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# Ethnic Name-Changing Among Mandarin-Speaking Music Therapists in the United States and Its Influence on Their Identity: A Literature Review

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**Ethnic Name-Changing Among Mandarin-Speaking Music Therapists in the United States**

**and Its Influence on Their Identity: A Literature Review**

Capstone Thesis

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**Abstract**

This capstone thesis uses available literature to explore the ethnic name-changing and its impact on the identity of Mandarin-speaking music therapists in the United States. Eight themes are explored in this literature review: (1) the distinction of Mandarin Chinese; (2) the relationship between names and selves; (3) Chinese naming practices; (4) the practice of name-changing among Mandarin speakers in the United States; (5) the reasons behind Mandarin speakers adopting English names; (6) cross-cultural adaptation; (7) cultural adaptation of foreign music therapists in the United States; and (8) the significance of music therapist's identity exploration. This literature review highlights the importance of self-awareness of identity and cultural adaptation for Mandarin-speaking music therapists in the United States. It also emphasizes the need for further research on this under-explored topic. By shedding light on the ethnic name-changing practice among Mandarin-speaking music therapists in the United States, this thesis aims to contribute to multiculturalism and advocate for diverse voices and perspectives in the field of music therapy.

*Keywords*: ethnic name-changing, Mandarin speakers, music therapy, identity, cultural adaption

*Author Identity Statement: The author was born and raised in Taiwan and identifies as Taiwanese. She has been living in Massachusetts since 2021.*

**Ethnic Name-Changing Among Mandarin-Speaking Music Therapists in the United States**

**and Its Influence on Their Identity: A Literature Review**

In the animated movie *Spirited Away*, directed by Miyazaki Hayao (2001), the main character, Chihiro, accidentally enters a spirit world where her real name is taken away and replaced by another name, Sen. As a result of losing her real name, she forgets who she is and loses her way home. In the story *The Little Mermaid*, the mermaid princess Ariel is fascinated by the human world. Thus, she trades one of her most vital things, her voice, for human legs to explore the human world (Andersen & Hague, 1993). As a music therapist in training, born and raised in Taiwan, and currently residing in the United States, I find these two stories relatable to my experience in the United States since I arrived here in 2021: I feel that I have lost an important part of myself by changing my name in order to adapt to the American culture.

I have been using my ethnic name, which was transliterated into English phonetic spelling, since I arrived in the United States. However, I have faced numerous occasions where people find it challenging to pronounce my name with the proper tones and remember it accurately. Those situations have prompted me to determine whether to adopt an English name, as it seems to be a practical way for cultural adaption. However, one internal struggle is that replacing my real name with an English name conflicts with the values instilled in me during my training, which emphasize the importance of authenticity for music therapists.

Names are not merely labels. Instead, names reveal their bearers' information, including gender, cultural background, and even social class and family dynamics (Cheang, 2008; Quaglia et al., 2016). That is to say, when encountered by others, a name serves as a multifaceted communicator, providing subtle yet significant clues about the bearers' identity. Research has shown that individuals derive a significant amount of information from the name of an unknown

person (Laham et al., 2012; Quaglia et al., 2016). One example is the name-pronunciation effect, which suggests that names that are easier to pronounce are judged more positively than difficult-to-pronounce names (Laham et al., 2012). Moreover, research has shown the impact of an individual's name on forming their identity. For instance, when individuals perceive their name as befitting their personal image, it evokes a sense of pride. On the other hand, names that feel incongruent with individuals' identities may trigger emotions of anger, aggressiveness, or a sense of closure and inhibition in social relations (Quaglia et al., 2016).

I believe, like many others I interacted with, name-changing is a significant aspect of adapting to a new culture for some immigrants. A common trend observed among Mandarin-speaking individuals is adopting an English name upon immigrating to an English-dominant country (Chen, 2016; Fang & Fine, 2020). As Chen (2016) pointed out, adopting an English name serves as a way to prevent the mispronunciation of their ethnic names and to gain acceptance in the host culture, contributing to their socialization and identity development.

Other Mandarin speakers choose to transliterate their ethnic names instead of adopting an English name to preserve their identities, and I am one of these people. However, I sometimes feel detached from my transliterated name and that my identity has been lost during the Anglicization process. Mandarin names, chosen for their profound meanings carried by character distinctions and tonal nuances, lose much of their essence when transliterated into English spelling. With its distinct linguistic structure, English struggles to capture the richness of Mandarin names, resulting in a significant loss in pronunciation, meanings, and the written form of those names during the Anglicization process (Wu, 1999).

Reflecting on my personal dilemma with my name, I have raised the following question: How does the process of changing one's ethnic name affect a music therapist, a profession that

seems to place strong emphasis on essence and identity? While several researchers have explored the connections between name and identity, there is a notable gap in understanding how this practice impacts mental health clinicians, not to mention music therapists. In this literature review, I will explore the relationship between name and identity, Chinese naming conventions, and the practice of adopting English names among Mandarin speakers when they face cultural adaptation. To fill the gap, I will also propose my own view of considerations that music therapists may face when navigating the intersection of name, identity, and cultural adaption.

## Literature Review

### Mandarin Chinese, the Musicality of Mandarin, and Mandarin Speakers

Mandarin Chinese is one the most spoken language worldwide, with about 955 million people in the world speaking Mandarin as their native language ("Chinese - worldwide distribution," 2024). Mandarin Chinese is also widely spoken in the United States. U.S. Census Bureau's report revealed that about 3.5 million households speak Mandarin or Cantonese at home in the U.S. in 2019 (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022).

Mandarin is often deemed musical and melodic because of its tonal nature. Mandarin is a tonal language, where the pitch pattern of a word can change its meaning. Phonemically, Mandarin distinguishes four tones. Tone 1 has a high-level pitch, Tone 2 has a high-rising pitch, Tone 3 has a low-dipping pitch, and Tone 4 has a high-falling pitch. This phonemic pitch pattern adds a musical quality to the language itself, as different tones can convey different semantic distinctions (Chao, 1956).

Musicality can also be encompassed in Mandarin characters. Yang (2010) explored the spatial and musical elements of Chinese calligraphy and proposed that calligraphy can be seen as a form of "soundless music." Yang (2010) argued that the radical components of calligraphy, the

dots and lines, represent time and action, forces and movements, within a fundamentally spatial structure. A dot may be viewed as a beat, tempo, or pause, and the rhythm of a Chinese character is established by or between the dots. Consequently, the musicality in Mandarin characters in calligraphy can be understood through the interplay of visual elements that create a harmonious and rhythmic composition. The strokes and composition of characters contribute to a sense of flow and harmony, akin to musical notes in a piece of music. Additionally, the spatial arrangement of characters on the page can evoke a sense of musicality, similar to how musical notes are arranged to create a melody (Yang, 2010).

Mandarin is the official language of several countries and territories, including China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Macau. In China and Taiwan, it is the only official language, while Singapore lists it as one of the four official languages. In Hong Kong and Macau, it is co-official with Cantonese and English/Portuguese respectively ("Chinese - worldwide distribution," 2024). While there are Mandarin speakers in other countries and territories, for the purposes of this capstone thesis, "Mandarin speakers" will refer specifically to individuals from China and Taiwan who speak Mandarin. This definition excludes individuals from Singapore, Hong Kong, Macau, and other countries and territories, as their naming conventions may be influenced by multiple official languages.

**Names and Selves**

*Names: Identity*

Identity refers to an individual's perception of who or what the person is (Dion,1983). Identity encompasses various aspects such as culture, gender, sexuality, ideology, profession, etc (Chen, 2021). A name, as a unique label that allows people to recognize and remember one another, has been widely acknowledged for its significance in constructing one's identity

(Quaglia et al., 2016; Zhao & Biernat, 2018). As pointed out by Quaglia et al. (2016), when children learn their own names, they start identifying themselves as "I". The name becomes an integral part of the self, representing the immutable part distinguishing an individual from others. Similarly, Edwards (2006) suggested that individuals' names represent who they are in relation to the world around them and reflect their identity, which is fluid and bound up with interpersonal interactions with others.

Apart from being a distinctive label, a name provides additional information regarding the bearer's various aspects of identity. For instance, names often convey the gender of their bearers. English names such as Amy, Emily, and Mary are usually given to females, while Mark, Ken, and John are given to males (Cheang, 2008). In Mandarin, the written version of given names can indicate gender identification. For example, names that include characters associated with physical strength, such as 强 qiáng (strong), 健 jiàn (healthy), and 力 lì (strength), are usually male-identifying. On the other hand, names that include characters associated with the woman radical 女, such as 娜 nà (graceful), 妍 yán (beautiful), and 姝 shū (beautiful), are generally female-identifying (Van De Weijer et al., 2020).

Moreover, names can be highly cultural-specific, as they can reveal the owners' cultural background. For example, people may assume a person's Portuguese background by their name Sidonior. A transliteration name like Ming-fai may reveal the owner's Chinese cultural background (Cheang, 2008).

### *Names: Impression Formation and Evaluation*

Since a name carries and activates a rich set of information regarding its owner, one's name influences the bearer's impression formation and evaluation from others (Laham et al., 2012). One hypothesis related to this is the name-pronunciation effect, which suggests that

people with easier-to-pronounce names are more likely to receive favorable evaluations than those with difficult-to-pronounce names. To test this hypothesis, Laham et al. (2012) conducted five studies, each with increasing levels of information content, in both laboratory and real-world settings. In the first study, the researchers selected 50 surnames from five different nationalities and asked the participants to rate them based on fluency, unusualness, and liking. The second study involved a mock ballot to see if name pronunciation ease would influence voting preferences for candidates. The third study expanded on this by including more decision-relevant information about the target names. The fourth study manipulated the group status of the names to see if the name-pronunciation effect would still hold true in out-group conditions. Finally, the fifth study explored the effect in the real world, investigating if people with easier-to-pronounce surnames occupy higher-status positions in American law firms. Not surprisingly, all five studies confirmed the hypothesis of the name-pronunciation effect, suggesting that a name's ease of pronunciation can have a significant impact on how others perceive and evaluate its bearer, even when other information is available.

Nick (2017) conducted a small-scale, mixed-method investigation in German to explore whether name-based biases affect teachers' reactions to students' school achievement. The investigation involved two experiments. For the first experiment, Nick (2017) acquired a school essay that had been awarded, written by a monolingual German-speaking 11th-grade student. Nick (2017) then replaced the student's name with three different names and sent the essays to German public-school teachers who had volunteered to participate in the research. The essays were almost identical, with the only difference being the first names of the students. The participants were then asked to grade the essays and provide a brief explanation for their assessments. For the second experiment, Nick (2017) expanded the set of personal names to

include both male and female genders. The teacher trainees who participated in this experiment were asked to provide grades and commentary on the essay, as well as indicate the writer's nationality, age, and gender. They were also asked to write the name of the essay writer on the answer sheets provided to ensure they paid attention to the writer's name. Both experiments revealed that school teachers and trainees demonstrate covert name biases towards names that are ethnically marked. Although the small size and the regional restriction of the samples in this study are acknowledged, Nick's (2017) research underscores the significant role that a name plays in shaping other people's impressions and evaluations of its owner.

### *Names: Self-Esteem*

Self-esteem refers to an individual's evaluation or perception of their overall liking or disliking towards themselves (Dion, 1983). As suggested by Dion (1983), since one's name is closely related to one's self, it can be expected that the liking for one's own name is tied to one's self-esteem. One related and well-known phenomenon is the "name-letter effect", which was identified by the Belgian psychologist Jozef Nuttin (1985). According to Nuttin (1985), the name-letter effect is the human tendency to favor alphabetical letters in one's own name. In the mid-1990s, researchers suggested the potential of the name letter effect for the measure of implicit self-esteem, which refers to "the introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) effect of the self-attitude on evaluation of self-associated and self-dissociated objects" (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995, p. 11). Nowadays, letter preference tasks have become increasingly popular for measuring implicit self-esteem and have been generalized across different cultures and alphabets (Hoorens, 2015). For instance, Kitayama and Karasawa (1997) designed a name letter task similar to the one devised by Nuttin (1985) to examine the name letter effect among Japanese. In line with Nuttin's (1985) claim, Kitayama and Karasawa (1997) found that Japanese

participants had a preference for the alphabetical letters that were included in their own name compared to the others.

Although the name-letter effect is a widely used method for measuring implicit self-esteem, some researchers argued that this effect can only measure self-esteem within specific domains, rather than overall self-esteem. Additionally, the Name-Letter-Task used in this approach does not take into account the order of letters in one's name (Gebauer et al., 2008). To address the limitations, Gebauer et al. (2008) created a new implicit measure of global self-esteem by extending the name-letter effect. Instead of using the Name-Letter-Task, they developed the Name-Liking measure, which asks participants to rate how much they like their own names. The result of the study showed that individuals who reported higher name-liking also exhibited higher levels of self-deceptive enhancement, which is considered a valid component of self-esteem.

Quaglia et al. (2016) viewed the correlation between an individual's name and their self-esteem from a unique standpoint by considering the suitability of the name. In other words, Quaglia et al. (2016) argued that the suitability of a name is determined by the feeling of harmony between the individual and their name. An individual can perceive their name in various ways. It may feel like an ideal match, suitable for their personality and self-image. On the other hand, it may not feel like the right name, causing a sense of disconnect. Lastly, one's name can be seen as a negative label, leading to the bearer feeling embarrassed and ashamed, significantly affecting their self-esteem (Quaglia et al., 2016).

**Chinese Naming Practices**

Chinese naming practice is distinct from English naming in several aspects. English names typically include three components with the following ordering: the personal name (given

name or first name), middle name, and surname (last name). Chinese names, including names in Mandarin, are made up of surnames followed by personal names, with no middle names being used (Li, 1997). The surnames in Mandarin are usually monosyllabic, and the given names can be monosyllabic or disyllabic (Li, 1997; Tan, 2001).

While it may be a universal tendency that one's given name is associated with parents' blessings and expectations, Chinese naming practices reflect unique cultural elements (Li, 1997). Auspiciousness is significantly emphasized in Chinese naming practice. Although there seem to be infinite combinations of Chinese characters for naming, however, not all characters are associated with auspicious meanings (Li, 1997). Chinese names are frequently associated with Chinese astrology, including practices like name divination, numerology, and onomancy (Chen, 2012). In other words, an auspicious name is not only determined by the positive meaning of the combining characters but also by the harmony of the name with the date and time of an individual's birth (Edwards, 2006). One example of this naming practice is to add a specific element to one's name, as noted by Yang et al. (2023):

> According to traditional Chinese culture, every child is supposed to have a balance of five elements – gold, wood, earth, water and fire – which are calculated according to the exact time of birth. If it is determined that a specific element is missing or in short supply at that particular time, the family must compensate for that shortage by adding a character to the child's name representing the missing element. (p. 295)

To ensure the auspiciousness of a given name, a common Chinese naming custom is to consult fortune tellers (Chen. 2012; Yang et al., 2023). One example is provided by a Chinese interviewee in Yang et al.'s study (2023):

We spent 25 Renminbi to calculate an appropriate name for my first born. Based on his birth time, he has a water shortage in the five elements. So we chose a Chinese character, 浩 (Hao), which has a good meaning and with water in the radical (p. 295).

Another example is provided by a Taiwanese international student in Chen's (2012) research:

Claire: She (Claire's mother) wanted to name me 彥婷 (Yen-Ting) at first. A fortune teller said that the number of strokes was bad; it carried an ominous foreboding of fate. She (Claire's mother) later consulted the dictionary to search for a feminine name. She calculated the strokes and finally found 琬 (Wan) (p. 40).

The above studies revealed the unique significance of Chinese naming practices. Chinese personal names carry deep symbolic meaning, with each character and phonetic nuance holding significance and are believed to influence the bearers' fate and destiny.

**Name-changing Practice Among Mandarin Speakers in the United States**

For almost every Mandarin-speaking individual, when residing in an English-dominant country, changing their names is necessary for functionality. Mandarin speakers change their names in several ways, including transliterating their ethnic names into the English alphabet, shortening their names by dropping certain components, or adopting an English personal name (Wu, 1999).

*Name Transliterating*

Transliteration is "to represent or spell in the characters of another alphabet" (Merriam-Webster, n. d.). According to Wu (1999), transliterating, in other words, phonetically writing all Asian-language components of their names in the English alphabet, is one of the aspects of name change that is required for nearly all Asian immigrants to have a functional name in American society. However, Wu (1999) also claimed that the process of transliteration inevitably sacrifices

the accurate pronunciation of the names. Mandarin and other Asian languages have unique sounds, tones, and stresses that are difficult for English speakers to pronounce, and it is also hard to find suitable letter combinations in English to capture the actual pronunciation of the names (Wu, 1999).

When transliterating a Mandarin ethnic name into the English alphabet, the original written form of the name is also sacrificed. Because of the homophone-richness of Mandarin, transliterating can result in the loss of meaning embedded in the characters of a Mandarin name. Diao's (2014) research on name selection for Chinese students studying in the US highlights this issue:

> When being romanized into the English alphabet, the meanings that the characters represented become lost. Chinese is a homophone-rich language, with on average about 11 characters sharing one spelling (Tan & Perfetti, 1998, p. 168). A romanized Chinese name can only be somewhat suggestive of the original meaning at the most, even to a native speaker. For instance, li can be a girl's name meaning "pretty" (麗), or a boy's name meaning "strength" (力). (p. 209)

### *Name Shortening*

Another aspect of name-changing is shortening names by removing certain components from their names, a common practice among early Chinese immigrants (Wu, 1999). This name-changing practice is also found prevalent among other Asian immigrants, such as Japanese, Korean, and South Asian populations (Srinivasan, 2019; Wu, 1999), for the reason of convenience and memorability in the dominant culture.

### *Adopting English Personal Names*

Numerous studies have shown that Mandarin speakers who move to an English-dominant

country commonly adopt an English personal name. For instance, Fang & Fine (2020) conducted a survey among 204 Chinese international students in a private university in the United States, and over 88% of the respondents reported using or having used English names. In the follow-up interview, 68% of the 25 interviewees reported using English names as their preferred personal names in the United States (Fang & Fine, 2020). Similarly, Heffernan (2010) surveyed 71 Chinese-speaking students in Canada, including those from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and found that 68 of them had an English personal name. There are debates around Heffernan's study, including categorizing individuals from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan as being of "Chinese ethnicity" without considering the distinction of cultural affiliation and naming practices in these three places (Chen, 2016). However, the above studies have shown adopting English names is a prevalent practice among Mandarin speakers when residing in English-dominant countries.

Based on the information provided regarding the musicality of Mandarin names, the connections between names and identity, Chinese naming practices, and the practice of changing names among Mandarin speakers in the United States, it is reasonable to assert that changing an ethnic name can have a significant impact on a Mandarin speaker's sense of self. Mandarin names are deeply rooted in cultural meanings, tonal nuances, and linguistic structures that may not easily translate into English or other languages. Consequently, altering or adopting a different name can result in a loss of the original cultural and personal significance associated with the ethnic name. However, the decision to change or retain one's ethnic name is not only about the name itself but also about the personal values, beliefs, and cultural practices it represents. The following section will explore the motivations of Mandarin speakers in adopting English names from the perspective of cultural adaptation.

**Motivation of Mandarin Speakers' Adopting English Names**

*Pronounceability of Ethnic Names*

Pronunciation appears to be one of the primary factors driving Mandarin-speaking people to use English names in the United States (Chen, 2016; Fang & Fine, 2020). According to Chen's study (2016), Taiwanese international students reported that their transliterated ethnic names were frequently mispronounced by non-native speakers, causing negative feelings. One reason that causes mispronunciation by non-native Chinese speakers is the significant distinction between tonal language and non-tonal language. Mandarin is a tonal language with four tones, and proper pronunciation of tones is essential to differentiate words from each other. However, non-native Mandarin speaker may be unaware of their off-tone pronunciation when saying a Mandarin name. Although the mispronunciation is unintentional, the experience may trigger more hurtful feelings than non-native Mandarin speakers may imagine. Consequently, some Mandarin speakers choose to use English names in order to avoid the possible mispronunciation of their ethnic names. One example provided in Chen's (2016) study is that a Mandarin-given name, Wěi-Jú 偉如, is frequently mispronounced as Wèi-zhū 餵豬 (feeding pigs) by non-Mandarin speakers. As a result, the awkwardness drives the name bearer to go by her English name and even conceal her ethnic name from peers.

*Memorability of Ethnic Names*

Another motivation that drives Mandarin speakers to adopt an English name is that their ethnic Mandarin names may be difficult to remember in the English-dominant country. In Chen's (2016) semi-structured interview with Taiwanese international students, interviewees claimed that one reason causing them to adopt English names is that they are easier for non-Chinese speakers to remember. Similarly, Zhao and Biernat (2018) conducted questionnaires with 109

Chinese students in the United States, and the result showed that adopting an English name was tied to the participants' perception that Americans had difficulties memorizing Chinese names.

### *Adapting to the Mainstream Culture*

Many Mandarin speakers, who are new to English-dominant cultures, face difficulties in adapting to their new environment. These challenges are often associated with the pronounceability and memorability of ethnic names, as highlighted by several studies. For instance, Edwards (2006) suggested that Chinese international students in the United Kingdom hold the view that if their names are not memorized, they will be forgotten. As a result, using an English name serves as a strategy for them to be remembered and, therefore, valuable in the host culture. Similarly, Chen (2012) argued that some Taiwanese international students encounter feelings of estrangement with their ethnic Chinese names in the United States due to issues with pronounceability and memorability. However, by using English names that are easier to pronounce and memorize by Americans, they may have a higher chance of fitting into and gaining acceptance by the mainstream culture.

### *Cultural Aspects*

Although a large body of literature has shown that Mandarin speakers' practice of adopting English names is motivated by linguistic and social pragmatic reasons in an English-speaking culture, their decision to practice may also have its roots in their unique cultural aspects.

**Confucianism.** Chen (2012, 2016) discussed a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context in Taiwan and its potential impact intertwined with Confucianism on Taiwanese international students' English use in the United States. Chen (2012, 2016) argued that this phenomenon has significant implications for Taiwanese international

students' use of English in the United States and is closely intertwined with Confucianism. According to Chen (2012, 2016), it is prevalent that Taiwanese acquire their English names from their English teachers at a young age and are expected to go by their English names in English classes. Because of this practice, it is believed that Taiwanese individuals have grown accustomed to using English names in English-speaking contexts and continue to do so when they move to an English-speaking country. Chen (2012, 2016) further claimed that moral values in Taiwanese culture could affect the adoption of English names by Taiwanese people in the United States. Due to the emphasis on social order in Confucianism, Taiwanese students are less able to decline English names assigned to them by their teachers in the EFL context of Taiwan, leading to their expectation of using English names in English-speaking contexts.

**Collectivism.** In the study by Edwards (2006), Chinese international students in the United Kingdom reported being expected by their British teachers to have an English name. As a result, many of them adopted English names, a practice that serves as a response to societal norms and expectations. Building on Edwards' (2006) idea, Park (2012) explained that the collectivistic culture of Chinese students influences this adoption of English names. Park (2012) argued that by adopting an English name, Chinese students conform to the expectations and desires of their new culture, aligning with the collectivistic culture's emphasis on adhering to group standards. In line with the above articles, in a qualitative study conducted by Liao (2011) involving in-depth interviews with ten first-generation Chinese immigrants in Canada, nearly all participants who used Western names mentioned the Chinese idiom"入鄉隨俗" (Ru Xiang Sui Su), a saying which is a deeply embedded Chinese cultural norm that as a newcomer one needs to conform to the customs of the new culture. Liao (2011) argued that the collective nature of Chinese culture may urge ethnic Chinese to follow the trend of the majority, leading to their

adoption of English names as well.

**Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

  Researchers have explored the phenomenon of Mandarin speakers adopting English names in cross-cultural settings through various lenses of cross-cultural adaptation. For example, Zhao and Biernat (2018) utilized the acculturation model proposed by Berry and Kim (1988) to investigate the relationship between adopting English names and psychological outcomes among Chinese international students in the United States. According to the acculturation model (Berry & Kim, 1988), individuals may use different strategies, including assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization, when adapting to a new culture. Berry and Kim (1988) further argued that since assimilation represents cultural loss, it may lead to poor mental health outcomes among individuals who adopt this strategy. Building upon the acculturation model, Zhao and Biernat (2018) hypothesized that adopting English names could be viewed as a form of assimilation, which may have negative implications for self-esteem. The research findings supported this prediction, indicating that Chinese international students who adopted English names reported lower levels of self-esteem.

  Liao (2011) used the concepts of identity defining and negotiation to explain the phenomenon of ethnic name change and maintenance among Chinese immigrants in a cross-cultural context. Based on the coping strategies to deal with acculturative stress among ten interviewees in the study, Liao (2011) proposed three styles of identity defining and negotiation relating to ethnic name change and maintenance in a cross-cultural context: enmeshed style, restricted style, and open style. The enmeshed style is when an individual conforms entirely to the cultural norms of the dominant host society while disregarding their cultural distinctions. Among the interviewees in Liao's study (2011), those inclined towards an enmeshed style felt

insecure about their distinct cultural identities and thus opted for adopting English names to avoid exclusion or alienation. However, Liao (2011) pointed out that individuals with an enmeshed style may come to the realization that assimilating into the prevalent culture is nearly impossible due to deeply ingrained cultural and ethnic distinctions. As a result, this enmeshed style can cause disillusionment, a lack of belonging, and identity confusion.

The restricted style also involves individuals identifying the host culture as dominant, but unlike the enmeshed style, they do not fully embrace the host culture on a profound level. According to Liao (2011), individuals with this style tend to establish a rigid cultural boundary between their home culture and the host culture. Some immigrants with the restricted style may choose to adopt Western names for social convenience, while others view it as unnecessary since they perceive themselves as incompatible with mainstream culture. In Liao's study (2011), ethnic name changers who adopted the restricted style reported using English names as a facade when interacting with the dominant culture, without revealing their true identity. Consequently, their connections with the host society may lack authenticity and depth, resulting in superficial cultural adaptations.

In contrast, the open style involves individuals making effective cultural adaptations while also maintaining cultural distinctions. According to Liao (2011), individuals adopting the open style are more likely to maintain their ethnic names and identities while also being receptive to cultural adaptations and engaging in cultural exchanges. While the open style and the enmeshed style both involve embracing host culture, Liao (2011) pointed out a significant difference between the two styles is that the sense of self in the open style does not depend solely on the reflections or evaluations of others, but also on self-reflection and self-evaluation. Thus, the open style can result in a more constant sense of self and a stronger sense of security in one's

ethnic identity. The open style creates a cultural boundary that is both open and solid, allowing for necessary adaptations while maintaining certain distinctions of the home culture. Hence, those who with the open style are more likely to achieve cultural integration (Liao, 2011).

Although a few researchers have emphasized the negative impact of changing ethnic names, Fang and Fine (2020) presented a more neutral perspective on the practice of name-changing in cross-cultural contexts. In their study, Fang and Fine (2020) used a cross-cultural naming approach to analyze the naming practices of Chinese international students in the United States. Cross-cultural naming, as defined by the authors, is the practice of using names from different cultural backgrounds or languages to navigate identity, assimilation, and self-presentation, particularly in transnational contexts (Fang and Fine, 2020). According to Fang and Fine (2020), two aspects of cross-cultural naming exist among Chinese international students in the United States: multiplicity and performativity. Multiplicity refers to the use of multiple names, including ethnic names, English names, nicknames, or other variations, which allows individuals to navigate between different cultural identities and contexts. For most Chinese international students, naming is a complex process as their identities are fluid and multiple identities co-exist. This means that there is no "real" name, and each name is authentic. This unique mechanism of transnational identity is triggered by critical life moments, such as graduation and decisions about whether to remain in America or return to their homeland (Fang & Fine, 2020).

On the other hand, performativity describes the way individuals use self-naming to construct their identities and meanings. Fang and Fine (2020) identified three practices of adopting English names to construct a sense of self. Matching refers to the practice of selecting an English name that reflects one's true self or important aspects of their identity. The act of

matching a name to the reflective self emphasizes a sense of authenticity and self-recognition. Differentiation is another practice which entails selecting an English name that sets one apart from others and emphasizes uniqueness, projecting a distinctive self in social interactions. Finally, idealization refers to a practice in which individuals adopting an English name that represents an idealized version of oneself. By choosing a name that aligns with their imagined self, individuals aim to present a version of themselves that reflects their aspirations, values, or desired characteristics (Fang & Fine, 2020). Fang and Fine (2020) further argued that while these practices can be distinguished in theory, they are closely intertwined in practice. To illustrate, a name can serve the dual purposes of aligning with one's personality and setting oneself apart, while also projecting both an authentic and aspirational version of oneself. Ultimately, one's sense of self is formed through the interplay of the reflective self, the distinctive self, and the imagined self.

**Foreign Music Therapists' Cultural Adaption in the United States**

A substantial amount of research has been conducted on the acculturative stress experienced by international students and immigrants residing in the U.S. However, there is very little literature available that explores the acculturative challenges faced by these individuals in specific professional fields, not to mention Mandarin-speaking music therapists (Kim, 2011). Kim (2011) argued that degree requirements specific to music therapy may pose a unique challenge for students from other countries, as both academic and clinical training require fluency in English, familiarity with music suitable for the American populace, and comprehension of how therapy is perceived by American clients.

Kim (2010, 2011) surveyed 134 international music therapy students from 25 countries in the U.S. to explore the factors that contribute to acculturative stress among this population.

Results indicated a strong relationship between acculturative stress and factors such as English proficiency, neuroticism, and academic stress. Moreover, Asian students face notably higher levels of acculturative stress than their European peers, likely due to greater language barriers and cultural disparities. However, the study found a negative and significant correlation between the length of time spent in the U.S. and acculturative stress. This suggests that simply spending more time in the U.S. may not necessarily lead to lower levels of acculturative stress. One possible explanation for this is that unresolved cultural conflicts can have a negative impact on the mental health of this population (Kim, 2010, 2011). Given these results, Kim (2010, 2011) highlighted the critical need for support to address acculturative stressors, since "when these students become helping professionals, their well-being can affect the well-being of their clients" (Kim, 2011, p. 127).

Lan (2020) conducted interviews with Asian international students pursuing graduate music therapy programs in the United States. The study aimed to explore the challenges faced by the participants in adapting to new academic and cultural environments. All participants acknowledged the importance of developing a social life to reduce stress from unique academic and clinician training demands in the music therapy field. However, many participants reported facing challenges in developing a social life due to language barriers, cultural differences, and experiences of exclusion. Some reported encountering experiences of exclusion, bias, or discrimination based on their cultural background and language proficiency. The perceptions of being different or not fitting into the dominant social group may create barriers to feeling a sense of belonging within the community (Lan, 2020).

Zhang et al. (2016) conducted a collaborative autoethnographic exploration of experiences of three international music therapy interns from China and Taiwan during their

clinical training in the United States. The three Mandarin-speaking interns shared their

experience of transitioning from familiar and homogenous cultural contexts to becoming part of

a minority group in the United States. They reported that their Asian appearance, accent,

thinking, and behaviors made them different from the majority. One participant, Rong Rong,

recalled the confusion on some clients' faces when they heard her "odd" name. This transition

from a majority to a minority group brought significant changes in the interns' social identities

and presented challenges in adapting to a new cultural environment, leading them to feel

vulnerable and losing their self-identity in an unfamiliar language and culture. As pointed out by

Zhang et al. (2016), the Mandarin-speaking interns made their best efforts to "speak like

Americans, think like Americans, and even act like Americans" (p. 49) to better adapt to this new

culture and society. However, they soon realized that they were detached from both their home

cultures and the new environment. This experience prompted the interns to reconstruct more

flexible self-identities without giving up their own culture.

**Music Therapist's Identity Exploration**

Researchers have emphasized the importance of exploring and understanding one's

identity in one's growth as a music therapist, especially in a multicultural context (Kim, 2020;

Mahoney, 2015). Mahoney (2015) argued that music therapists must understand their own

identity to provide effective and culturally sensitive therapy. To become a multicultural music

therapist, one should increase self-awareness and gain an understanding of the cultures they

identify with. In other words, multicultural music therapists must understand who they are, how

they perceive themselves in the world, and how society views them (Mahoney, 2015). Mahoney

(2015) also suggested that music therapy training programs should provide opportunities for

students to explore their own cultural backgrounds, values, and beliefs to gain a deeper understanding of how these factors influence their identities.

Kim (2020), the proposer of Cultural Informed Music Therapy (CIMT) approach, also highlighted the significance of music therapists understanding aspects of their identities, including their own musical background and cultural heritage, before they can effectively practice. Kim (2020) stressed the importance of maintaining a sense of fluidity between different cultures when working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Being fluid, as pointed out by Kim (2020), is essential for resolving cultural conflicts and interacting with new cultures. According to Kim (2020), music therapists' self-awareness enables them to approach cultural differences with fluidity, fostering a deeper understanding and connection with clients. Music therapists who are mindful of their own cultural background, beliefs, and biases can navigate interactions with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds more effectively (Kim, 2020).

Based on the above information, although there is a lack of research on ethnic name changes among Mandarin-speaking music therapists, it is reasonable to assume that ethnic name-changing may be one of their strategies for adapting to American culture, given the unique challenges they face in the music therapy field. As self-exploration and comprehension of identity are crucial for music therapists, Mandarin-speaking music therapists are encouraged to reconsider the connection between their names, cultural assimilation, and personal identities.

**Discussion**

The literature review explores the complex dynamics of cultural adaptation, identity negotiation, and professional considerations associated with the decision to change ethnic names among Mandarin-speaking music therapists in the United States. Drawing on cross-cultural adaptation models and cultural theories, this literature review examines the relationship between

names and identity, self-esteem, and impression formation, as well as the motivations behind ethnic name-changing practices among Mandarin-speakers. Cultural influences, such as Confucianism and Collectivism, shape individuals' decisions regarding their names, highlighting the importance of cultural context in understanding these practices.

Despite the considerable amount of research on ethnic name-changing among Mandarin speakers in various fields, there is a lack of specific research focused on ethnic name changes among Mandarin-speaking music therapists. This gap in research presents an opportunity for further exploration into how Mandarin-speaking music therapists navigate the decision to change or retain their ethnic names in social and professional settings, considering the unique challenges they may encounter in the field of music therapy. Drawing from the existing literature, the following discussion presents suggestions for Mandarin-speaking music therapists to consider as they navigate their naming choices. Additionally, recommendations for further research on this topic are provided.

**Ethnic Name Changing and Preservation of Cultural Identity**

Despite various research suggesting that changing ethnic names can have a negative impact on cultural identity among Mandarin speakers, it is important to recognize the significant role that cultural influences, such as Confucianism and Collectivism, play in Chinese and Taiwanese culture when considering name changes among this population, as noted in the literature review above. Some Mandarin speakers may choose to retain their ethnic names in an English-dominant country to honor their cultural background, while others may adopt English names because of their cultural beliefs. Ultimately, I believe that name choices are a form of personal expression that can reflect individuals' cultural identity and values. Whether individuals choose to change or retain their ethnic names, the decision is a reflection of their connection to

their heritage. By making conscious choices about their names, individuals assert their cultural identity in a way that is meaningful to them.

**Ethnic Name Changing and Cultural Fluidity**

As highlighted in the literature review, fluidity is essential for individuals, including music therapists, who encounter different cultures. In my opinion, the choice of names by Mandarin-speaking music therapists can demonstrate cultural fluidity. As Fang and Fine (2000) pointed out, using multiple names allows Mandarin speakers to manifest different aspects of their identity in various contexts. While some studies suggests that the process of changing names among Mandarin speakers may impact their cultural identity because of the inevitable loss of meaning and pronunciation of their ethnic names, it is worth noting that name choices is also a way to reconstruct a sense of self in a new culture, and the reconstruction of a more flexible self-identity is vital for Mandarin speaking music therapists to engage in different cultures without giving up their own culture background (Fang & Fine, 2000; Zhang et al., 2016). Taken together, I believe that the conscious decision to change or retain ethnic names can be seen as a way of moving between different cultures and being fluid with various cultural identities.

**The Importance of Exploring Self-Identity**

The reviewed literature highlights the importance of music therapists exploring and understanding of their identity, particularly in multicultural contexts. For Mandarin-speaking music therapists in the United States, who inherently navigate a blend of cultural identities, engaging in self-exploration and reflection regarding their identity is crucial. From an ethical perspective, the American Music Therapy Association's Code of Ethics (2019) calls upon therapists to "identify and recognize their personal biases, avoiding discrimination in relationships with clients, colleagues, and others in all settings." In my view, comprehending

how one's background influences thoughts and attitudes is essential for music therapists to identify and effectively mitigate their personal biases. Names, as significant components of identity, can serve as a starting point for Mandarin-speaking music therapists to explore themselves. It is recommended that Mandarin music therapists be mindful of their decisions regarding retaining or changing their ethnic names and explore the naming process through the lens of cross-cultural adaptation. Whether they choose to change or maintain their ethnic names in the United States, Mandarin music therapists are encouraged to find a connection to their names and identities.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

As previously noted, a significant finding from this literature review is the extensive gap in research on ethnic name-changing among Mandarin-speaking music therapists in cross-cultural contexts. As multiculturalism in music therapy is increasingly valued, this capstone thesis serves as a foundational exploration of this under-researched topic. This capstone thesis not only highlights the importance of considering Mandarin music therapists' cultural identity and adaptation in cross-cultural therapeutic practices but also open up opportunities for ongoing research and discussions.

Further research is recommended to delve deeper into this topic. Future researchers are recommended to undertake qualitative studies on the personal experiences and perspectives of Mandarin-speaking music therapists, offering insights into the impact of ethnic name-changing on their identity. Long-term studies, following Mandarin-speaking music therapists who have changed their names, can provide valuable insights into how name changes affect their professional identity, cultural adaptation, and therapeutic practice over time. Additionally, investigating how clients perceive and engage with Mandarin-speaking music therapists

depending on the therapists' selected names can help explore the impact of ethnic name-changing on therapeutic relationships. Taken together, as multiculturalism in music therapy continues to gain attention, the voice of Mandarin-speaking music therapists in the United States must be heard, and their experiences and perspectives on retaining and changing ethnic names are worth exploring. Further in-depth studies are recommended to explore this important topic to contribute to the multiculturalism in music therapy.

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# *THESIS APPROVAL FORM*

**Lesley University**
**Graduate School of Arts & Social Sciences**
**Expressive Therapies Division**
**Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Music Therapy, MA**

**Student's Name:** *Ying-Jung Chen*

**Type of Project: Thesis** *Literature review*

**Title:** *Ethnic Name Changing Among Mandarin-Speaking Music Therapists in the United States and Its Influence on Their Identity: A Literature Review*

**Date of Graduation:** 05/18/2024

In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

**Thesis Advisor:** *Basel Zayed*