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The Use and Non-Use of Japanese Names by Non-Japanese

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While Japan is often said to be homogenous in population, recent years have seen an increase in foreign residents, making it interesting to consider if the same patterns of adaptation of names found in other countries could be observed. A survey amongst foreign residents of Japan showed that while adaptation of names in their pronunciation was common, it was generally uncommon to use Japanese personal names. However, people of Asian heritage used them more commonly. It is suggested that the binary positioning of Japanese identities may make it difficult for some foreigners to take Japanese names, with additional factors such as racial expectations for foreigners possibly influencing some groups' ability to take Japanese names.

KEYWORDS Japan, immigrants, personal names, identity, adaptation, foreigners, race

Overview

While Japan has often been assumed to be largely homogenous, social changes over the last thirty years may make that myth obsolete. With the decreasing population, many have argued that it will be increasingly necessary to take in foreign workers (Huber and Hans, 2013). International marriages have also increased, accounting for 3.92% of marriages in 2011, compared with just 0.9% in 1980 (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2013). In 2008, the government set the ambitious goal of attracting 300,000 foreign students a year (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2013), and established new immigration rules in 2012 to draw in elite foreign workers (Immigration Bureau of Japan, 2013). Research on naming practices amongst immigrants has shown that changes in names are a common feature of assimilation and adaptation, and this developing diversity brings forth the question whether similar patterns will be found in Japan.

As Watkins-Goffman (2001) notes, immigrants to the United States have often Anglicized their names to signal their new national identity. Early research by Alatis (1955) looked at how Greek immigrants adopted their names in the United States through Anglicization. Klymasz (1963a–c) also looked at such patterns amongst

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Slavic immigrants in Canada, and similar trends have been found amongst Asian immigrants to the United States (Wu, 1999; Louie, 1991). Although some research suggests that such trends may lessen overtime as societies become more accepting of multiculturalism (e.g., Wu's 1999 examination of naming practices amongst Asian-Americans), negotiating names still appears to be important within the immigration experience. More recently, Kim (2007) showed that individuals' sense of habitus was an influential factor in negotiating name changes amongst Korean immigrants in Toronto: individuals with fewer connections to Canada and less established Canadian roots were less likely to adopt an English name, whereas individuals who made changes generally did so within their negotiation of a new Canadian identity.

As opposed to the United States or Canada, however, Japan has never been an immigration-oriented country; instead of people being brought into the fold, there has been a tendency to tightly regulate and manage foreign populations (Komai, 2000). As such, foreigners living in Japan may have different attitudes about selecting Japanese names or making adaptations. This article seeks to establish how common selecting — or *not* selecting — Japanese names is, as well as some of the factors affecting that, using data from a survey of 138 foreign residents of Japan. Following reports from Becker (2009) and others that immigrants who are more integrated into their host communities are more likely to change their name and Wu's (1999) insight that some groups find their new community more receptive to changes than others due partially to racial factors, I formulated two hypotheses: first, that foreigners do not usually take Japanese (personal) names, and, second, that foreigners of Asian heritage are still more likely to do so compared with foreigners of other races. I also hypothesized that adaptations would still occur in their pronunciation given the restrictions of Japanese phonology.

The hypotheses were supported by the data, with only twenty-one people reporting Japanese names, the majority of them (13) of Asian heritage. In discussing this, I touch upon the latent image in Japan of the *visible* foreigner as a barrier towards taking Japanese names for non-Asians. However, the results also point to an alternative adaptation strategy of adjusting names to Japanese phonology, with 84.78% having a consistent Japanese-pronounced form. The results show that foreigners do not actively assimilate to a Japanese identity, likely because the binary social positioning of Japanese identities is unforgiving of hybridity, particularly to those who look non-Japanese and face expectations of difference. Nonetheless, the use of names adapted to Japanese phonology suggests that adjustments are made in response to the Japanese environment, offering one possible way to create a hybrid identity.

Japan, immigrants and names

While studies such as those on Koreans, Ainu, and new immigrants to Japan compiled in Weiner (2008) have gone a long way to proving Japan's homogeneity myth false, it is nonetheless true that compared with the United States or Canada, people of non-Japanese citizenship make up a small percentage of the population. While foreign-born individuals make up 13% of the population of the United States, 44% of them naturalized (American Community Survey Reports, 2012), mid- to long-term foreigners made up just 1% (1,652,292) of the Japanese population at the end of 2012, of which 38% (624,501) are permanent residents (Ministry of Internal Affairs and

Communications, 2012). In 2012, just 10,622 applications were approved for naturalization and 457 were rejected, actually lower than 2003, when 17,633 were approved and 150 rejected (Ministry of Justice, 2013b). In addition, 381,364 individuals have *special permanent residency*, a status given to people of Korean and Taiwanese heritage and their descendants who stayed in Japan at the end of WWII and whose citizenship was reverted; such individuals are commonly referred to by the term *zainichi* ("in Japan") or *old comers*. As Japanese nationality is *jus sanguinis*, many special permanent residents were born in Japan and speak only Japanese; their experiences are thus qualitatively different from more recent arrivals, often called *new comers*, who are the main focus of this article.

The path to permanent residency status in Japan is long: a person with no familial ties would need to stay in Japan for ten years (Ministry of Justice, 2013a), and while there are some exceptions for highly skilled individuals, spouses of Japanese, and those of Japanese heritage, there are no opportunities like green card lotteries. Although the government has made changes which may make it easier for some to stay longer, such as longer maximum visa lengths and the creation of a points system for elite foreigner workers, Komai's (2000: 322) description of the government's stance on foreigners being that they are seen as people who need to be "controlled" and "monitored" rather than "equal contributors" seems accurate. Indeed, there are concerns that these changes may make the wait for permanent residency longer (Saitō, 2012). Note that this is partially why the literature, including this article, often uses the term *foreigners* rather than *immigrants*: in principle, the Japanese system is not oriented towards integrating such populations, and they are thus usually treated as possibly long-term but not permanent additions.

There may be thus few motivations to take Japanese names. While many people enter the United States with the intention of putting down long-term roots, it is far more difficult to make such plans in Japan; yet, without them, people may not actively seek to carve out "Japanese" identities, or be negatively motivated *against* it. As Lie (2001) describes, there is a tendency to view Japanese identities as binary: either you or are you are not. Given what one would lose, adopting a Japanese identity may seem less desirable, as it negates retaining part of one's original culture. It also creates a sense of distance between Japanese and non-Japanese, such that even for those with such roots, the social expectations may make it difficult to take a Japanese identity, and thus a Japanese name.

The historical function of Japanese names amongst foreigners can also be problematic. While Japanese names have been a tool to forcefully assimilate populations — for example, the social pressure on Okinawans to take Japanese names starting in the Taisho period (1912–1926) (Taira, 1997); the semi-forced adoption of Japanese names in war-time Korea (Mizuno, 2008) — they have also been used to differentiate populations such as with the banning of Japanese names in Okinawa in 1624 and the regulation of names in Amami after the Satsuma clan's invasion in 1609 ("Amamigaku" Kankō I'inkai, 2005). Perversely, both attitudes demonstrate the importance of names for Japanese identities: in the earlier cases, the imposition of Japanese names was a way of bringing populations into the fold, and in the later cases it was a way of carving out a distinct *pure Japanese* identity. It is no wonder that at least some old comer Koreans actively use their Korean names to reestablish a Korean identity (Kim, 2002).

These points are complicated by the fact that many foreigners are racially distinct from Japanese. Although Gerhards and Hans (2009: 1107) note that "(i)mmigrants in multicultural societies will probably feel less obliged to choose nonethnic names to avoid discrimination," suggesting by correlation that in less multicultural societies like Japan there should be *more* pressure, factors such as one's ability to "pass" may be relevant. While there has traditionally been pressure upon Asian immigrants in the United States to assimilate, the selection of new Anglo surnames has traditionally been rare (Wu, 1999). Wu (1999) ascribes this to racial expectations for Asian Americans: as opposed to Caucasian European immigrants, racially distinct Asian immigrants face expectations of difference that is supposed to be reflected in their names, given that "(m)aintaining an American surname is the ultimate assimilation tactic, because the surname represents and identifies not only an individual, but implies a particular history and ancestry" (32). Although the largest single group of foreigners living in Japan are Chinese (36.46%; e-Stat, 2012a), people of other racial groups may experience similar burdens to be "different" as Asian Americans do.

This does not mean that people do not make any adaptations. As has been described by Alatis (1955) for Greek Americans, adaptation did not necessarily mean the adoption an Anglo name, but can include shortening it or adapting it to English phonology. Similarly, foreigners in Japan may make adaptations to Japanese phonology, which is very restricted: it features only five phonemic vowels and thirteen consonants, and with the exception of coda-position /n/ and some mid-word geminates, all syllables must be open. When foreign names are written in Japanese, they generally use *katakana*, a syllabary used to phonetically write foreign words in their Japanese pronunciation. *Katakana* versions are often necessary to do things like open a bank account, suggesting that there are many everyday situations where foreigners might feel compelled to adapt their names' pronunciation.

With these points in mind, then, three hypotheses can be formulated: first, foreigners will not generally take Japanese names, regardless of length of residency; second, adaptations will instead be common in regards to pronunciation; and finally, Asian individuals will be more likely to take Japanese names.

Methodology

To test these hypotheses, I conducted a survey of 138 foreigners (F = 85, M = 53) living or who had lived in Japan from March 2013 to June 2013.[1] The survey was conducted primarily online, with both Japanese and English versions.[2] I took a snowball approach in finding participants, and made the links available on SNS forums. The majority (78.61%) responded in English (Table 1). Respondents came from 28 different areas and countries, with the most common being the United States (42), Canada (23), and China (12). The average length of stay in Japan was 7.60 years; most reported conversational-level Japanese. The survey consisted of 39 questions, 17 which were background questions and 22 specifically on names; responses were in the form of Likert-like scales, selection and free-form. To consider the research questions I will specifically look at the results from three questions about participants' perceptions of changes in their names; their use of *katakana* names and introductions; and whether or not they have a Japanese name.

TABLE 1

SAMPLE DETAILS

Number of countries		Respondents		
		Female	Male	Total
28		85	53	138
Survey	English	67	39	106
	Japanese	18	14	32
Years in Japan	Average	7.92	7.09	7.6
	Minimum	≤1	≤1	≤1
	Maximum	41	25	41
	Mode	1.5	2	2
Japanese language ability	0 = Not at all	1	0	1
	1 = A little	15	3	18
	2 = Conversational	40	29	69
	3 = Business	22	17	39
	4 = Native/near-native	7	4	11
	Average	2.23	2.42	2.3

Results

Changes in names

While somewhat over 50% of respondents felt that their name had changed (*No*: 47.20%, *Somewhat*: 28.80%, *Yes*: 24.00%), very few reported changing it through the use of a Japanese name (Figure 1). One respondent noted that she used a Japanese middle name; however, she was of mixed Japanese heritage, suggesting that her situation is somewhat different. The most common way to change one's name was its pronunciation (51.09%), which may be inevitable given that Japanese is very restricted, phonemically. While there is a popular folk belief that difficulties pronouncing languages outside of one's own just requires more effort, reflected in Kim's (2007: 123) case study's comments that it was "their" (= non-Korean Canadian's) problem that they could not pronounce her name, this is clearly one case where effort alone is not sufficient to overcome the problem (see Niedzielski and Preston, 2003 for this phenomenon in popular dialects discourse). On an everyday basis, interacting with Japanese, whether in Japanese or one's native language, may mean getting used to the particularities of Japanese phonology.

Changes in names in self-introductions and Japanese-pronunciations

The question of pronunciation also arises when individuals introduce themselves to people for the first time: do they prioritize their name's pronunciation in their native language, which may lead to difficulties for Japanese speakers, or do they prioritize their name's pronunciation in Japanese, which may lead to a disconnect with its original form? Figure 2 shows the results for two related questions: how individuals introduce themselves, and whether they use a consistent *katakana* form. In general,

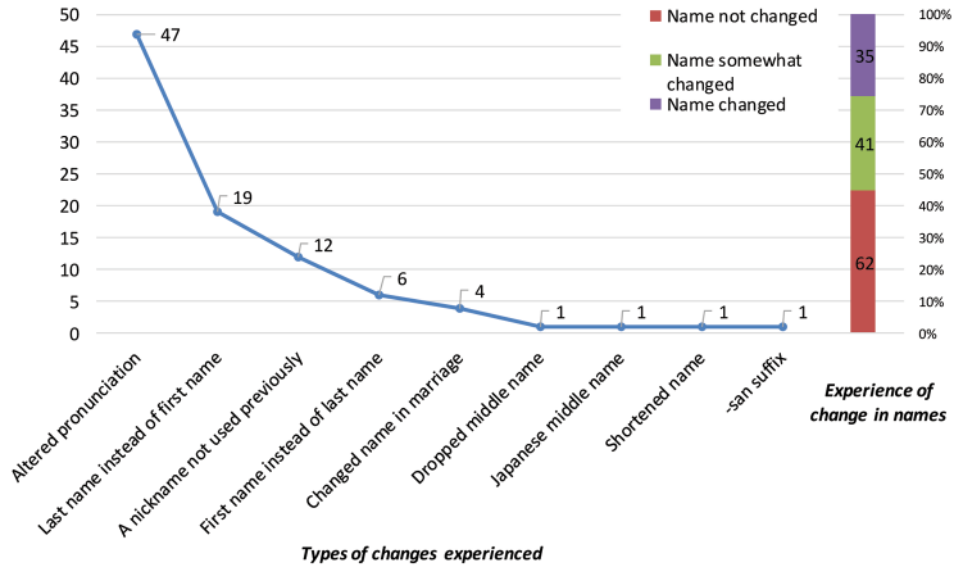

FIGURE 1 Perception of changes in names and types of changes experienced.

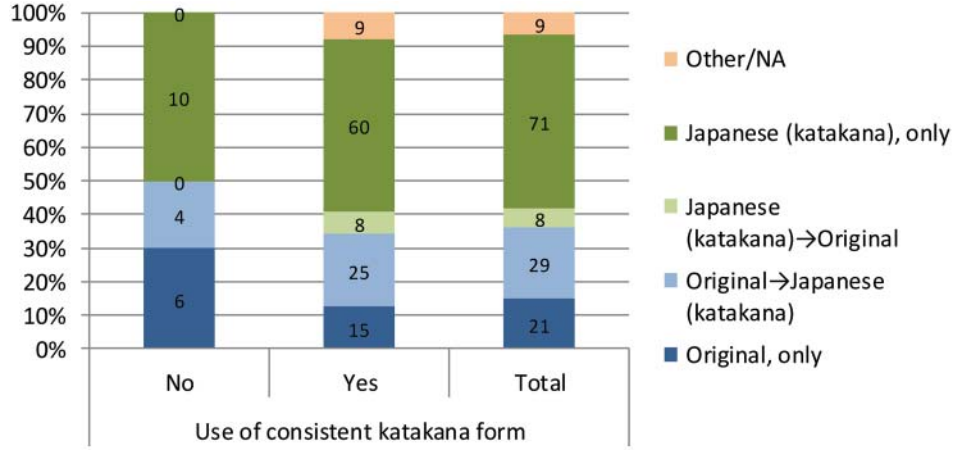

FIGURE 2 Self-introductions and consistent *katakana* forms.

most people not only had a consistent *katakana* form (84.78%, $n = 117$), but they also preferentially introduced themselves using their name's Japanese pronunciation: 51.45% ($n = 71$) *only* gave the Japanese pronunciation, with an additional 5.80% ($n = 8$) giving the Japanese pronunciation before giving the original pronunciation, suggesting its importance as an everyday strategy.

Use of Japanese names and differences between groups

While adaptations in pronunciation were common, however, use of a Japanese name was rare. Only 21 individuals (15.22%) had a Japanese personal name which was

different from their regular name.[3] In further support of hypothesis 1, there was also no significant difference for the usage of Japanese names by how long individuals were in Japan ($r = -.03$, $p > .1$). There were also no clear correlations between use of a Japanese name and gender ($r = -.05$, $p > .1$); the correlation with Japanese language ability, however, while not significant, was trending ($r = -.03$, $p = .10081$). However, there were clear differences by participants' race. I used participants' responses to how they identified themselves to code them into Asian (Chinese, Korean-American, mixed Japanese heritage, Thai, Filipino, etc.; $n = 37$) and non-Asian (Caucasian, African-American, French, etc.; $n = 99$) individuals. Testing between these two groups showed that Asian individuals used Japanese names more than non-Asian individuals: whereas only 8.08% of non-Asian individuals ($n = 8$) said they had a Japanese name, 35.14% ($n = 13$) of Asian individuals said they did, a significant difference (Table 2). Thus, while Japanese names were rare in general, they were still more common amongst Asian respondents.

Discussion

The data supports all three hypotheses, that is, that while (2) adaptations to pronunciation would be common, (1) foreigners would not generally take Japanese names, although (3) Asian individuals would use Japanese names more commonly. Looking at the free answers to the questions, some individuals specifically noted problems they experienced when using Japanese names, even if it was their legal surname.[4] One thirty-year-old male respondent from Argentina with a Japanese surname said that his motivation for changing his name was that "I don't want people to mistake me for a Japanese person (Japanese last name)." One might interpret this as their avoidance of having to perform as a Japanese person: since Japanese names are viewed as being the sole purveyance of Japanese people, having a Japanese name could bring up just as many questions as it silences ("Why do you have a Japanese surname if you cannot speak Japanese?" "What is your real ethnicity?").

Similarly, a fifty-five-year-old Swedish Caucasian female respondent married to a Japanese man, whose Japanese surname was rather unusual, noted that "[. . .] because my family name has a kind of 'high society' sound, Japanese people often call me by my first name. I think they think '—' is more 'suitable' for a foreigner than '—'." Note that, generally, surnames are more commonly used between non-familiar adults in Japan. Thus, calling her by her personal name rather than her Japanese surname is important as it demonstrates a gap between the regular social norms: the use of

TABLE 2

CHI-SQUARE TEST FOR USE OF JAPANESE NAMES BY RACE

Use of a Japanese name	Race		χ^2
	Asian	Non-Asian	
No	24	91	15.1**
Yes	13	8	

**$p < .01$

Japanese names — even ones established through heritage or marriage — is seen as being so exclusively Japanese that people choose to use a name that would normally be unacceptable (e.g., a personal name). This use may be supported by a common assumption amongst Japanese that non-Japanese *prefer* to be referred to by their personal names, so that many non-Japanese are called by their personal names even when it would be more appropriate by Japanese norms to use surnames (Maeda, 2002).

Along the same vein, one thirty-five-year-old-female Australian Caucasian respondent married to a Japanese man who has been living in Japan for thirteen years noted that "(m)y Japanese surname is very rare in this area and I find myself explaining my surname as well. Many people assume I am explaining a foreign name." It may be that people's expectations that she has a non-Japanese name affect their recognition of it as Japanese. Because there is a tendency to see Japanese names as a sign of Japanese ethnicity, even names of Japanese origin may be interpreted as being non-Japanese if they are used by someone who is "obviously" not Japanese.

While unusual, this would presumably not occur if she fit the physical image of a Japanese person, which may be why it is easier for people of Asian heritage to take Japanese names. One reason for this is an apparent persistent belief that being foreign means *looking* foreign. A recent drawing on the Ministry of Justice's (2013b) website on international marriages featuring three couples is typical of this: the first couple is a black man with darker skin than the others and tight curls and a (presumably Japanese) Asian woman; the second a white man with yellow-blond hair and blue eyes, also with a (presumably Japanese) Asian woman; and the third a white woman with yellow-blond hair and blue eyes, with a (presumably Japanese) Asian man. These are the typical images of foreigners, but it is not reflective of the reality. In fact, the majority of international marriages in Japan are (1) between a foreign woman and a Japanese man (68.66% in 2012; e-Stat, 2012b), (2) between a Japanese person and an Asian individual (70.32% in 2012; e-Stat, 2012a).

Nonetheless, as the image suggests, being foreign is seen as something visibly different. This of course does not mean that non-Japanese of Asian heritage are treated as Japanese. Quite the contrary, recent years have seen a rise in anti-foreigner demonstrations, whose major targets appear to be old comer Koreans (Osaki, 2013). Yet because foreignness is expected to be physically visible, Asians in Japan are often treated as essentially invisible until something brings it forth. A good example of this may be found in a discrimination lawsuit by Arudou Debito, wherein a hot springs establishment in Japan refused to allow in "obviously" foreign individuals even after already letting in a Chinese woman, who was assumed to be Japanese: upon learning her nationality, they removed her, too (Debito, 2004). In these circumstances, using one's physical invisibility may make passing a desirable strategy, and a Japanese name can help avoid such prejudices. Murphy-Shigematsu (1993) notes that it is quite common for minorities in Japan to take on Japanese names for "invisibility"; this is particularly well noted by many old comer Koreans, who are commonly reported as feeling pressure to avoid prejudice by using *tsūmei*, or non-legal, official Japanese names used in place of their legal name in everyday life (Zainihon Daikan-minzoku Seinen-kai,1994). Similarly, the one female respondent of mixed Japanese heritage who changed her name to her Japanese middle name noted that she did so because "I didn't want to be seen as different for my name or nationality but rather for my

attitude/actions." Thus, for this respondent, actively using a Japanese name was a way of avoiding labeling as a foreigner, which would then limit how her actions were interpreted (i.e., "Oh, you do — because you're a foreigner!"). However, while she stresses her belief that she wants to be judged by her actions, it can also be viewed as assimilatory in that it stresses her Japaneseness to others, rather than her more complicated background as a third-generation Japanese American of mixed heritage.

While Murphy-Shigematsu (1993: 68) is critical of the self-silencing of minority groups in Japan, noting that "(m)inorities quietly endorse the myth by their unwillingness to publicly declare themselves ethnic minorities and insist on the right to live as they choose," on an everyday basis, taking on Japanese names may seem as a way to smoothly enter into Japanese society to those individuals to which such options are available. As the examples of people's use of Japanese surnames suggests, however, such usages only act as softeners in so far as the individual can be perceived as being Japanese, visually if not in other ways. For non-Asian foreigners living in Japan, the use of a Japanese name — first or last — can instead be seen as an unwelcome talking point that can cause stress or discomfort.

As the question concerning whether individuals perceived that there were changes in their names hints, this does not mean that foreigners do not make adjustments to their names while in Japan. Quite the contrary: as noted earlier, approximately half of all respondents felt that their name had been changed in some way. However, *how* names are changed may be the major difference. While the original research question asked whether individuals take Japanese names, it was primarily concerned with a relatively restricted view of what a Japanese name counted as. However, the use of *katakana* forms of one's name is a uniquely Japanese practice. As mentioned earlier, the integration of many non-Japanese names into Japanese is quite difficult, requiring at times occasionally dramatic changes to the structures of the names themselves. For example, the common English surname such as "Williams" /wɪlyəmz/ would become "ウィリアムズ" (*wiriamuzu*, realized as [ɯᵝiɾiamɯᵝzɯᵝ]). These differences would not make sense in any environment outside of Japan, meaning that these *katakana* names are a unique part of the Japanese experience for non-Japanese.

Changing one's name through the use of a *katakana* version could in itself be considered a kind of "Japanesization": While it does not differ as dramatically as the adoption of a Japanese name, these changes are still clearly felt to be different. More importantly, they might also be comparable to the kinds of Anglicization seen in changes such as from the Spanish *Juan* to the English *John*. While the adoption of Japanese names themselves may not seem feasible, we can thus see that they are still subjected to similar processes of assimilation in so far as the pronunciation of their names is changed. That process is, however, remains at a distance from full-out assimilation, such that foreigners are still distinguishable from Japanese: their names are made more accessible to the Japanese language, yet are still of a different enough form that no one would think to confuse them.

Conclusion

This article sought to consider whether Japanese names are used by foreigners living in Japan. As opposed to countries with established immigration histories, Japan

has a comparatively homogenous population. This led to three hypotheses: while changes in pronunciation would be common, Japanese names would not be common amongst foreigners, but that within this group, they would nonetheless be more common amongst Asians. All hypotheses were supported by the survey data, which I argued is related to the role of names in constructing Japanese identities. Nonetheless, because being foreign is popularly associated with certain physical characteristics, Japanese names can be helpful for passing as Japanese amongst individuals who do not fulfill those expectations, such as people of Asian heritage. At the same time, the adaptation of names to Japanese phonology may function to help foreigners create new identities in Japan, suggesting another way of considering foreigners' experiences in Japan.

Of course, certain points could not be dealt with here, most importantly how individuals' backgrounds and experiences in their home countries affect them. In particular, the sample was skewed towards Americans, who may not be likely to adapt their names: as noted earlier, more accepting attitudes towards multiculturalism in the United States have led to more Asian Americans using ethnic names (Wu, 1999), a point likely true for many different ethnic groups. Increasing the sample size to enable analysis by country would be one way of assessing this. Nonetheless, Japan offers an interesting way of considering the experience of international migrants and names. While immigrants in other non-multicultural countries may use names as a way to assimilate, as Becker (2009) found with Turkish immigrants to Germany, the Japanese example seems to suggest that this may be influenced by their host country's immigration policies, the role of names in creating a sense of national identity therein, and individuals' ability to physically pass. While it may seem obvious that local names can help create a local identity, their non-use can, too, tell us a great deal about people's experiences.

Notes

[1] I did not restrict it to individuals currently in Japan to maximize potential respondents: 102 were living in Japan, 35 were not; one did not respond.

[2] In English at <http://goo.gl/8px9O> and in Japanese at <http://goo.gl/bmY1p>.

[3] I did not focus on surnames as changes are possible through marriage and informally taking surnames is a less viable social and legal option.

[4] The qualitative data described comes from people's free answers and a final question asking for experiences to share.

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