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ETHNOGRAPHY OF SINGAPORE CHINESE NAMES: RACE, RELIGION, AND REPRESENTATION

Abstract

Singapore Chinese is part of the Chinese Diaspora.This research shows how Singapore Chinese names reflect the Chinese naming tradition of surnames and generation names, as well as Straits Chinese influence. The names also reflect the beliefs and religion of Singapore Chinese. More significantly, a change of identity and representation is reflected in the names of earlier settlers and Singapore Chinese today. This paper aims to show the general naming traditions of Chinese in Singapore as well as a change in ideology and trends due to globalization.

Keywords

Singapore, Chinese, names, identity, beliefs, globalization.

1. Introduction

When parents choose a name for a child, the name necessarily reflects their thoughts and aspirations with regards to the child. These thoughts and aspirations are shaped by the historical, social, cultural or spiritual setting of the time and place they are living in whether or not they are aware of them. Thus, the study of names is an important window through which one could view how these parents prefer their children to be perceived by society at large, according to the identities, roles, values, hierarchies or expectations constructed within a social space. Goodenough explains this culturally driven context of names and naming practices:

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> Different naming and address customs necessarily select different things about the self for communication and consequent emphasis. In some instances what is selected for emphasis will reflect and reinforce dominant public values; in others what is selected will reflect personal concerns…In any event, it will be something about which people are concerned, something about their own identities or the identities of others that they *want* to emphasize. What it will be depends on the nature of the identity problems their social circumstances prevailingly create for them (1965: 275; emphasis in original).

Names are linguistic codes representing individuals in meaning and sound. Bean (1978: 14) notes that "participants in a speech act may bring almost any combination of social identities to it."

This article aims to explore how in multilingual Singapore, Chinese names reflect the race, religion and representation of these ethnic Chinese. Ethnic Chinese in Singapore use Chinese names written in Chinese scripts, and English names either in phonetic form of these Chinese names and/or Christian names. Through the study of these Chinese and English names across times, researchers are able to see how these names reflect changes in values and identities in the multilingual and multicultural environment.

Singapore began as a Malay fishing village. Key historical events that deeply influenced the Singapore society include being colonised by the British in the 19th century, occupied by the Japanese in the 1940s, merged with Malaya after the war, and becoming independent in 1965. Currently, Singapore has a population of approximately 3.6 million citizens and permanent residents. Chinese make up 75.1% of Singapore residents, Malays 13.7%, Indians 8.7%, and Eurasians and other groups form 2.5%.[1] Most of the ethnic Chinese are from the southern dialect groups: Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese. All were traditionally spoken in Singapore until recent times. Because of historical reasons, the national language of Singapore is Malay (Singh 2007).[2] The official languages are English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. English has been the country's language of administration since independence and the main medium of instruction in schools.

The data collected, based on availability are roughly from three periods: (1) 1920s, (2) 1940-50s, and (3) 1995-2000. The first period is when World War I ended, the second is around the World War II, and the third is the more recent period. The division of the first two periods corresponds with major historical

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[1] Statistics Singapore, 2008. *Statistics: Population (Mid-year estimates)*, retrieved from: www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/themes/people/hist/popn.html, and *Demography*, retrieved from: www.singstate.gov.sg/pubn/reference/yos/statsT-demography.pd.

[2] Singh (2007: 115) explains that "Malay was made the national language of Singapore due to the historical significance and presence of the Malay community as well as due to Singapore's location in the heart of the Malay world."

events, while the third reflects more current times. Names from the first and second periods were collected from clan associations while the third was from current primary and secondary schools. The data of this research were collected from the following sources: (1) interviews with people in charge of clan associations[3]; (2) membership lists in the clan associations; (3) 2,000 names from primary and secondary schools; (4) names from telephone directory.

The most recent discussion on Chinese personal names is Zheng (2010). She traces the development of Chinese names from Han dynasty to current times. Lee (2009) discusses the historical changes of Singapore Chinese names. Studies on the phonetic spelling of Chinese surnames in Singapore include Loh (2008), Pan and Xie (1975). General discussions on Chinese surnames and names include Foo (1992), Wu et. al. (2006) and Cai et. al. (2008). Other than scholarly discussions, there are books about Chinese names, aimed at helping English educated Singapore-Chinese choose Chinese names for their children (Lin 1986; Lip 1988; Liu 1996; Luo and Cao 1999).

Section 2 of this article discusses how these names reflect the Chinese race and the Peranakan culture. Section 3 discusses how religion is involved in the naming practices among the Singapore Chinese. Section 4 discusses the representation of early naming practices. Section 5 compares the names of boys from different periods to understand the change in values and representations in these names. Section 6 does the same for girls' names. Section 7 discusses how globalization affects naming practices. Section 8 concludes the paper.

2. The Chinese race

2.1 Surname

Surnames are important among the Chinese race as they are said to be originating from common ancestors especially when they are from the same village in China. In other words, surname represents closeness in kinship. For the sake of solidarity, Chinese often regard those with the same surnames as being in one family. If the Chinese people of the same surname come from the same village and speak the same dialect, there is immediately a sense of closeness in relationship. The solidarity shown among those of the same surname shows that traditionally the Chinese race embraces a strong family bond.

Many of the immigrants from China who came from the same village, bearing the same surname established what are now known as the Clan Associations or

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[3] Details of interviewees from clan associations are given in Appendix 1 at the end of the article.

kongsi 公司. There are two distinct types of Clan Associations: (1) the family association, or ancestral temple, whose members bear the same surname and (2) the district association, whose members come from the same prefecture or district, but are not necessarily of the same surname.

There is a strong feeling of fraternity among the members of the family association as they are believed to be direct descendants from the same ancestor or progenitor. The primary aims of the associations were laudable. The association extended help to newcomers (Sing-Khek,*xinke* 新客 or new visitor), gave them accommodation in the premises, and found jobs for them. Scholarship funds were provided to encourage education, and mutual aid schemes for old age care and so on were promoted. Ancestral tablets were set up in sanctuaries at the association to preserve the memory of the dead. Today, many associations have discarded the original functions intended by the founders. (Wu Liu, Penang Gazette, 8th Oct 1950 in Jones 1989: 9)

There is a couplet that sums up the popular surnames in Southern China: "陈林半天下，黄蔡满街走." Using today's English, it can be translated as "*Chens* and *Lins* cover half the country, *Huang* and *Cai* are found on every street." According to an earlier study based on telephone directories and clan association names, there are about 300 surnames in Singapore. They are arranged in descending order:

	Mandarin	**Hokkien**	**Teochew**	**Cantonese**	**Population**
陈	Chen	Tan	Tan	Chan	20,000
林	Lin	Lim	Lim	Lam	18,000
黄	Huang	Ng	Ng	Wong	15,000
李	Li	Lee	Lee	Lee	
王	Wang	Ong	Heng	Wong	
张	Zhang	Teo	Teo	Cheong	
吴	Wu	Goh	Goh	Ng	
蔡	Cai	Chua	Chua	Choi	
刘	Liu	Low	Low	Low	
杨	Yang	Yeo	Yeo	Yeong	

We also notice that some surnames clearly belong to a particular dialect group. For example, most of those with the surname *Foo* "符" are from the Hainan dialect

group. Most with the surname *Han*"韩" belong to the Hainanese group, while some belong to the Hakka dialect group. Those with the Lai surname are usually Hakka. *Lee* and *Tan* (or *Chan* depending on the dialect group) can be from any dialect group. If they are Hokkien or Teochew, the surname will be spelled as *Tan*. If they are Cantonese, it will be *Chan*.

2.2 Generation name *bei ming* 辈名

Traditionally, Chinese families identify which generation they belong to according to the family's generation poem. These poems are often given in their ancestral temples in China. In Singapore, more traditional families continue to use these poems when they choose names for their children. Kiang (1934) states that in the Han Dynasty (beginning about 206 B.C.), each clan in China would hold a meeting of its leaders to select a list of names that would be adopted as the 'generation names' of subsequent generations of the clan so that they could be more easily remembered. The names are arranged in the form of a poem, each line consisting of five names, and each stanza consisting of two, four or six lines.

When a son[4] (usually not daughter) is born in a Chinese family, the father ascertains from the family association what the appropriate generation name is and uses it as the first character of the personal name of the son. Each clan has its own table of generation names exclusive to those of a particular clan (i.e. persons having the same surname) who come from one province only. For example, the *Lee* clan of Hokkien Province will not have the same table as the *Lee* clan of the Teochew Province.

In modern Singapore, the Hainan and Foochow families still adhere to the practice of naming by generation. Perhaps because these are the smaller dialect groups, they are more protective of their traditions and therefore have preserved the generation names. There are many family Clan Associations all over the island. The Hainan Clan Association members' lists and the Foochow Clan Association members' lists are listed according to surnames. Under one particular surname, there are many of the same first character of the two-character given names, which is likely to be the generation name. Sometimes the generation may be the second character of a two-character given name. By looking at a person's generation name, one can tell which generation the person belongs to. A relative of a later generation name will have to address another of the older generation as Aunt or Uncle even if

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[4] Traditional Chinese families still show preference for the sons because they bear the family names. However, more modern families prefer daughters who are taking care of the parents more than the sons who are usually busy with work and their own families.

he is older in age than that of the younger generation name. Today, when the younger generation is told that they are "aunts" or "uncles" to relatives much older than them, they usually find it very amusing.

In Singapore, the most complete compilation of the generation name is that of the Foo Clan. The Foo Clan has an impressive website, accessible at www.fooclan.org. Current Chairman Dr Foo Say Wei, associate professor of electrical engineering at the Nanyang Technological University, has his personal genealogy that traces back to the *Qin* Dynasty (206 BC). He is currently the 73rd generation from *Qin* Dynasty. The first *Foo* ancestor originally carries the surname *Ji* 姬. He was appointed to take charge of the Battle Order (*bing fu* 兵符) Imperial Seal (*yu xi* 玉玺), and Appointment Flag (*ling qi* 令旗), hence his title was *fu-xi-ling* （符玺令）. Soon people got used to calling him *Master Fu* (符公), making his surname *Fu* (in Singapore, the spelling is *Foo*). This little anecdote shows how an appointment can lead to a surname.

Dr *Foo* belongs to the *Zhi* (之) generation. His full Chinese name is 符之玮 *Foo Say Wei* (*Fu Zhiwei* in Mandarin). His son's generation is supposed to be the *Ji* 基 generation, but he chooses to use the parallel "new" general table which gives him the generation name, *Chuan* 传. Female children usually do not use the generation name. It is of great importance that a family enters into the chronicles of the family clan book and they can only do so through the sons.

Other than the Hainan dialect, those of the Foochow dialect also pay attention to the generation name. Mr Tian of the Foochow association shows how his family could trace their generation name from AD 911 in the Cheng's anniversary memorial book published in 2002. Even until the 1990s, relatives in China and overseas still follow the order of the poem below:

元亨利贞

本由天道

文章礼乐

The oldest living generation is now 本 *ben* (original), and the youngest is 乐 *le* (happy). In other words, there are eight generations in the present time. Mr Tian belongs to the 道 *dao* (way) generation, while his children belong to the 文 *wen* (literati) generation. His eldest son is 文希 Wen Xi. Wen Xi's daughter also uses the next generation name of 章 *zhang* (chapter). His daughter's name is 章慧 Zhang Hui. Mr Cheng's older brother's name is 道述 Dao Shu. Mr Cheng Dao Shu's sons are 文瑞 Wen Rui and 文建 *Wen Jian*. Wen Rui's son belongs to the Zhang generation and

is named 章耀 *Zhang Yao*. *Wen Jian's* son is named 章锦 *Zhang Jing*. According to Mdm Ji (杨纪彬), the male and female children of her family use the generation name.[5]

Besides the Hainanese and Foochow people, most Chinese in Singapore no longer pay attention to the generation name. For example, as a Teochew myself, I rarely hear the Teochews follow the generation name. However, I discovered that the owner of a local famous Teochew Restaurant, Huat Kee, Mr *Lee Chiang Howe* 李长豪 is from the same village and the same alley as my grandfather from the Second Alley of the *Guak Cha* 鹳巢 (*Guan Chao* in Mandarin) Lee family in Chao An, China. Hence, there is reason to believe that he is a relative in one way or another. Moreover, Mr Lee's generation name is *chang* 长 (pronounced *chiang* in Teochew) which is similar to that of my cousin Dr *Lee Chiang Tee* 李长智. He is therefore likely to be from the same generation as myself. This is further confirmed when he gave me the following generation poem from which his generation name 长 *chang* is derived:

可学开成
启迪前烈
长法其详
家声克绍
诗礼传芳

The generation before *chang* 长(*Chiang* in Teochew) is *lie* 烈 which is my uncle, Mr *Lee Liat Cheng's* 李烈清 generation name. However, my father's name was not chosen according to the generation name, neither was my brother, nor does any of the generation younger than myself follow the next generation name *fa* 法. Thus, if no one in my family bothers to find out the generation name, it may stop at the point of my cousin *Chiang Tee*. This illustrates that the present generation is the transition one between traditions and changes.

Recently, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr George Yeo (杨荣文部长) visited his home town in Ang Bu (庵埠) of Chao An (潮安) province. I asked him if his family follows the generation name. According to Mr Yeo, the Yeo family uses the

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[5] 2008 年 6 月 5 日，在福州会馆访问。

岚公系 *Ruan Gong* system that was established since the Qing Dynasty. Thirteen generations have been using this generation system. The system is as follows:

<div align="center">

外世系

茂天之世，必其永昌。

元文秀**启**，**应时英**贤。

华光盛彩，奕开泰祥。

弘农嘉庆，传芳万年。

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Mr Yeo's father belonged to the 启 *Qi* generation but his name was chosen wrongly using the next generation name of 应 *Ying*. His name is 应松 *Ying Song*. However, his uncle used the correct generation name of 启 *Qi* and was named 启迪 *Qi Di*. Minister Yeo's mother decided to restore the generation name of her grandchildren. Hence, Minister Yeo's children's names begin with 时 *Shi* (时恩 *Shi-en*, 时明 *Shi-ming,* 时智 *Shi Zhi*, 时弘 *Shi Hong*). Minister Yeo's third brother's son was 时浩 *Shi Hao*, and his daughters are 时娴 *Shi Xian* and 时敏 *Shi Min*. Minister Yeo's fifth brother's son is 时辉 *Shi Hui*. The next generation, 时浩 *Shi Hao's* son also followed the generation name and was named 英成 *Ying Cheng*.

2.3 Manufactured names

The study of naming practices and their relationship to social structure has been of some interest to researchers, particularly in anthropology. See Collier and Bricker (1970), Price and Price (1972) for case studies in the Americas; Burton (1999), and Bean (1978) for a most detailed study. Aceto (2002: 582) claims that

> alternative names or multiple naming practices signal the emphasis or construction of an imminent or latent identity (or, inversely, in some cases, the rejection or concealment of an previous identity) correlated with one or more socially constructed components, such as language, kinship, social status, ethnicity, nationality, spirituality, or gender.

In traditional Chinese society, Chinese people can have multiple names as well. They use different names to identify themselves depending on where they are and

who they are speaking to rather than for concealment.[6] Zheng (2010: 52-53) outlines a variety of alternative names with respect to the spheres they are used adapted in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Name types

Sphere	Name
Home	Pet or childhood name（小/乳名）, bestowed at birth, and clan name （族名）
School	Great name（大名）or School name（学名）which could be bestowed a few months after birth or when the child entered school.
Adulthood	Adult name（字）, given to men when they reach adulthood and women at marriage Adult/ style name （号）, self-given for a certain identity Style/courtesy name （字）
Profession	Examination title（学位名）, occupation qualification（职业名）
Emperors	Reign name/title （年号） Temple and posthumous name （庙号） Given name （俗名） Unofficial and tomb names （墓名）
Well-known persons (Martial artists, pirates, fugitives, etc.)	Pseudonyms （假名，无名） Nicknames （外/绰号，别名） Literary name/title （笔名） Nom deplume or pen name （别号）
Religious believers	Religious name (教/法名）
Resident abroad	Foreign name （洋名）

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[6] see Kaganoff (1977) for the case of Ashkenazic Jews in Europe and Scott 1985.

Pseudonym in Greek is made up of two morphemes that means 'false name.' However, Room (1981: 5) explains that a pseudonym may be more accurately defined as an 'assumed name,' since these are most often taken on consciously and explicitly as a kind of name change with little or no effort to deny the individual's original name. Aceto (2002: 584) makes a clear distinction between nicknames and pseudonyms. Recipients usually select their own pseudonyms, while nicknames are usually chosen for them. Pseudonyms are common among individuals who assume a new, more public identity (e.g. in politics, in social and religious contexts, and especially in entertainment). This applies to many famous people in society.

Price and Price (1972) discuss names among the Saramaka Maroon group of Suriname, distinguishing three general types of personal names: (i) Gaan ne 'big name' or 'true name,' which becomes restricted in use in late adolescence and early adulthood; (ii) piki ne 'little name' or 'nickname,' which is usually externally derived; and (iii) bakaa ne 'Western name,' literally 'white name,' a name chosen by men who work on the coast of Suriname in a more European-influenced context where Dutch or Sranan (a third English-derived creole of Suriname) are often spoken. According to Aceto's definition, name types (ii) and (iii) correspond well to nicknames and pseudonyms respectively.

I shall give examples of some of these name types found in Singapore Chinese names.

(1) Small name *xiaoming* 小名, milk name *ruming* 乳名

Small names and milk names start off as a pet name, for use by the family and close friends, but it may so happen that a person will go through life and never have any other name. The small name usually is more like a real name whereas a milk name may be a term of endearment. My mother's given name is *Shunyu* 舜玉 (*Soon Gek* in Teochew). She has a milk name *Soi Nek* 细肉 (in Teochew), which means "little flesh," denoting the preciousness of one's flesh and blood. Her elder sister's milk name is *Dua Nek* 大肉 (great flesh or the elder flesh), and her younger sister's milk name is *Nek Ngee* 肉丸 (flesh ball, denoting the smallness and cuteness). Friends are unlikely to call a person by his milk name if he had other names – it was reserved for family use. But not everyone in traditional China had several names. A working class man most likely had only a milk name.

(2) Great name *da ming* 大名

The way Chinese ask one another of their name is by asking 请问尊姓大名 or "May I ask your respectful surname and great name?" Because of the high respect for teachers, they were often asked to bestow the *da ming* or school name and even the *hao*. Incidentally, a man's *da ming* and *hao* could be opposite in meaning or act in tandem. For example, if his *da ming* means War, then his adult name may mean Peace. An example is that of Confucius' son. He was named Carp because when he was born, the family received this fish as a present. Carp's adult name was Bo Yu 伯鱼, meaning "first – born fish." There are examples of people who when given a school name, started using it instead of his given name for the rest of his life (Louie 1989: 49). In the Singapore context, this category is not of much significance.

(3) Marriage name

According to the Cantonese custom, a bridegroom adopts a special 'marriage name' for use on his wedding day only called *zige* 字格 (name frame) (Jones 1989: 50). However, we have found an example of using the generation as a marriage name. For example, Mr *Lo Hock Ling's*, the chairman of *Gang Chow Hui Kun* given name is 鹤龄 *Hock Ling* (in Cantonese, lit. 'crane age') but his marriage name is 贤俊 *Xian Jun* (able and handsome). According to Mr Lo, his marriage name follows the generation name given in the following poem:

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始履华中和

继芳应位育

圣**贤**万世存

斯道为之鹄

文章乃国华

诗书是家福

守礼与怀仁

子孙受百禄

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Mr Lo's generation belongs to the 贤 *xian* (able and upright) generation, though, his father chooses the common name 龄 *ling* (age) for him and his brothers. The generation name was given only when he got married. Similarly, marriage names were also given to his younger brothers:

康龄 *Hong Ling*, married name is 贤杰 *Xian Jie*

卓龄 *Cheok Leng*, married name is 贤博 *Xian Bo*

嘉龄 *Kah Ling*, married name is 贤广 *Xian Guang*

This practice of marriage names is also hardly heard of among Chinese in Singapore today.

(4) Pseudonyms: courtesy name *hao* 号, adult name *zi* 字 and pen name *biehao* 别号

The Chinese pseudonyms include courtesy name *hao* 号, adult name *zi* 字 and pen name *biehao* 别. According to Giles's definition, a *zi* name is, "A name or style taken at the age of twenty, which may be used by friends, or of one another by brothers." The terms *hao* and *zi* can be quite confusing because in the literature on Chinese names, the *zi* is called an adult name and the *hao* a courtesy name. These two terms were switched around in modern usage. The Chinese scholar, *Lin Yutang,* observes: "In the course of life, as their taste develops and their wisdom deepens, they often take a fancy to a certain word or phrase fraught with meaning, and give themselves another name to indicate their spiritual progress or a particularly meaningful experience: hence a person may have several *hao* or fancy names..." (Lin 1955: 413).

Art experts rely on the *bie hao* of an artist for authenticating the provenance of a Chinese painting. Famous writers usually had several because this could create an illusion of wide support. For example, the scholar and diplomat *Hu Shih* had twenty-four *bie hao*.

Another case is that of the late Mr. *Lee Kong Chian's* 李光前 (1894-1967), businessman and philanthropist in Singapore. His original name was *Li Yukun* 李玉昆 and *Kong Chian* was his *bie hao* 别号 (Kua 1995: 44-45). He used *Kong Chian* as his name and people hardly knew about his original name. The meaning of *Kong Chian* (光前 Guang Qian) literally means "bright front" or "glorifying earlier ancestors." Obviously, he would like people to see him as one who glorifies his

forefathers. On the other hand, Mr. *Lee Wee Nam* 李伟南(1880-1964), a leader of the local Chinese community, has a *zi* name, *Yinghao* 英豪 (heroic and noble) but chooses to use his original name *Wee Nam* 伟南 , which means "great south."

Goodenough draws two basic conclusions when discussing the variety of personal names found among two societies in Oceania: Names often function "as constant reminders to people of things about their identities [they] want to be reminded of" or "they are things about which most people want to remind their fellows" (1965:275). This is also true for those who choose their pseudonyms.

(5) Nicknames *hua ming* 花名

A nickname is typically a name given to an individual in addition to his or her given or official first name. They often highlight characteristics or stigmas, physical or social, to which the recipient is reluctant to call attention. Morgan et al. add, "nicknames very often home in on just those characteristics he would prefer to forget" (1979: 5). Some Chinese may have a nickname given to them at home usually preceded by the vocative *Ah*. Sometimes these names are given according to some special features. For example, a child who is dark in complexion may be given a nickname *Ah Neh*, *Neh* is short-form for Indian in the Hokkien dialect. Some are given names such as *Ah Jiam* 亚尖 (*Ah* + pointed), probably denoting that the child had a pointed face at birth. Many of the Chinese people live through their lives accepting all these not so pleasant nicknames given to them to the extent that people do not know their given name. The use of *Ah* as prefix is said to have originated from the bi-syllabic feature in vernacular Chinese language.

2.4 *Neo* and *Ba* : Straits Chinese

There is a group of Chinese people in Singapore called the Peranakans, a general term for Straits Chinese. The roots of the Singapore Peranakans can be traced to Chinese settlements in Malacca and the Dutch East Indies from at least the 17th century onwards, when intermarriages took place between male Chinese migrants and local non-Chinese women. They have their own distinctive culture, which is a combination of Malay, Chinese and English. They would claim to be "more Chinese than the Chinese" and "more Malay than the Malays." Many of them speak Hokkien and Malay but no Mandarin.

The males are called *Babas* and the females are called *Nyonyas*. Many of the females have names ending in *Neo* (*niang* 娘) from the first part of *Nyonyas*. Any female names with the character *Neo* is usually from a Peranakan family. Girls'

names usually consist of common characters such as *Geok* (玉 *yu*) "jade," *Lian* (莲 *lian*) "lotus," *Choo* (珠 *zhu*) "pearl," *Poh* (宝 *bao*) "precious," and *Guek* (月 *yue*) "moon." Due to limited Chinese, the names chosen by the Peranakan people are of a small set of characters. For the males, the common characters are *Hock* (福 *fu*) "blessing," *Chye* (财 *cai*) "wealth," *Cheng* (清 *qing*) "clear," *Kim* (金 *jin*) "gold," *Beng* (明 *ming*) "bright."

The Teochew Clan Association shows names that are influenced by the Peranakan. Many of the Teochew males are named *Ah Ba* 亚峇,which means *Ah* young man, with *Ba* 峇 from the Baba. There are names such as *Lim Ah Ba* and *Tan Ah Ba*. Almost every surname has someone named *Ah Ba*. This phenomenon no longer exists as people got more educated and their names became more sophisticated. Some of these practices were combined with the Chinese numbering system and names developed such as *Dua Ba* 大峇(eldest boy), *Ji Ba* 二峇(second boy) and *Sah* Ba 三峇(third boy) etc.

3. Religion

3.1 Five elements

The Chinese people in Singapore still believe in the importance of cosmology in name practices. The *Wu xing* 五行 or 'five elements' is very important when it comes to given names. The 'five elements' are:

Jin	金	Gold
Mu	木	Wood
Shui	水	Water
Huo	火	Fire
Tu	土	Earth

When a child is born, the parents may consult a geomancer who, after reference to the child's date of birth and to his own almanacs, advise whether the child is likely to be deficient in any of the 'five elements'. Then the child will be made good by the choice of names consisting of those elements. The following names are quite common among the old-fashioned, and they are real names of people in their 50s or 60s today:

Chinese	Mandarin	Hokkien	Translation
金木	Jin Mu	Kim Bak	Gold and Wood
金土	Jin Tu	Kim Tho	Gold and Earth

More educated parents today may not use the 'five elements' directly in their children's names. Instead they use characters containing elements such as three gold or the metal radical to show an abundance of the gold element: *xin* 鑫 (financial prosperity). Similarly, those who lack the water element will have names carrying the character with three water elements: *miao* 淼 (of an expanse of water), and those lacking wood will have the character with three wood radicals *sen* 森 (forest) etc. Some more creative parents will use *jiang* 江 for a child who lacks water, such as in the name *Chen Da Jiang* 陈大江 (Chen big river).

3.2 Derogative names (*zhuo ming* 浊名)

According to De Groot (1892), it is part of Chinese superstitious belief that a name and its owner are identical. The name represents his body, life, soul and energy, just as well as his image and his horoscope do. They believe that it is by no means rare for people of either sex to hear their names pronounced in the air and to incur a serious disease, and even death, not long after. He said that

> It is then clear that the Chinese must feel and manifest an aversion from pronouncing names, especially in their own and those of persons whom they are bound to esteem, to respect and to love. It is therefore wise to use as personal names such terms as denote in the ears of the uninitiated specter-world quite other things, preferably despicable things which are not worth attending to; in other terms, naming men must be overt depreciation, or even scolding. Indeed, specters will, on hearing such names, believe at once that the bearers are despised by everyone, and they will turn their refined maliciousness against persons of more importance (Groot 1892: 1128).

This phenomenon is also found elsewhere. Regarding the maintenance of secrecy surrounding sacred names, Herskovits states:

> Names are given at stated periods in an individual's life, and, as among all folk where magic is important, the identification of a 'real' name with the personality of its bearer is held to be so complete that this 'real' name, usually the one given him at birth by a particular relative, must be kept secret lest it come into the hands of

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someone who might use it in working evil magic against him (Herskovits 1941:190).

Clodd (1920: 65) describes the secrecy associated with Sinhalese 'rice names' as a safeguard against sorcery. Harrison (1990) describes the secrecy surrounding names and the power inherent in them that must be guarded in Papua New Guinea.

Among Singapore-Chinese the Hakka and Teochew Clan Association name list includes names such as *Ah Pig* and *Ah Nine*. The number nine has the same sound as "dog" and hence it is used in place of the character "dog," other variations are *gou* 苟 which also sounds like "dog" in Hakka.

Chinese	Mandarin	Hakka	Teochew	Translation
亚猪	Ya Zhu		Ah De	Ah Pig
亚九	Ya Jiu	Ah Keow		Ah Nine (sounds like dog)
亚苟	Ya Gou	Ah Keow		Ah (sounds like dog)

Other names include *bie ren* 别人, *bak nang*, which means "other person" in Teochew or a variation *bak nang* 别南 (other-south) but sounds the same as "other person." Thus, the person's name is "surname + other person" so that the evil spirits will not recognize him, and he grows up unharmed. These names do not exist any more in today's children's names. It is quite clearly a practice of the past.

Mr. Tian Took Earn, the general affairs officer of Singapore Foochow Association, told me that his Milk name or pet name was 水妹 *shui mei* or "water sister." Typically, any name with the character 妹 mei or younger sister, definitely belongs to a female. However, in the directory of the Singapore Foochow Association, there are numerous names with the character 妹 mei "younger sister." Strangely, they all belonged to males. Mr. Tian explained that around the time of WWII, his parents lost two baby boys before he came along. In order to ward off evil, they gave him a girl's name and named him 水妹 shui mei or "water sister." They believed that by giving him a girl's name, evil would consider him worthless to attack. Mr. Tian is known as shui mei among his relatives, but in school, he wasknown as Took Earn. Besides the Tian family, many male members in the Singapore Foochow Association and the Foochow Coffee Association also had 妹 *mei* "younger sister" as their names. There were"依妹"Yi-mei "Ah-younger sister," "莲妹"Lian-mei "lotus younger sister," "光妹" Guang-mei "bright younger sister," "金妹" Jin-mei "Gold younger sister," "三妹" San-mei "Third younger sister," "观妹"

Guan-mei "Observe younger sister," "缸妹" Gang-mei "Urn younger sister," "亚妹"
Ya-mei "Ah Younger sister" etc.

Interestingly, the Singapore Futsing Association in Singapore also shows a
similar trend. There are names such as 春妹 Chun mei "Spring sister" and 宝妹 Bao
mei "precious sister" used for males. According Mr. Ling Geok Choon, the officer
of cultural and e-Education in the association, the Fuqing people also prefer to
choose names that mean tough or hard ying 硬 to ensure the child has the toughness
to survive all odds. To ward off evil, they also choose derogative names such as"傻
子" sha-zi "stupid," "亚呆" ya-dai "Prefix Ah – Dumb," "亚愚" ya-yu "Prefix-
dense."

3.3 Western names

British rule and western influence have causedchanges in naming practices. The
most obvious influence is the high percentage of Christian names of school
children today. In mission schools, students are likely to come from Christian
families; 80% of students in mission schools have Christian names such as
Jonathan or Christine. Most of the time, family members, relatives and friends call
them by their Christian names, except for their Chinese teacher in school. This
makes their Chinese given name little used. The common practice is to put their
Chinese name in front, then add a comma with a Christian name e.g. *Liu Jia Shen,
Jonathan*. However, there are also people who do it the other way round, giving
the Christian name first then the surname and Chinese given name, e.g. *Christine
Tan Ling Yan*.

Mission schools also show a great increase in names with the character *en* 恩
(grace) some real examples are: *Ci En* 慈恩 (motherly grace), *Yi En* 溢恩
(overflowing grace), *Zhi En* 智恩 (wisdom and grace), *Kai En* 凯恩 (victorious
grace), *Wei En* 伟恩 (great grace), *En Quan* 恩全 (complete grace), *Tian En* 天恩
(heavenly grace), *Jing En* 敬恩 (respect and grace), *En Jian* 恩健 (grace and health).

There is a trend to choose Chinese names that reflect the sound of the Christian
names and yet has a good meaning. Some real examples are as follows:

郑凯恩 Kelvin Tay Kai En

何骅伦 Alan Ho Hua Lun

Others would simply translate their Christian name into Chinese and not bother to
add English names to the Chinese characters. For example, 黄玛丽 *Mary Ng* (in

Mandarin the name is *Huang Ma Li*, here the dialect pronunciation of the surname is Ng, and the Chinese name *Ma Li* 玛丽 is probably derived from the Christian name Mary). Although this practice is not common at the moment, there is reason to believe that this trend may gain popularity as people are now so used to calling each other by their Christian names. There are also names using the translation of the Christian name only in sounds without any meaning. These are also found in the current Teochew Clan Association members' list such as *Xu Ma-ge-lie* 徐玛格烈 (surname + Margaret, in Teochew the surname would be *Chi* or Chee[7]), *Xu Hen-li* 徐亨利 (surname + Henry).

4. Identity in the 40s and 50s

4.1 According to birth order

Data from the Clan Associations show that it was common in the earlier period for families to name their children by way of their birth order. For example, in a Teochew family, the eldest son is called *Dua Di*（大弟）, literally "big brother" or eldest brother. The he second son would be named *Ji Di*（二弟）, literally "second brother" and so forth. The eldest daughter would be named *Dua Mueh*（大妹）, literally "big sister" or eldest sister, while the youngest daughter would be named *Soi Mueh*（细妹）, literally "little sister" etc. Thus, names developed such as *Tan Sah Muey*（陈三妹）in which Tan is the surname, and *Sah Muey* is the given name, which also means "third sister." However, as people get more educated, we no longer find any numbering system of this kind among school children today.

Data also show that it was typical for Cantonese and Hakka families to name the youngest children with the character *man* 满 (full) when they decided not to have any more children. There are names such as *Chin Man Chai* 陈满仔 (*Chin* full son), *Chin Man Moy* 陈满妹 (*Chin* full sister), *Chin Ah Man* 陈亚满(*Chin Ah*-full) for either the intended youngest son or daughter.

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[7] Surnames are not available in the members list of Clan Associations with the exception of the Hokkien Huay Kuan.

4.2 Ah (亚 or 阿) as prefix for names

It is common among the Southern Chinese to have names prefixed by *Ah*. For example, if a person's name is *Lim Yong Beng*, it is common for his family to call him *Ah Beng*. Records from the Clan Association shows that many of the Chinese who are now in their 50s, 60s or 70s have names such as *Tan Ah Meng* and *Ng Ah Lim* (*Tan* and *Lim* are the surname), etc. These names show that the parents are not very educated, hence they simply use *Ah* as part of the given name. This type of naming practice does not exist any more in today's generation, although it is commonly used in the spoken form to add "Ah" to the last character of the name, e.g. I am still known as *Ah Leng* (from Lee Cher *Leng*) to my family and relatives.

Some even have names as simple as *Ah Di* (*Ah* Young Brother) and *Ah Mueh* (*Ah* Younger Sister). These are especially common among the Hokkien- and Teochew-speaking community. Some families have given their children names but use this way of addressing them at home. Unfortunately, as people got used to calling them these simple names with the *Ah* prefix, these children's names could be *Ming Hui* 明惠 , for instance, but she is called *Ah Muey* 阿妹 (Ah sister) at home by parents and siblings. Soon, people may not remember her name except the simple form of *Ah Muey*. *Ah* may also come before the person's order of birth. For example, the elder sibling may be called *Ah Dua* ("big" in the Teochew dialect) and the younger *Ah Soi* ("small" the Teochew dialect). Hence, names such as *Tan Ah Soi*（陈亚细）(Tan + Ah + small) are found in the Teochew Clan Association name list.

5. Change in identity of male names

This section discusses the names of Chinese males born around the end of WWI and those in current times. These names reflect the historical and social contexts as well as the aspirations of their parents during those times.

5.1 Earlier generation: survival

From 1,000 male names taken from a clan association born around 1920s, there was a clear preference for the following characters:

生 *sheng* or life		46
华 *hua* or Chinese		36

祥 *xiang* or auspicious	33
荣 *rong* or glory	32
福 *fu* or blessing	21
南 *nan* or south	18
汉 *han* as in "Han Chinese"	16
昌 *chang* or prosper	15
天 *tian* or Heaven	14
海 *hai* or Sea	9

A total of 240 (about 25%) of the names consist of one or more of the above characters. Although these characters could have dialectal preferences, it is possible to understand the ideology and philosophy behind these names:

(1) Life and Survival

The main concern is that of giving life to the child as in the character *sheng* 生 or life, or wanting the child to have the ability to survive, to keep on living. It also has a good sound and is easy to write. Examples of such names are: *Qingsheng* 庆生 (celebrate life) and *Shunsheng* 顺生 (smooth life).

(2) *Han* or *hua* (Chinese) race

The Chinese ethnic element is also prevalent as seen in the character *Hua* (Chinese) and *Han* 汉 as in "Han Chinese." Examples of these names are *Wei Hua* 伟华 (great Chinese), *Yao Hua* 耀华 (bright Chinese), *Han Guang* 汉广 (Han being broaden) , *Han Qiang* 汉强 (Han being strengthened).

(3) Auspicious and Blessed

A main concern is the hope that the child has an auspicious life (*xiang* 祥 or auspicious), a life full of blessings (*fu* 福), prosperity (*chang* 昌), glory (*rong* 荣), and being helped by heaven (*tian* 天 or Heaven). Examples of such names are *Tian Xiang* 添 祥 (adding auspiciousness), Wan Xiang 万 祥 (Ten thousand-fold auspiciousness), *Wan Chang* 万昌 (Ten thousand-fold prosperity), *Miao Chang* 淼昌 (Prospers like expanse of great waters).

(4) South Sea

There is the element of South (*nan* 南) and Sea (*hai* 海) hinting the birth of the child is away from mainland China, in the southern seas. Examples of such names are *Zhi Nan* 志南 (ambitions in the south) and *Hai Xin* 海新 (Seas of the New).

(5) Glorify ancestors

There is also an important feature of Confucian ethics. Especially in bringing honor to forefathers, Chinese have the saying *guangzong yaozu* 光宗耀祖 or glorify and honor ancestors. Many prominent figures in Singapore have this type of name:

a. 李光前 Lee Kong Chian (1894-1967) – "Lee Glorify Ancestors" was a local prominent businessman and philanthropist. As mentioned above, his original given name was 玉昆 (Mandarin is *Yukun*), and his *bie hao* was *Kong Chian* 光前. It was obvious that his ambition as stated in his *bie hao* was to bring glory to his forefathers, and he certainly did so in all the good deeds he has done for the society.

b. 黄祖耀 (Wee Cho Yaw) (1929-), a prominent banker and chairman of the Hokkien Huay Kuan since 1972. His given name means "ancestor glorified," and he has certainly done so.

(6) Seeking protection

There are also quite a number of names involving *fo* 佛 or Buddha such as *fo bao* 佛保, *fo you* 佛佑, both of them mean "Buddha protect." The choice of such names show that they are Buddhist and also expresses the wish for Buddha to protect them.

To summarize, the choice of names focus on Chinese ethnicity, the ability to survive (life), to endow the child with blessings, honor, and prosperity, and to honor forefathers and be blessed by their gods. In short, there is a general hope that the child survives well, is protected, and eventually prospers in the times when Singapore's future was still unknown.

5.2 Current generation: character and ambitions

This section discusses names of Singapore Chinese boys' born between 1995 and 2006. Today's school children live in a different Singapore compared to their forefathers. It is a nation thriving with success and has more security than many neighboring countries. This change of political and social scene is clearly reflected in the naming practices today. The general trend has shifted from survival to the emphasis on the character and ambitions parents wish their children to possess.

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The examples below are derived from real samples of more than 2,000 names from primary and s-Secondary school children in Singapore today[8].

(1) Building character:

The common characters used to show character are: *wei* 伟(greatness), *hao* 豪 (nobility), *jie* 杰(outstanding talent)*, jun* 俊(handsome and outstanding), *qiang* 强 (strength), *yong* 勇(courage), *xian* 贤(wise and virtuous), *ming* 明(brightness, also in understanding), *ren* 仁(benevolence), *de* 德(moral), *zhi* 志 (ambition), and *ze* 哲 (scholarly). Examples of names consisting of these characters are:

俊豪 *Junhao* (handsome and talent)
贤勇 *Xianyong* (able and courageous)
伟明 *Weiming* (great and bright)
明仁 *Mingren* (clever or bright and benevolent)

(2) Glory and honor (to forefathers):

Common characters to show honor and glory: *yao* 耀(brightness), *hui* 辉 (splendor/radiance), and *rong* 荣(glory and honor). Examples of names with these characters are:

国耀 *Guoyao* (country's glory)
健荣 *Jianrong* (healthy and glorious)
耀扬 *Yaoyang* (glory magnified)

(3) Maleness: 龙 *long* (dragon), 雄 *xiong* (male)

The character of the dragon 龙 *long* is common among males as it denotes a strong sense of maleness and the auspicious quality it denotes in the Chinese context, e.g. *wen long* 文龙(which means a literal dragon), and *zhen long* 振龙 (a dragon with a force to boost).

(4) New favorites:

New characters emerging as favorites showing more educated and sophisticated parents: *yu* 宇(universe) instead of only *guo* 国(country), soar 翔 *xiang* (instead of flying 飞 *fei*), high, lofty, dignified 轩 *xuan*, and perseverance 毅 *yi*. Examples of names containing these characters are:

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[8] There are many books that one could consult to name their children, such as Lin (1988), Luo and Cao (1999), Lip (1988) and Liu and Wu (1996).

立宇 *Liyu* (building the universe)

宇亮 *Yuliang* (the universe brightened)

敬轩 *Jingxuan* (respect and dignified)

宏轩 *Hongxuan* (magnificent and dignified)

毅洪 *Yihong* (boundless determination)

6. Change in identity in female names

This section compares the Singapore Chinese female names from the 1920s to the current generation (1995-2006). In the earlier times, the parents who came from China did not seem to give the female children clear identity. Compared to today's female's names, there are a lot of changes. It is obvious that parents are more educated and they want to see their daughters succeed in life.

6.1 Earlier generation (1920s): little identity

(1) "sister" and "flower"

Out of about 150 female names in the 1962 members list of the *Ying Fo Fui Kun*, the main characters are *ying* 英 (a flower, pronounced as *yeng* in Hakka) and *mei* 妹 (sister, *moy* in Hakka). They make up about 40% of the names. This shows how limited the female names were. The distribution is as follows:

英 Ying or a type of flower	37
妹 Mei (sister)	36
招 Zhao (summon)	15
香 Xiang (fragrance)	10
兰 Lan (orchid flower)	10
娣 Di (call forth a son)	6
满 Man (full)	5

The girls are named after some flowers, with the most common ones being *ying* 英 and *lan* 兰. They use very few characters and almost every other person consists of

a name such as "sister" *Mei,* e.g. 三妹 *San Mei* (third sister), or *ying*, e.g. *mei ying* 美英 (beautiful flower), or *lan ying* 兰英 (two kinds of flowers).

(2) "Bring-a-younger-brother" in Female names

There is a type of woman's name that would never be mistaken for a man's name. It expresses disappointment in the birth of a daughter, denoting the strength of the obsession about having sons. There are many female names that carry the character *di* 娣 which is made of the woman radical 女 and the younger brother radical 弟. This character is given so that the daughter will hopefully bring forth a younger brother. Many have names such as *daidi* 带娣 (bring brother), *zhaodi* 招娣 (call forth brother), *laidi* 来娣(come brother). This is especially common among the Hakka people as reflected in the Clan Association members list. This practice does not exist any more in the names of young people today.

6.2 Current generation female names (1995-2000): Women of identity and destiny

Names are chosen for girls according to the way they sound, and having a good meaning, easy to remember and easy to write. The common features of girls' names today concentrate on the virtues of a girl, female qualities such as gentleness and wisdom, beauty, etc.. They are also named after precious ornaments such as different kinds of jades, beautiful flowers etc.

(1)   Feminine virtues and wisdom: *shu* 淑(kind and gentle), *hui* 慧(wisdom), *min* 敏(agile, intelligent), *hui* 惠(grace), *yi* 仪(poised), *jing* 静 (quiet), *an* 安 (peace, still), *xin* 欣(joyful), *si* 思(thoughtful), and *ying* 颖(clever and bright. This is the new favorite)

(2)   Names of female qualities, often using the woman radical 女: *ting* 婷 (graceful), *wan* 婉(elegant, graceful), and *juan* 娟(beautiful and graceful)

(3)   The jade 玉 (*yu*) radical in characters of jewelry or ornaments with good sound such as: *ling* 玲(small jade, petite and dainty), *ling* 琳(beautiful jade), and *zhen* 珍(precious)

(4)   Delicate plants and beautiful flowers and fragrance: *fen* 芬(fragrant), *fang* 芳(fragrant), and *lian* 莲(lotus)

(5)   Beauty: *mei* 美, *li* 丽, *xiu* 秀 all of these used to be common but as the parents receive more education and are more sophisticated, these characters are gradually replaced by more literary and rare ones.

Examples of names are:

淑敏 *Shu Min* (kind, gentle and intelligent)
美玲 *Mei Ling* (beautiful jade)
怡慧 *Yi Hui* (serene and wise)
婉芳 *Wan Fang* (elegant and fragrant)
颖惠 *Ying Hui* (clever and full of grace)

As the society gets more affluent, many parents are choosing names that are less common for their daughters but still good sounding with good meaning. Hence, there are more poetic names using characters such as *shi* 诗(poetry) and *yun* 韵 (rhyme or tone), and more sophisticated characters such as *ying* 颖(clever) is gaining popularity among names of the younger generation.

7. Globalization

7.1 *hanyu pinyin* vs. dialect spelling

In the early days, the person who registered the names of new infants used to be from the Indian or Malay race. As they were not familiar with Chinese names, they often spelled them phonetically.. As a result, those in the same family may not have the same surname spelling. Singapore-Chinese surnames were all registered in the dialect pronunciation since the early immigrants from China were mainly from southern China. If it were a Cantonese boy, his name would be Chan Wai Meng. Iif this name belonged to a boy of Teochew dialect, it likely would be spelled as Tan Hwee Meng etc.

In 1979, the Speak Mandarin Campaign was launched. In the following year, the Ministry of Education announced that all children enrolling in kindergarten and primary school in January 1981 would have to spell their names in *hanyu pinyin*. The Hanyu pinyin name would be listed first, followed by the name given at birth. This was to promote Mandarin, which was used as a medium of instruction; to follow the use of hanyu pinyin names in Chinese textbooks since 1971, and to be

consistent with Chinese dictionaries.[9] From January 1982, all Chinese studies in primary, secondary, and pre-university were to use hanyu pinyin names to replace their original names.[10] The government also suggested that parents use hanyu pinyin for the newborn.[11]

However, the current trend is to use the spelling of the dialect for the surnames and hanyu pinyin for first names. This shows that Singapore Chinese still prefer to keep the identity of the family in the surname. By doing so, one can tell the dialect group and even trace the origin of the family. For example, if a person's surname is chen and he keeps the Teochew/Hokkien pronunciation, he will spell it as Tan. If he is Cantonese, he will spell it as Chan. However, if he spells it as chen, no one will ever know which dialect group he is from. Chinese-Americans are said to change their surname to sound Americanized, e.g. the surname *Teo* 张(pronounced in Teochew or Hokkien) could be changed to *Dewing* so that it sounds American, or the surname *Loh* 罗(pronounced in Teochew or Hokkien) could be changed to *Law*, or even *Lewis* to sound American (see Louie 1998:181-192).

Such change of names from dialect spelling to *hanyu pinyin* shows that more Singapore-Chinese are speaking Mandarin and dialects may soon fade into the past. This shows that the government has been successful in encouraging more people to speak Mandarin and drop dialect. For the younger generation, Clan Associations and dialects would still have a special meaning, especially in connecting with Chinese people and in passing on traditions. Younger people are able to understand blood relationship, closeness in same village backgrounds, etc. through the dialect spelling of their surnames and names. When the names were changed to hanyu pinyin, early immigrants and new Chinese immigrants did not show much difference except in the surname. There is less difference between the new and old immigrants, but there will certainly be a loss in Singapore-Chinese immigrant history and memory.

7.2 Western names

Singaporean Chinese is moving towards the trend of adopting "foreign names," namely English names besides their Romanized Chinese names. Even among Chinese-speaking people, they would introduce themselves using their "foreign" names such as Wendy, Susan, Esther, Robert, Richard, Albert, etc. This trend may not necessarily be related to adopting the Christian or Catholic religion but more because of globalization. English is the predominant language spoken in Singapore.

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[9] See Nanyang Siangpao 20th November 1980.
[10] See Sin Chew Jit Po 21st May 1981.
[11] See Sin Chew Jit Po 3rd December 1980.

Many find that it is trendy and convenient to adopt a western name, which is usually easier for others to remember than the Chinese names that come with different kinds of spelling. For instance, those in the sales profession who would like people to remember their names easily would use these western names.

There is a recent article written by the Senior Minister Mentor Mr. Lee Kuan Yew's daughter Dr. Lee Wei Ling on westernized names.[12] She wrote that when her father was born in 1923, his family consulted a friend knowledgeable in choosing names. He suggested "Kuan Yew," which means "brightness" in Hokkien. Her great-grandfather was awed by the British and added "Harry" to Mr. Lee Kuan Yew's name. Because his name appeared as "Harry Lee Kuan Yew" on his birth certificate, when he graduated from Cambridge University and later from Middle Temple, he could not persuade either institution to drop "Harry" from his university degree or his certificate as barrister-at-law. In 1950, he managed to arrange for himself to be called to the Singapore Bar as just "Lee Kuan Yew," without "Harry." "Lee Kuan Yew" thus became his public persona. To this day, only family members and a few close friends call him "Harry." None of Mr. Lee Kuan Yew's children had western names. Mr Lee Kuan Yew was not literate in Chinese so when Wei Ling was born, he approached a court interpreter he knew to give him some names to choose from. "Wei Ling" according to her, means "the sound of tinkling jade."

According to Dr. Lee, throughout her years in school from kindergarten to pre-university all her friends had only Chinese, Malay, or Indian names. When she was in medical school and postgraduate training, the only westernized names were the Christian names of those who were actually Christian. By the late 1980s, however, non-Christian Chinese began to have westernized names and often did not use their Chinese names at all. The trend was initially subtle and she later discovered that these names are unofficial. Dr. Lee mentioned that when her nephew asked for permission to adopt a western name, his mother, Madame Ho Ching, told him: "In China, only waiters and waitresses use western names." To date, none of her nephews and niece has a western name even though this is a family in which English is the dominant language. She confesses that it is her strong anti-colonial instinct that leads her to abhor any attempt by people in former colonies to adopt the names of their past colonial masters.

However, many in the sales and marketing line want people to remember their names and find that it is much easier to remember names such as Wendy and Robert rather than Geok Hong and Juak Seng, for example. This move towards more western names only reflects the fact that English is the dominant working

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[12] March 21, 2010, the *Sunday Times*, page 35, "No need for 'uneqqee' name" by Lee Wei Ling.

language in Singapore, and it is inevitable that this be reflected in naming practices as well.

7.3 Changing names

There is a rise in people consulting experts to change their names as part of a plan to have a better life. This is part of a practice called *Xingmingxue,* or "Study on Names." It originates from China and was further developed in Japan. The main difference between this school of Study of Names and that of the Five Elements mentioned above is that this school considers the number of strokes of the existing name. The number of strokes of a name needs to be considered together with the person it is applied to, as well as the time and place in order for it to work well.

According to Sun (2006: 3), many people like to use the character *yu* 宇 (universe) because it has a greatness in meaning. However, one needs to see how it is being used. The character must not interact adversely with one's year of birth. For example, if it is used on someone who is born in the year of a rabbit *tu* 兔, due to the cover radical of yu 宇 over the rabbit character *tu* 兔, the effect of using the *yu* 宇(universe) will bring a bad connotation of *yuan* 冤 or being treated with injustice. Similarly, if a person born in the year of the cow *niu* 牛 uses the *yu* 宇 (universe) character, it will have the connotation of him being jailed 牢 (*lao*).

A classmate's original name was 逸芳 Yi Fang, which means exceptional or carefree fragrance. According to her, when she consulted the experts on study of names, she was told that her name was too masculine and lacked feminine qualities. This has caused her to be too direct in her interaction with others making her unpopular. The expert then recommended that her name be changed to 柔慧 Rou Hui, which means gentle and wise. According to her, the change of name has caused her personality to be gentler and she has since improved in interpersonal relationships.

8. Conclusion

This research uses an ethnographic approach to Singapore Chinese names and studies how these names reflect the race, religion, and representation of the Singapore-Chinese. The names reflect the Chinese race in the following ways: First, the importance of surnames among Chinese shows closeness in kinship. Second, the existence of generation names from the poem taken from the village temple shows the importance of identifying the different generations in the same family.

Third, Chinese have multiple names, depending on social contexts. Finally, the Straits Chinese names reflect a multiracial and multicultural society in which Chinese marry the local Malays.

The Singapore-Chinese names also reflect the religion of the Chinese people in that they rely on the Five Elements to choose names for their children, use derogative names to avoid evil, and Christian names are becoming popular, which shows an influence in the Christian belief among Singapore Chinese.

Singapore-Chinese names in mid-20th Century reflect that the early immigrants from China are blue collar workers who choose simple names for their children with strong preference for male children as they carry on their family names. When the names of male children after WWI were compared, it was found that that the names were mainly concentrated on survival. This reflects the turbulent times such that the parents were more concerned that children grow up safely. In contrast, the names of children in recent times show that parents choose names reflecting ambitions for good character and prosperity. Similarly, female names after WWI were simple using the common character 英 *ying* (name of a flower) or 妹 *mei* (younger sister), or even calling forth sons. In recent times, the names of girls also show the feminine qualities as well as aspirations of wisdom and destiny. This shows that in modern times, parents give equal opportunities of education to their daughters.

The trend in Singapore-Chinese names in English is to use hanyu pinyin rather than the spelling that reflects dialect pronunciation. This shows the decline of dialect in multilingual Singapore and greater dominance in Mandarin Chinese. It is also fashionable to change names in hopes of a better life. Anglicization is also apparent with more families giving "Christian" names (or western) names to their children.

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Singapore Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan 2005 Members' List
Singapore Ying Fo Fui Kun 1962 and 2006 Members' List
2000 Fairfield Primary School
2000 Nan Hua Secondary School
Singapore Telephone directory

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Appendix 1

Table 2. Details of interviewees from clan associations (ages according to 2010).

Clan association representatives	Name	Age	Occupation	Education
Chairman, Singapore Kong Chow Wui Koon 新加坡冈州会馆理事长	Lo Hock Ling 卢鹤龄	80	Accountant	Professional degree
Secretary, Ying Fo Fui Kun 新加坡应和会馆监事	Liang Zhaohui 梁肇辉	73	Retired Bank manager	Secretary
Deputy Cultural and Education Officer, Singapore Hainan Hwee Kuan 新加坡海南会馆文教部主任	Han Tan Juan 韩山元	66	Journalist	Masters
General Affair Officer, Singapore Foochow Association 新加坡福州会馆总务股主任	Tian Took Earn/ Tiang Taw Earn 程道润	65	Businessman	Pre-University
Executive Officer, Singapore Foochow Association 新加坡福州会馆执行员	Yong Kee Pin 杨纪彬	62	Executive Officer, Singapore Foochow Association	Secondary school
Secretary, Singapore Hokkien Association 新加坡福建会馆秘书长	Sim Bee Har 沈美霞	43	Secretary of Association	Tertiary
Cultural and education chairman, Singapore Poit Yip Hui Kuan 新加坡潮州八邑会馆文教委员会主席	Lee Chee Hiang 李志贤	52	University Professor	PhD
Singapore Futsing Association, officer of the Cultural and Education 新加坡福清会馆文教股主任	Ling Geok Choon 林玉聪	65	Comic artist (retired journalist)	Art Diploma
Singapore Peranakan Association Chairman 新加坡土生华人协会会长	Lee Kip Lee 李急利	87	Retired (running family business)	Professional degree

Acknowledgements

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