

Reflection

The story of my life is not unique. Having immigrated to Vancouver at the age of three with my older brother and mother as my father stayed in China for business, we are but one of the many astronaut families in Canada.

An astronaut family is a family unit in which one parent (typically the mother) accompanies their children to a new country, while the other parent (typically the father) remains in the country of origin for work (Tsong et al., 2021). The reasons for such family structure commonly include the aspiration of educational opportunities for children, as well as the associated upwards mobility. However, despite these long-term benefits of (presumed) quality education and employment, the gains are not always clear to the satellite children of astronaut parents, who may find it difficult to justify the current costs being made. For example, satellite children report becoming aware of race, racism, and internalized racism at a younger age. This is often partnered with challenges in cultural identity, as the child struggles to connect with both heritage and host cultures, often resulting in loss of connection with one's country of origin.

Furthermore, this individual "picking of sides" does not exist in isolation; the parent-child relationship is also affected as satellite children report conflicts and disconnections with their parents due to cultural divides (Tsong et al., 2021). After all, children seem to acculturate faster and easier than adults, resulting in an acculturation gap with implications regarding language barriers and the clashing of values among family members (Cheung et al., 2011). This was, unfortunately, reflected in my own family history.

One might think that having grown up in a city as Chinese-populated as Richmond, I would be safe from racism, both internal and external. And yet, mirroring the research on astronaut families, my "otherness" as a Chinese immigrant was made apparent at a young

age—but interestingly, not by White Canadians, but by Canadian-born Chinese. We might have looked the same on the outside, but I was still deemed “other” due to my inherent “Chineseness.” For instance, I was one of the very few who was pulled out of class to attend ESL (English as a Second Language) lessons—a deviation from the status quo for which I was mocked.

Soon, I found myself internalizing this hierarchy. I wanted to speak English without an accent; I wanted to bring pizza for lunch and not “stinky” dumplings; I wanted to celebrate Canadian holidays the “right” way, like having a Christmas tree during the wintertime. Despite the fact that I was aspiring to become more like a Canadian-born Chinese, it was essentially analogous to pursuing Whiteness. In the end, like many of the children in astronaut families, I chose to be “White” over “Chinese.”

This struggle of cultural identity drew a wedge between myself and my mother. From the ages of at least 10 to 16, we fought. My internalized oppression went head-to-head with her desire to pass on our heritage culture, but I never relented. I refused to learn Mandarin at home, to put up decorations for Lunar New Year, to eat foods that were “too Chinese.” While I still loved her and she loved me, this cultural divide made sure that we were never able to truly understand one another.

Now, I’m using this recipe book as a way to reach out.

I’m using it to reconnect with my heritage through the love language of food. I’m using it to learn about my mother’s life, about her growing up in China, about her relationship with her parents, and about her beliefs and values surrounding health. I’m using it to strengthen our relationship. When I sit down with my mother and ask about our language and culture, I am accepting the hand that had reached out so many years ago. And I am also acknowledging the pains that *she* faced in our astronaut family, having immigrated to an unfamiliar country with

limited English proficiency, no friends or family, and two children who had pushed her and her culture away.

Therefore, I see the creation of this recipe book not only as a sharing of delicious foods, as a gesture of motherly love, or as a dissemination of Chinese Herbal Medicine. To me, it is also a form of healing and resistance. It is a way for me to honour and reconnect with an identity I had renounced. It is a way for me to address the internalized racism I had experienced, and to apologize for the external racism I had subsequently struck onto my mother. And it is a way for me to challenge the perspective of the White dominant discourse, not only by sharing a medicinal perspective that has often been looked down upon, but by openly and proudly embracing my Chinese roots.

Thank you for listening to my mother's, and now my, cultural beliefs on the healing power of food.

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