaviors (ATBs), misguided teacher behaviors (MTBs), and sympathetic teacher behaviors (STBs). In analyzing these themes, I focus on interrogating and unpacking students' narrative construction to explore how teacher behaviors affecting their naming choices. Since the research follows a reflexive TA approach, it is important to note that the data analysis presented below is one—and not the only one—version of reading the data set.

## 4. FINDINGS

From analyzing 41 students' Namestory assignments, the study found three types of classroom teacher naming behaviors: 1) Authoritative Teacher Behaviors (ATBs); 2) Misguided Teacher Behaviors (MTBs); and 3) Sympathetic Teacher Behaviors (STBs). Figure 1 below describes the breakdown in the percentage of each type of teacher behaviors. It is important to note that the names I attach to these types of teachers refer to their behaviors as constructed in students' narratives in that particular time and place. It should not be understood as referring to teachers' general states.

*Table 1*. Teacher Naming Behaviors

| Category | Number | Percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ATBs | 21 | 51.2% |
| MTBs | 17 | 41.5% |
| STBs | 3 | 7.3% |
| Total: | 41 | |

In the paragraphs below, I discuss each type of teacher's behaviors to understand how students' constructions of these types of teachers' behaviors affect their naming choices.

## 4.1 Authoritative Teacher Behaviors (ATBs)

In this study, teacher behaviors are classified as authoritative when they require, assign, and suggest AISs to use an English name. More than half of the participants received their English names authoritatively from a teacher, a practice that Harris (2016) describes as a common "classroom baptism" in China educational settings.

It is interesting to note that many students were not resistant to teacher English-name prompting. Jiaming and Aaron, for example, believed that having an English name would help them to learn English better. Jiaming wrote that after having an English name 'Andy', his relationship with the teacher improved and became more meaningful. The teacher often initiated conversation inside as well as outside the classroom which helped Jiaming to practice and be more comfortable speaking English. Because of this, Jiaming believed that "a correct name can bring people closer."

Not all students were as supportive of teacher's English name prompting as Jiaming and Aaron. Some students used English names only after they found out that their ethnic names were unpalatable. Zhou initially used a Chinese name but when teachers and peers were unable to pronounce it even after he taught them repeatedly, he had to revert to the English name he used in kindergarten. Zhou realized that when his teacher was unable to recall his Chinese name, it hindered his intention to be an active learner. In his own words:

> I want teachers to ask me questions in class because it helps me to learn. To accomplish that, I need to have an easier [English] name first. If my name is so complicated, they [teachers] would ignore me and ask someone else.

Zhou's words reinforce Jiaming's experience mentioned earlier of the correlation between a palatable name and learning. Unlike Jiaming, who readily used an English name, Zhou was initially reluctant to do so until he learned how his insistence to use a Chinese name actually might inhibit his learning. He often noticed that teachers tended

to ignore calling students with difficult names, resulting in fewer opportunities to practice English and receive feedback.

Although many students did not seem to mind teachers' English name prompting, the issue students faced when accommodating ATBs need to be critically discussed. For students who were asked to find their own English names, the process to find the best-fit English name is not as easy as these teachers might think. The first issue is the lack of knowledge of appropriate English names. When asked to find an English name, Ying, for example, described the process as making her feel lost and frustrated:

> After our high school teacher gave us the task of getting a new English name, ... I
> started searching on the internet concerning the 'recommended names for girls' or
> 'how to show your elegance by name', .... However, hundreds and thousands of names
> just messed me up and I felt lost in the 'name ocean'. Then I ran into a webpage with
> the name of Sabrina, my first intuition told me that this name is the perfect fit.

Ying's narrative might clearly show the discrepancy between teachers' naming intention and students' uptake. While teachers might want students to have an English name so these names can assist them in learning, they often overlook the significant time and effort it requires for students to select an appropriate name, as demonstrated by Ying's experience.

Other students were not as lucky as Ying, who eventually was able to find a fitted English name. For a few students finding an 'appropriate' English name was a never-ending process. Nhi, an AIS from Vietnam, was one of them. Nhi was happy when she learned English because she saw it as an opportunity to replace her ethnic name that she disliked.  Like many AISs, she received multiple teacher-assigned English names. She received her first English 'Nancy' from a Vietnamese English teacher. However, she soon hated it. Her uncle often teased her because it was also the name of a dirty public market in the town. So, she dropped the name immediately. She did not feel the need to have an English name until middle school when a foreign English teacher expected every student to have an English name. Since she had no intention of using 'Nancy' again, she asked the teacher to select one for her. He chose "Mickey" for her. Nhi hated the name since it was "ridiculous" and "childish" but still used it out of respect for the teacher. When she was in high school, she decided to choose another English name. She chose "Weiss" based on the name of her favorite anime character. Peers often teased and giggled when the teacher called her "Weiss" because of its similar pronunciation with the word "Wise". Because of that, she never voluntarily answered teacher questions. Her self-chosen English name made her a silent student and 'invisible' because she did not want to subject herself to peers' negative remarks.

From this section, we learn the multiple effects of ATBs. Generally, students do not seem to mind when teachers suggest them to use an English name since many believed that having an English name can assist them in learning English. However, not all students used English names voluntarily. Some decided to use English names only as a last resort because their ethnic names are unpalatable and therefore, hinders their

learning. Although students do not generally show resistance toward English names, it is important for teachers not to insist on having English names. The narratives of Ying and Nhi show that finding a fitted English name is not an easy process for some.

## 4.2 Misguided Teacher Behaviors (MTBs)

The second type of teacher behaviors mediating AISs' naming choices is what I termed as 'Misguided Teacher Behaviors' or MTBs, for short. Based on the Namestory assignments, teacher show a misguided behavior in two ways. First, they insist on pronouncing students' ethnic names even though they could not pronounce it effectively. This behavior is frequently observed during roll calls. Ying and Guo, for example, were marked absent because they did not identify themselves as they could not recognize when their teachers (mis-) pronounced their Chinese names. A few students—such as Yujie—could recognize teachers' (mis-) pronunciation of her ethnic name. However, the (mis-) pronounced was so distinctively off that it made her feel "very embarrassed and my face blushed with shame." Sun, who intended to use his ethnic name "Sun" in his first year of college, quickly decided to revert to his English name "Tom" because his lecturer "Dr. D" mispronounced his Chinese name as "Son". As a result, each time Dr. D called him, several of his peers chuckled. According to Wang's (2009) study, the way non-Chinese speaker teachers insisted on (mis-)pronouncing students' Chinese names are often the reason why many Chinese students preferred their teachers to call them by their English names (McPherron, 2009, Chen, 2016).

The second reason a teacher can appear misguided is when they act as the 'gatekeeper' of English names. This happened to several students. For instance, when introducing herself by her English name 'Ester,' her teacher fleetingly remarked that the name was old-fashioned. Although she did not ask Ester to choose another name, Ester took it upon herself to find a more 'modern' English name and spent a considerable amount of time to do so. Shary was assigned an English name 'Sherry' by her physics teacher because the English name she chose was "a non-existent English word." Zhang's Namestory is the only one which describes the prolonged psychological effect of a teacher's questioning student's self-chosen English name. He described an incident during the first semester in the current university—two years before he participated in the current study. This happened during a student introduction activity on the first day of mathematics class. When it came to his turn, Zhang wrote the event as the following:

"Hello everyone, my English name is Kylin, I come from China."

"What is your name? Can you repeat that again?" Dr. J asked.

"Kylin." I said. The professor still didn't understand.

"Kylin? Can you explain this name to us?" the professor asked. At that time, I feel really nervous. I don't know how to explain that. I just said, "A kind of god animal."

"Animal? Are you sure you want me to call you this?" the professor feels very surprised about this.

I used this name for a whole semester… even though our professor can't pronounce my name in the right way.

The incident Zhang described clearly illustrates how Dr. J unknowingly acted as the guardian of English names. Zhang's choice of the uncommon English name 'Kylin' might have been an effort to assimilate and fit into the classroom community. However, Dr. J's seemingly benign act of questioning his English name might cast an unwanted light that Zhang tried not to put himself into. This incident might be an epitome of the power struggle AISs' may face when choosing a non-mainstream English name in a classroom setting. Similar to participants in Harris' (2016) study, Zhang's English name 'Kylin' has created "a condition of heteroglossia" (Bakhtin, 1986) where centrifugal and centripetal forces are colliding. In language use, 'centripetal forces' regulate usage to follow established norms or rules whereas 'centrifugal forces' focus on the creation of new words or genre (Bakhtin, 1981) that differ from the norm. I understood Zhang's utilization of 'Kylin'—one of the most revered fictitious animals of ancient China and a symbol of a good fortune—as another name so he could still 'stand out' among the seas of people with English names. However, Dr. J perceived 'Kylin' as not being a 'proper' English name and felt the need to question it.

## 4.3 Sympathetic Teacher Behaviors (STBs)

Last but not least, is Sympathetic Teacher Behaviors or STBs, for short. Unlike the ATBs who assigned or suggested a particular name, STBs did not suggest any name but instead, they are supportive of students' naming choices. Among the 41 participants, only three students encountered STBs. Haoyang, for example, did not feel the need to search for an English name because during the first week in college, he met a professor who was not only able to pronounce his Chinese name but make the effort to articulate that his Chinese name was "easy to pronounce". Other students, Boyu and Zijie, coincidentally ran into STBs when they have to use their Chinese name because their English names were unfitted. When attending high school in the US, Boyu used his English name 'Jack'—a name that was chosen by his Kindergarten teacher. He soon found out that there was another 'Jack' in the class, so he has no other choice than using his Chinese name 'Boyu.' He was surprised when his high school English teacher Ms. Peterson was able to pronounce it "almost perfectly" and even said that his ethnic name was a very easy name. Ms. Peterson's ability to pronounce his name coupled with her explicit affirmation of the easiness of his ethnic name is the reason why Boyu continued using his cultural name in the US.

The role of teacher's affirmation of the students' continued use of ethnic names is also evident in Zijie's experience. Zijie dropped his English name 'Teemo'—a cartoon character from a popular video game League of Legends—when his Chinese high school

peers began to ridicule him. When he nominated himself to answer teacher's question, his peers often said, "Captain Teemo on Duty!" He, then, dropped the name and searched for "cool American names" on Google, where "Wilson," "Aaron," and "Michael" were the top three suggestions. He did not want to have a common White name, so he decided to use his Chinese name while looking for a more suitable English name. It was during this time that he run into Professor D that thought his Chinese name was "very wonderful", and "easy to remember." Because of Professor D's remarks, Zijie has been using his Chinese name ever since.

Among the three types of teacher behaviors, STBs appear to be the most favorable, yet they are the least common among the teachers encountered by students in this study. From students' Namestory assignments, teachers can be supportive to students' naming choices when they are able to appropriately pronounce students' birth name and explicitly mention how easy their name is for them to pronounce.

# 5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of the current study is to explore the role of teachers in 41 Asian International Students (AISs) (re-)naming practices documented in a Namestory assignment—the first major assignment in an ESL composition class in the US. The Namestory assignment is an autoethnography account where students reflected on one critical incident leading to their current naming choice. While the finding of the current study generally echoes earlier studies on the strong impact of classroom teachers to AISs' (re-)naming practice (see, for example, Chen, 2016; Edwards, 2006; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012), the situated nature of autoethnography allows us to gain more contextual perspective on the impact of English teacher naming behaviors toward AISs naming choices.

Data collected from 41 Namestory assignments found three types of teachers' behaviors affecting students' naming choices: authoritative teacher behaviors (ATBs), misguided teacher behaviors (MTBs), and sympathetic teachers' behaviors (STBs). From the Namestory assignments, most teachers behaved authoritatively when it comes to students' naming choices. Different from earlier studies by Edwards (2006) and Harris (2016), the findings of the current study generally support the findings of Chen's (2016) and McPherron's (2009) studies where many participants appear to support the need to have an English name to facilitate their English learning. Namestories of Aaron, Jiaming, and Zhou, for example, illustrated that after adopting an English name, they were able to build a more productive relationship with their teachers.

However, it is worth noting that different from Chen's participants who collectively preferred teachers to assign an English name, students' Namestory essays show little preference towards teacher's assigned English names. The Namestories of Nhi and Zhou underscore the psychological toll that students have to bear when being assigned with a

non-favorable English name. It is crucial to point out here that the fact Nhi and Zhou did not openly resist and challenge teachers renaming prompting might indicate that students understand and believed the importance of having an English name as a "contextualized self" (Walsh, 2002, p. 103) when learning English and studying abroad.

While many students in the current study do not show overt resistance to teachers' English name prompting, this does not mean that teachers need to start actively suggesting or mandating and/or require students to use a self-assigned English name. Different from studies by Wang (2009) and McPherron (2009) whose participants seemed to show enthusiasm when selecting an English name, the handful of students' Namestories construct a completely different picture. These narratives illustrate multiple struggles students went through when searching for a 'fitted' English name such as the case Nhi and Ying. As a result, it might lead to an unintended and long-lasting psychological impact if students cannot find a 'fitted' English name quickly.

If student Namestory essays describe ATBs as preferable, seventeen students (41%) who encountered MTBs believed that these kinds of teacher behaviors pedagogically disadvantaged them. In addition to insisting on pronouncing students' ethnic names, teachers can appear misguided when they act as a gatekeeper of English names. The case of Zhang's who chose an English name 'Kylin,' for example, clearly shows a misassumption of many English teachers' about AISs' English names. Dr. J questioned the origin of Zhang's English name with the assumption that Zhang's English name went through a well-thought and meaningful process which is not supported by many studies on AISs' English naming choices (Harris, 2016; McPherron, 2009; Wang, 2018). These studies show that some AISs can chose English names without the need to understand their etymological origin. Dr. J's question can also be interpreted as him exercising his gatekeeping attitude, attempting to appropriate and even, correct an (English) name that does not adhere to the common standard of English name convention. To this end, Harris (2016) warns teachers not to judge non-mainstream English names as "inauthentic" and "unusual" (p. 2). McPherron (2009) went a step further and pointed out the need for teachers to take students' English name who might be non-traditional, nonmainstream, 'funny', creative and/or unique "seriously" (p. 527). Even a well-intended discussion or a question--such as the one asked by Dr. J in Zhang's incident-- "can often lead to misinterpretations and even the silencing of the types of creativity and re-appropriations" (p. 527) or ownership of English that many equitable pedagogies try to cultivate in English classrooms. Many AISs who choose non-mainstream English names might do so to separate themselves from domestic students and/or foreground an "assimilationist intent" (Harris, 2016, p. 2) and recreating their identities (McPherron, 2009).

Finally, and perhaps, the most favorable teachers are STBs. This is when teachers show explicit support toward students' ethnic names. 'Explicit supports' here meant not only they were able to pronounce students' ethnic names but also gave a verbal validation of how easy their names were. It is interesting to note that the three students who ran into

STBs initially did not have the intention to use their ethnic names. They were in a between English name phase—a common phase where either their previous English names do not fit them, or cause peers' ridicule and they have not found a new/fitted English. When they were in this phase, they had no choice but to use their ethnic names and this was when they met a STB. For these students, the way these STBs were able to pronounce their ethnic names and provided verbal validation helped them to end the process of finding an appropriate name to be used in the US.

Since STBs are constructed as the type of teacher behavior that is most favorable, should instructors begin to pronounce their ethnic names and then, say how easy their names are like Ms. Peterson in Boyu's Namestory or say how their names are easy to recall like Professor D in Zijie's Namestory? If this is how you truly feel, most certainly. However, teachers who teach AISs--me included—know first-hand that we cannot exude a sympathetic behavior for all AISs' ethnic names. Some ethnic names might be easy for us and others might not and that is expected. Although students in the current study appear to favor a STB, it does not mean that we should insist on calling students by their ethnic names if that is not their preferred name.

When I initiated the study, I was hoping the study would result in best practices that will give teachers—like me—ways to navigate AISs with unfamiliar names. However, after completing the data analysis for the current article, I have come to realize that AISs' naming practices are far more nuanced and complex than I originally thought. Offering best practice strategies in fact will only overshadow the complexity of students' naming choice and disregard the contextual factors affecting students' naming choices. What all these Namestories have in common is students want teachers to respect their agency in (re-)naming themselves–be it ethnic names, uncommon, non-traditional/mainstream, 'funny' or unique English names, or even, other (non-English) names. I feel this is another more feasible way of exuding sympathetic teacher behavior.

Studies by McPherron (2009) and Wang (2009) clearly highlight that students expect their teachers to respect their chosen preferred name and see these names as their names (Wang, 2009) and not questioning the legitimacy of their naming choices. From reading students' Namestories, I also learn how little attention has been given to raise awareness to the complexity AISs' naming practice. Therefore, it might be useful to consider holding professional development opportunities for teachers where they can reflect on how they respond to students with unfamiliar names. These workshops can also invite international students to share their renaming experiences so teachers can navigate their naming behaviors based on these Namestories.

The findings are not intended to be objective and generalizable as in many qualitative methods. It is important to understand that these selected stories are not representative of all AISs because (re-)naming are highly contextualized (McPherron, 2009) and an embodiment of these students evolving identities (Harris, 2016; McPherron, 2009; Chen, 2016). However, I hope these Namestories raise teachers' awareness of the way their behaviors and verbal comments strongly influence students' naming choices, the

way they see themselves as a learner and their learning. Given that students' Namestories in the study is a writing assignment with a word limit of 500-750 words, a longer Namestory assignment might allow students to share richer and more personal stories related to naming that might give better understanding about AISs' renaming issues.

## THE AUTHOR

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