

My name

Sociology, Communication



As per the Chinese tradition, I was named by my grandfather after the Princess of Wales, Lady Diana Spencer, who was well known for her grace, beauty, and generosity of spirit. I was born in America, although my origin is Chinese. My grandfather felt that it was necessary for him to give me a name that sounds American (or European) in origin. The name, Diana, felt appropriate also because it is a popular name among the Chinese (“ChineseCulture”).

This name was derived from an old Indo-European root with the meaning, heavenly or divine (“Diana”). Perhaps this is the reason why I am never offended when my friends often call me “Dee” or “Di.” I know that Lady Diana Spencer, too, was often referred to as Lady Di. All the same, it is perhaps the sacredness of the meaning of my name, Diana, that saves me from feeling insulted when I am called, “Di” (pronounced as “Die”).

In short, I have never had a problem identifying with my first name. It is only my last name, Ng, that has given me some trouble, seeing that it is almost impossible for a person with American (or European) origin to read it correctly, unless of course he or she has conducted some research on the pronunciation of Chinese names. Hence, unfortunately, there are few people I know outside my family that pronounce my last name correctly.

Chinese last names are patrilineal. In other words, they are passed from fathers to their children. Chinese women are also typically known to retain their birth surnames after marriage (“Chinese Surname”). Although I may or may not retain my last name after marriage, the mere fact that the last name is traditionally known to be significant enough to be used throughout

one's lifetime, gives me the reason to respect my own last name unconditionally. This is despite the fact that many people mispronounce my last name, Ng, as "Nig" or simply call me Miss N-

G. People have additionally made fun of my last name by remarking that NG stands for either "no good" or "not given." Even so, I continue to honor my traditions and my family name.

I understand that Ng is an unusual last name in America, and difficult to pronounce because it lacks a vowel. Moreover, I have felt annoyed at people's mispronunciation of my last name, and their mockery of it. Ng was translated from Cantonese, and in Mandarin it is Wu. The name has various other dialect variants such as Wone, Wong, Bong, Huynh, Hoang, Hwang, Oei, Oi, Ooi, Uy, Wee, and Ong ("Family Name: Wong").

Unsurprisingly, all of the dialectical variants are transliterated and pronounced differently. Furthermore, because of the different pronunciations and romanizations, it is generally easy for the people of Chinese origins to tell whether a person using a different dialectical variant of a last name is from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Southeast Asia including Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia ("Chinese Surname").

Many of my cousins in America have changed the last name to Eng in order to make it easier for others to pronounce. I do not change it because I am quite attached to the idea of preserving good old family traditions.

According to Scott Edward Harrison, Chinese names in the original script are

relatively problem free only for those who are familiar with the written language.

But when those names are transliterated based on established standards of transliteration, some intelligibility may be lost. This is certainly true with my last name. So, even though my last name is often mocked or mispronounced, I do not overreact to the insult because I have perfect understanding of the nature of the problem.

Had Chinese writing been popular in America, nobody would have had a problem saying my last name. What is more, I have firm trust in the fact that Americans do not mean to harm or humiliate me by saying my last name incorrectly, or using it inappropriately. I do believe that the people I know respect and honor me as an individual. Fortunately, in America one's personal strengths are more important than one's origins or name. Hence, I have never really felt like a misfit, or suffered maladjustment in any way.

One variant of my last name, Wong or Huang, is known as the seventh most common last name in China ("List of Common Chinese Surnames"). The name is also used by many people in Vietnam, and almost one million in Korea. Moreover, approximately two million Chinese people settled overseas are known to be using at least one dialect variant of my last name ("Family Name: Wong"). According a 1987 study, there are more than four hundred and fifty surnames in use in Beijing ("Chinese Surname"). Knowing that my last name, including its dialectic variants, is among the most popular Chinese names, makes it even easier for me to feel at ease with respect to my last name.

Works Cited

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