



WeChat Usernames: An Exploratory Study of Users' Selection Practices

XING XU

School of International Relations, Sichuan International Studies University, Chongqing, China; School of Education, The University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia

HE HUANG

Research Center for Language, Cognition and Language Application, Chongqing University, Chongqing, China

TING JIANG AND YUANPENG ZOU

College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Chongqing University, Chongqing, China

As one of the most popular social networking applications in China, WeChat has recently attracted scholarly attention. To date, these studies have tended to concentrate on how it has been used as a social networking and emerging business model. However, little is known about the practices users follow when selecting usernames on WeChat. Using an onomastic lens, this study addresses this gap by examining 501 WeChat usernames. With data collected through an online survey, this study first investigates categories emerging from the name corpus and explores the reasons behind each of these categories. It then analyzes the sociocultural ramifications embedded within this use of names. As one of the first of its kind, the article provides key insight into how the interplay of online discourse, acquaintance networks, and Chinese culture contribute to the development of this important onomastic phenomenon.

KEYWORDS WeChat, usernames, internet, China, acquaintance network, online discourse

Introduction

The mobile instant messaging platform, WeChat, was launched by Tencent Inc. in 2011. Since then, it has dominated the market in China as an innovative multi-functional social media application (Guo 2017). Free of charge, WeChat provides users not only with common instant messaging services such as the exchange of texts, images, voice notes, videos, and files; it also offers other emerging services such as online payment, private communities for sharing images and texts, and news subscriptions (Lin, Fang, and Jin 2017). Since its inception, WeChat has aimed at limited person-to-small-group communication, thereby drawing the Chinese away from mass-oriented online discourse to community-based group cohesion and local mobilization (Harwit 2017). This one-stop application, with its superior user friendliness, has proven to be a major success.

Recent figures from Statista (2019) showed that by the second quarter of 2019, the number of active WeChat users hit 1.13 billion. Along with the unprecedented popularity of WeChat in China comes the increasing scholarly attention paid to it. Harwit (2017) analyzed, from both political and apolitical perspectives, the development of WeChat into the dominant messaging app, suggesting that it has revolutionized the social ecosystem of China by augmenting small- and intimate-group interactions that “act on a local rather than national scale” (324). Exploring young Chinese internet users’ experiences as members of WeChat, Fu’s (2018) study challenged the notion of a dichotomous discourse in service of offline-online identity navigation in favor of one that is more dynamically negotiated in complex social relationships. Scrutinizing the adoption and use of WeChat among middle-aged residents in urban China, Huang and Zhang (2017) added to the body of literature by identifying communicative patterns that varied across gender and age groups.

These scholarly endeavors have mostly addressed WeChat at the intersection of communications studies and sociocultural perspectives. The literature to date has highlighted the evolution of WeChat as a social media tool and explored the corresponding ramifications in relation to the transmission of social information resources and the transformation of interpersonal relationships. To the best of the authors’ knowledge, however, no study has yet addressed the issue of WeChat usernames from an onomastic perspective, leaving behind a lacuna to fill. The objective of this study is to cast some light on WeChat as an all-embracing onomastic phenomenon that penetrates deeply into many people’s lives. To accomplish this goal, this investigation examines WeChat usernames and provides important insights into time- and context-specific normative rules (Leslie and Skipper 1990) of naming as well as the personal, social, and cultural contexts in which these names are produced.

Although several studies on Chinese birth names have argued that names crystallize ideals, ambitions, aesthetic values, and ideological beliefs of Chinese people (Diao 2014; Sercombe et al. 2014), little is known about whether and how

these conventions and perceptions are applicable to online settings. Given that names in online settings are chosen rather than bestowed, the authenticity, the explicitness (or lack thereof) of online/offline connections, and sense of self-presentation (Gatson 2011) may present dynamics that are different from those found in a non-virtual nexus. Situated in the onomastic context of virtual cyber environments, this study also sought to determine users' cognizance of their online naming practices in the Chinese context.

In this paper, "username" is defined as a self-assigned nickname or pseudonym used in a particular online milieu predominated by closed communications between offline acquaintances. As a particular type of name used for interactions online, it belongs to the broader family of Internet names. Though terminologies vary with respect to Internet names (e.g., nicknames, usernames, pseudonyms, handles), previous studies have centered their discussions on the use of Internet names as an embodiment of the self-representation of identity (Scheidt 2001; Stommel 2007). These studies support van Langendonck's argument that Internet names are chosen based on a psychological motivation of "a personal appraisal of the sound, the image, the length, the attractiveness, or the aesthetic value" (2007, 300) embedded in certain names.

Recent studies have shed light on Internet names used on different platforms and appropriated in particular cultural contexts. Analyzing the characteristics of usernames in a Moroccan chatroom, Hassa (2012), for example, posited that an oscillation between a traditional local Muslim identity and a global citizen identity permeates the construction of a user's virtual identity. Focusing on Twitter usernames in South Africa, Olivier (2014) identified 17 categories of e-names and specified the conditions under which they were used. Such studies illuminate the nuances and complexities involved in the variants of Internet names as they embedded in their specific temporal-spatial contexts. Nevertheless, as insightful as this work has been in extending and deepening the onomastic scholarship within the domain of Internet names, more research is needed to shed light on other Internet environments and cultural contexts. Following Aleksiejuk's (2014) cautionary assertion that Internet names per se are a heterogeneous group in which different types demand diverse tactics of investigation, this study entered the uncharted territory of WeChat to understand how this branch of onomastic knowledge is constructed within Chinese society.

To explore this phenomenon, an online survey was administered, the details of which are reported in the parts that follow. In the discussion section, findings are analyzed and presented with a sharp focus on the distinctive features of WeChat and its cultural embeddedness. The paper ends with an examination of the limitations of this study and presents recommendations for future research.

Methodology

The three main research questions anchoring this study are the following: (1) what categories of WeChat usernames emerge from the survey corpus?; (2) what

reasons contribute to the users' choice of a particular onomastic category?; and (3) what are the potential sociocultural ramifications of these naming practices? To answer these three questions, an online survey was administered for data collection. The survey asked the study respondents to reveal their WeChat usernames, the meanings of those names, and their reasons for having chosen them. All of the questions were asked and answered in Mandarin. In accordance with Lee and Schuele (2010) who proposed that "researchers should collect only the demographic information that is necessary for the specific purposes of the research ... [and] that will enhance interpretation of the results" (347), this study did not ask for demographic information, given that it did not aim to investigate demographic variations among the participants.

This study combined convenience and snowball sampling techniques to recruit participants. Starting in March 2018, recruitment was initiated through the researchers' circles of friends (COF) in their WeChat accounts. Using these COFs helped to ensure that the information posted and shared was only visible to the users' friends (Lin, Fang, and Jin 2017). Accordingly, all friends in the researchers' WeChat accounts were targeted as primary potential study participants. Willing respondents were asked to complete the online survey available through a link posted in the COFs. The initial contacts targeted were also encouraged to disseminate the recruitment link in their COF so that more prospective volunteers could be attracted to participate. The recruitment lasted a month and ended in April 2018. The recruitment secured 539 participants in all, 38 of whom returned surveys with missing information. These incomplete surveys were removed, leaving 501 surveys that were considered valid. Non-probability sampling was used in this study. Although this method is potentially limited by the "accidental" nature of choosing a sample that is not representative of the population, it is still useful for studies in which randomization made impossible by extremely large population sizes (Etikan 2016). Such was the case in this study. Given that the investigation did not aim to generalize the findings to an entire population, but sought only to throw some light on yet uncharted territory, the easily accessible and time-saving method of non-probability sampling was deemed appropriate for this research.

After the data were collected, they were imported into a spreadsheet in which each column specified information on one aspect of the survey. The researchers then conducted an initial independent analysis of the usernames. Patterns pertaining to the meanings and reasons behind the usernames were determined. The onomastic data were then taxonomized accordingly. A comparative analysis was carried out by the researchers, who, after several rounds of discussions, reached a consensus regarding the onomastic categorization.

Results

Based on the researchers' joint analyses, seven categories of WeChat usernames were identified. These are presented in Table 1. The categories include

TABLE 1
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF EACH CATEGORY

WeChat usernames category	Number of usernames	Percentage of usernames
Referring to a Chinese birth name	163	32.53
Expressing personal wishes	104	20.75
Referring to a foreign name	73	14.57
Matching a nickname used on other social networking platforms or in real life	46	9.18
Created randomly without deliberate consideration	42	8.38
Referring to self-defined relational positions and qualities	27	5.38
Other	46	9.18
Total	501	100.00

usernames that: (1) referred to a Chinese birth name; (2) expressed personal wishes; (3) referred to a foreign name; (4) matched nicknames used either on other social networking platforms or in real life; (5) were, according to the respondents, created randomly without deliberate consideration; (6) referred to self-defined relational positions and qualities; or (7) fell under the category “other.”

Username Referring to a Chinese Birth Name

The first obvious feature of the data was that the dominant category of naming practices pertained to Chinese birth names. This name type appeared in 163 out of 501 instances, accounting for 32.53% of the total population. Whereas many adopted usernames in Chinese characters were exactly the same as their birth names, a closer look at this category revealed several variations.

68 of 163, constituting 41.71%, chose either their full birth names (e.g., 胡杨, 万静) or surnames/given names used on their own (e.g., 李, 梦). 51 of 163, or 31.28%, chose Romanized pinyin, such as pinyin versions of their full birth names (e.g., *tang jing, gu xin yi, lin lin*); pinyin initials of their birth names (e.g., *XXS, HXJ*); pinyin versions of their birth names with numbers (e.g., *wu xiao yi_1998*). 22 participants, accounting for 13.49% of this category, used Chinese counterparts that had pronunciations similar to their birth names. An example is the username 圆沉君. This name consists of three different Chinese characters that have the same pronunciation as the participant's birth name. 19 participants, or 11.65%, opted for a combination of their birth names and English names, such as 周鹏-Vincent. There were also 3 cases (1.84%) in which the respondents' birth names were split into different characters. For example, the username 三每王木木 consists of five characters that were created by splitting

elements of the original two characters of the birth name. The name 立青 consists of the two characters that when put together form the single character that is the participant's given name.

There were three prominent reasons mentioned behind these choices. 75 of 163, accounting for 46.01%, noted that the reason for their choice of username was their desire to be identified easily—a necessity for effective communication. For example, 周鹏-Vincent gave the following reason for selecting his WeChat username: “I chose it because when I use it, my friends can easily identify me.” XXS offered a similar motivation: “It consists of initials of my birth name. I think it is simple and easy to be remembered.” The respondent with the username 三每王木木 explained: “It is special but also easy for my friends to identify me.” In contrast to these study participants, 32 of them, or 19.63%, noted that their priority was protecting their real identities by changing their birth names with some variants. *Lixiongyong* said, for example: “I use the Romanized pinyin of my birth name. It is still me but not that easy to be identified by the unknown.” *CL* made a similar statement: “It consists of the initials of my birth name. I do not want to reveal my full name.” There was yet another motivation identified in the study. 27 participants, constituting 16.56%, selected their usernames to facilitate potential business communication. As mentioned above, WeChat is an emerging marketing platform. In view of this fact, birth names were adopted as usernames in hopes of making future business exchanges more direct and efficient. This motivation was disclosed by 周帅 who stated the following: “I use my birth name so that my clients can find me easily.” Another participant, 谭 Lily, echoed this opinion: “I combined my family name and English name for more efficient communication with my business partners.”

Usernames Expressing Personal Wishes

Of the total sample of participants, 104 participants, or 20.75%, chose a username expressed a desire or wish such as a goal they aspired to achieve. One of these ideals was optimism: this point was mentioned by 37 out of 104 (35.57%) as evinced by the following usernames: 笑一笑 ‘to wear smiles’; and 阳光总在风雨后 ‘After the storm comes the sun’. The respondent called 笑一笑 gave the following reason for selecting this username: “I want to be happy and smile every day.” Another desire expressed in the respondents’ usernames was the wish for peace and simplicity, accounting for 28 of this category (26.92%). For example, the name 心静如水 was inspired by a poem by a Chinese poet Lu You and means ‘as calm as still water’. Another poetry-inspired name that fell into this category was 渡野. This name was inspired by a Chinese poem by Wei Yingwu and reportedly means ‘an unattended boat anchored at a ferry’. The participant who selected this username explained that it represented his desire for a leisurely and peaceful life.

Another theme in this onomastic grouping related to the desire for kindness. A total of 20 participants (19.23%) selected usernames that expressed this wish.

One such name was 善喜. According to the study participant, this name was borrowed from Buddhist Philosophy and mean ‘The supreme happiness comes from kindness’. A second example of this username type was 若水. Taken from the Chinese classic *Tao Te Ching*, this name translates into ‘As water, benefiting all without competing for fame’.

An interesting variation of this category involved those usernames which expressed the users’ desire to align themselves with persons, characters, or works they admired, chosen by 19 of them (18.26%). For example, the username *Bryant* was chosen by a participant who named himself after the famous US American basketball player, Kobe Bryant. As the respondent revealed: “I like Kobe. It [the username] is a tribute to my idol.” The name 齐天大圣 ‘the monkey king’ was selected in homage to a fictional character in *Journey to the West*, a Chinese literary classic. Another literary-inspired username in this category was *Walden*, borrowed from Thoreau’s masterpiece. Finally, 呦呦鹿鸣, meaning ‘sound of deer’, was taken from a line in *Classic of Poetry*, the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry.

Most of the respondents (83 out of 104, totaling 79.81%) who selected names in this category explained that feelings of fondness for the original name-sake had motivated their decision. For example, 呦呦鹿鸣 stated: “The name sounds lovely. I also like *Classic of Poetry* a lot.” By comparison, 左思 indicated this username represented a personal pursuit to follow in the footsteps of an admired writer: “I named myself after this writer and poet of the Western Jin because I want to be as accomplished as him.” A similar line of thought was best captured by 若水 who gave the following motivation for selecting this username: “I think it reflects my philosophy and ideal of life to treat others and myself with kindness.”

Usernames Referring to a Foreign Name

The next pattern involved the use of a foreign name. This group constituted 73, or 14.57% of the total. English names were chosen by 65 respondents (89.04%), dominating the foreign languages represented, while Korean and Japanese were favored by only 8 of the study participants (10.95%). There were pattern variations in this group as well. For example, 10 (13.69%) added numbers to their foreign language user names (e.g., *Bosco18* and *Elsie7*). 31 (42.46%) combined non-Chinese and Chinese names or initials (e.g., *Jason Chen*, *nick柳*, *Joyce_du*, *FayZX*, and *amycsy*).

30 participants (41.09%) explained that they had adopted a foreign username because of easy access. For example, *Maggie Su* said: “It is my English name and pinyin of family name. I use it simply because I have an English name.” *Spencer* stated: “I use my English name because I have used it for a long time.” 22 respondents (30.13%) explained that non-Chinese usernames helped them facilitate communication with their foreign friends. For example, 변역 said: “It’s my Korean name. I have many Korean friends. I want them to remember me.”

Paddy lee mirrored this sentiment: “I used my English name and pinyin of family name to make it easier to communicate with my foreign friends.” By comparison, there were 14 study respondents (19.17%) who made it clear that they used foreign names in place of their original Chinese names for the sake of confidentiality. As *Glenn* explained: “I don’t want to use my real name in an online setting. I prefer an English counterpart.” *せきてんこう* also shared a similar concern, saying: “I do not want to disclose my real identity. I chose a Japanese counterpart of my Chinese birth name.”

Usernames Matching a Nickname Used on Other Social Networking Platforms or in Real Life

Of the participants investigated, 46, or 9.18%, claimed that they had chosen a username that they used elsewhere. With this group, 28, or 60.86%, continued using a nickname that they had already used on other social networking platforms (e.g., *DAN*, *missing_1025*, *BB*, *shalou1110*, 北大西洋的风 ‘wind from the North Atlantic’). 18, or 39.13%, adopted nicknames that they used in their daily lives (e.g., 卓哥 ‘Brother Zhuo’, 六宝 ‘the sixth baby’, 小K ‘little K’, 赵小笨 ‘silly goose Zhao’). The participants who fell into this group explained that they had used this strategy because they had gotten used to the names that they either already used online or used in their non-virtual lives. For example, *DAN* said: “It’s my QQ nickname. I have used it for long. I chose it for convenience.” *BB* made a similar claim: “I chose my Microblog name for my WeChat name. I am comfortable with it.” In 卓哥’s words: “It is my nickname. That is how I have been called by my friends.” This position was echoed by *zaza*, who said: “I chose a nickname given by my high school mates. I got used to this simple name.”

Usernames Created Randomly without Deliberate Consideration

42 out of 501, taking up 8.38%, indicated that they had chosen random usernames without any significant deliberation (e.g., 萝卜青菜 ‘turnip and bok choy’, *Max*, *F*, ㊦, *juju*, 珠穆朗玛 ‘Mount Everest’, 薄荷糖 ‘mint candy’, 小巫女 ‘little witch’). 30 participants, or 71.42% in this group, acknowledged that their username choice was purely capricious without any specific reason. As *wuiok* admitted: “The name is meaningless. I chose it randomly.” This admission was echoed by *Max*, who said: “I gave myself this name for no reason.” 8 respondents (19.04%) attributed their choice to phonological aesthetics or a sense of fun. For example, 起风了 ‘wind comes’ said: “I did not think much about it, but the name sounds nice.” *karyee* shared the same view, saying: “I just typed it down because it sounds cute to me.” 小巫女 said, “It is just a random name. I think it sounds funny.” 4 participants (9.52%) mentioned that they had not put in much effort in designing a meaningful username as long as it was easily identifiable. ㊦, for example, explained: “It’s just a random choice with

no specific meaning. I felt that it was easy to be identified.” This sentiment was echoed by *F*, who said: “I don’t know what it means. It’s easy for my friends to recognize me, I think.”

Username Referring to Self-defined Relational Positions and Qualities

27, or 5.38% of the participants, self-identified their relational positions or personal attributes with their username choices. Usernames expressing personal relationships include the following: 桐童妈 ‘Tongtong’s mother’; 农民 ‘farmer’; 黄黄姐姐 ‘Huanghuang’s sister’ (*Huanghuang* was the participant’s pet dog). Usernames based on self-ascribed personal qualities include 国际浪民 ‘a global wanderer’; 叫我汉子 ‘call me a tough girl’; 琪琪有个包子脸 ‘Qiqi has a round face’; and 吃货一枚 ‘a foodie’.

All of the participants in this group stated that their name choices were partly motivated by how they self-identified. For example, 黄黄姐姐 said: “I love my dog. I am his sister.” 农民 revealed: “Since I am a farmer’s son, I want to remind myself of this fact.” 国际浪民 reported: “I feel like I am wandering around the globe all the time. It is a description of my life.” Interestingly, 7 participants (25.92%) chose names associated with some of their unfavorable physical features, perhaps revealing a self-deprecating sense of humor. 小丸子 ‘a meat ball’ said: “I am a bit chubby. I look just like a meat ball.” 琪琪有个包子脸 explained: “I think I have a big face. That is why I gave myself this name.” Although ostensibly an act of self-abasement, the entrenched wittiness and humor echo Hassa’s (2012) findings that Internet usernames often convey humor and playful complicity.

Other

The last category, labeled “Other,” accounted for 9.18% (46 out of 501) of the total. In this group, usernames were based on subjective interpretations and naming practices were individually meaningful. These names were derived entirely by the users through their own conceptualization of certain subjects and/or experiences. For example, choosing the first three letters of the word “lemonade,” *Lem* gave herself this name because it was “the first word that came to mind.” *Strawberry* revealed: “This name matches my girlfriend’s username *Banana*”, while 饼干 ‘cookies’ said: “I chose this name because my mum used to buy me a lot of cookies when I was young.” *Cherry* explained the motivation for her name choice was she had “a cherry tree in my backyard.” These highly individualized self-naming practices resonate with Jönsjö’s assertion that a nickname is sometimes “beyond the scope of linguistic analysis” (1979, 16) as it is an arbitrary decision whose meaning resides in the bearer’s interpretation alone.

Discussion

To begin with, the findings indicate that the participants appeared to negotiate their naming practices to address the tension between self-protection and self-presentation. On one hand, WeChat names feature special qualities of Internet names. Communicating personal information to others (Jourard 1971), they represent self-disclosure which risks encroachment on privacy (Bazarova and Choi 2014). For participants who adopted usernames which disguised their real names, their obvious concern to de-identify themselves conformed to the findings of previous studies that have revealed a propensity for Internet names being used to disguise one's real identity (Scheidt 2001). On the contrary, the participants were galvanized to communicate the complexity of their cultural identity via usernames. A foreign name can operate as an additional identity marker (Huang and Ke 2016). However, given that it may not be personal enough to represent some dimensions of the users' identities they wish to communicate, the addition of the Chinese family name, which was popular among the respondents, may reflect an attempt at "personalizing" a randomly self-arranged foreign counterpart. Furthermore, given the fact that WeChat represents a relatively strong community which is less anonymous than other online social tools (Lin, Fang, and Jin 2017), the participants may have been willing to forge social bonds by reinforcing their personal identities using their birth names as WeChat usernames. Signaling frame-shifting from an online to an offline setting (Jacobson 1996), this practice echoes Hassa's assertion of "bring(ing) real-world sincerity and authenticity to cybersphere communication to create transparency and reinforce relationships" (2012, 206).

Additionally, there is a cultural embeddedness in selecting WeChat usernames that pertained to ideals. Those names expressing personal wishes revealed a marked propensity to refer to Chinese poetry, classics, philosophy, and other similar aspects of culture. This result resonates with Bechar-Israeli (1995) findings that name-bearers had a preference to borrow names from figures in literature, films, and famous people while selecting online nicknames. As cultural artefacts, these names reflected a wealth of information about the ethos of Chinese culture. In this sense, they may well have been used not only as mere referential tokens or linguistic identifiers, but as active, creative, and efficacious semiotic resources (Henry 2012). As such these name choices may be interpreted as linguistic expressions of users' ambitions, aesthetic values, and ideological beliefs that were held dear offline. This practice lends weight to Akinnaso (1983) who identified communicative functions of personal names in cultural transmission.

To recap, the choice of a WeChat username is "not an arbitrary process" (Cornetto and Nowak 2006, 379). It manifests as a practice that people consciously and creatively craft to best brand the self (Hassa 2012), subjected to the intertwining forces of internet communication and acquaintance networking within broader sociocultural structures.

Conclusion

This study has a few limitations. As discussed earlier, one of the most significant was the use of non-probability sampling that restricts the generalizability and representativeness of the findings. In addition, the small sample size relative to the number of WeChat users left those users who were not easily accessible voiceless. These limitations mean that it was not possible to capture the true potential level of variation that exists in WeChat users naming practices. Future research that uses probability-sampling methods and incorporates more participants in larger investigations is encouraged.

Another limitation of this research was its narrow focus. As this was an exploratory study, the decision was made to address a limited number of research questions. This means that several factors of potential importance to username selection were not taken into consideration here. For that reason, it may prove fruitful in the future to look at demographic factors (e.g., gender, age, educational background, and location) to determine how and to what extent these variables may influence username choices. Despite these limitations, as one of the first pieces of onomastic research into WeChat, this investigation still provided many new and intriguing insights about names and naming on the most dominant mobile instant messaging application in the Chinese market today. For this reason alone, this work makes a substantial contribution to the under-researched area of onomastic practices among Asian online users.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the CSC–Newcastle University Joint Scholarship.

Bibliography

- Akinaso, F. Niyi. 1983. "Yoruba Traditional Names and the Transmission of Cultural Knowledge." *Names* 31, no. 3: 139–158.
- Aleksiejuk, Katarzyna. 2014. "Internet Names as an Anthroponomastic Category." *Names in Daily Life: Proceedings of the XXIV International Congress of Onomastic Sciences*, 243–255. Barcelona.
- Bazarova, Natalya, and Yoon Hyung Choi. 2014. "Self-Disclosure in Social Media: Extending the Functional Approach to Disclosure Motivations and Characteristics on Social Network Sites." *Journal of Communication* 64, no. 4: 635–657.
- Bechar-Israeli, Haya. 1995. "From 'Bonehead' to 'cLoNehEAd': Nicknames, Play and Identity on Internet Relay Chat." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 1, no. 2. Accessed 10 January 2019. <https://academic.oup.com/jcmc/article/1/2/JCMC127/4584330>Chen
- Cornetto, Karen, and Kristine Nowak. 2006. "Utilizing Usernames for Sex Categorization in Computer-Mediated Communication: Examining Perceptions and Accuracy." *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 9, no. 4: 377–387.

- Diao, Wenhao. 2014. "Between Ethnic and English Names: Name Choice for Transnational Chinese Students in a US Academic Community." *Journal of International Students* 4, no. 3: 205–222.
- Etikan, Ilker. 2016. "Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling." *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics* 5, no. 1: 1–4.
- Fu, Jun. 2018. "Chinese Youth Performing Identities and Navigating Belonging Online." *Journal of Youth Studies* 21, no. 2: 129–143.
- Gatson, Sarah N. 2011. "Self-Naming Practices on the Internet: Identity, Authenticity, and Community." *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 11, no. 3: 224–235.
- Guo, Martin. 2017. "Kantar China Social Media Impact Report 2017." *Kantar China*. Accessed January 10, 2019. <https://cn-en.kantar.com/media/social/2017/kantar-china-social-media-impact-report-2017/>
- Harwit, Eric. 2017. "WeChat: Social and Political Development of China's Dominant Messaging App." *Chinese Journal of Communication* 10, no. 3: 312–327.
- Hassa, Samira. 2012. "Projecting, Exposing, Revealing Self in the Digital World: Usernames as a Social Practice in a Moroccan Chatroom." *Names* 60, no. 4: 201–209.
- Henry, Eric S. 2012. "When Dragon Met Jasmine: Domesticating English Names in Chinese Social Interaction." *Canadian Anthropology Society* 54, no. 1: 107–117.
- Huang, Chiu-Yen, and I-Chung Ke. 2016. "Parents' Perspectives on Adopting English Names in Taiwan." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 37, no. 8: 849–861.
- Huang, Hanyun, and Xiwen Zhang. 2017. "The Adoption and Use of WeChat among Middle-Aged Residents in Urban China." *Chinese Journal of Communication* 10, no. 2: 134–156.
- Jacobson, David. 1996. "Contexts and Cues in Cyberspace: The Pragmatics of Naming in Text-Based Virtual Realities." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 52, no. 4: 461–479.
- Jönsjö, Jan. 1979. *Studies on Middle English Nicknames*. Lund, Sweden: LiberLäromedel.
- Jourard, Sidney M. 1971. *Self-Disclosure: An Experimental Analysis of the Transparent Self*. Oxford, England: John Wiley.
- Lee, Marvin, and C. Melanie Schuele. 2010. "Demographics." In *Encyclopedia of Research Design*, edited by Neil J. Salkind, 346–347. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Leslie, Paul L., and James K. Skipper. 1990. "Toward a Theory of Nicknames: A Case for Socio-Onomastics." *Names* 38, no. 4: 273–282.
- Lin, Chenglong, Wei Fang, and Jianbin Jin. 2017. "You Are What You Post in 'Circle of Friends' of WeChat: Self-Presentation and Identity Production from a Personality Perspective." *Global Media and China* 2, no. 2: 138–152.
- Olivier, Jako. 2014. "Twitter Usernames: Exploring the Nature of Online South African Nicknames." *Nomina Africana* 28, no. 2: 51–74.
- Scheidt, Lois A. 2001. "Avatars and Nicknames in Adolescent Chat Spaces." Accessed December 24, 2019. http://www.academia.edu/2958619/Avatar_and_nicknames_in_adolescent_chat_space.
- Sercombe, Peter, Tony Young, Ming Dong, and Lin Lin. 2014. "The Adoption of Non-Heritage Names among Chinese Mainlanders." *Names* 62, no. 2: 65–75.
- Statista. 2019. "Number of Monthly Active WeChat Users from 2nd Quarter 2012 to 2nd Quarter 2019 (in millions) (in millions)." Accessed September 7, 2019. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/255778/number-of-active-wechat-messenger-accounts/>
- Stommel, Wyke. 2007. "Mein Nick Bin Ich! Nicknames in a German Forum on Eating Disorders." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1: 141–162.
- van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. *Theory and Typology of Proper Names*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Notes on contributors

Xing Xu is a lecturer at Sichuan International Studies University, China, and a PhD candidate at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Her areas of interest are identity theory, cross-cultural adaptation, and doctoral student issues.

He Huang is a full-time researcher at Research Center for Language, Cognition and Language Application of Chongqing University, China. His areas of interest are computational linguistics, corpus linguistics, and big data.

Professor Ting Jiang is responsible for English for Academic Purposes course for doctoral students in Chongqing University. Her research interests focus on English for Academic Purposes, English for Specific Purposes, and Systemic-Functional Linguistics.

Yuanpeng Zou is a lecturer in the College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Chongqing University, China. Her areas of academic interest are English for Academic Purposes, English for Specific Purposes, and Cross-cultural communication.

Correspondence to: He Huang, Room 533, Chongqing University, 174 Shazheng Street, Shapingba, Chongqing, China. Email: riverhuang@cqu.edu.cn