

Apishiish ni piikishkwaan. 識一啲. I speak a little.

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Two birds fly together, synergistically intertwined as if they are the ribbons of a rhythmic gymnast. They swirl gracefully becoming interlocked in a double helix shape.

Foreword

Before acknowledging the land on which I come from and that I live on today, I would like to address some conflicting feelings. I have been privileged and honoured to grow up on Turtle Island, in what is colonially known as Vancouver. While I have been hearing land acknowledgments for the last several years, I have come to a point where most of it feels performative. It is just one of many complicated tensions that have arisen in this new era of “post-colonial radicality and reconciliation”. There is a cut-throat expectation (often and more realistically a mandate) for a land acknowledgement to be spoken/performed before any formal event/presentation/course, etc. While I do believe there to be an importance to this practice – it has undoubtedly come to a point at which it begins to lose meaning, especially when mumbled in monotone. There lies a stark difference in how Indigenous and non-Indigenous folk address land acknowledgments; at least from what I have noticed. While I attempt to recognize and honour these feelings in the ways that I will approach my own land acknowledgement, I am not from any of the host nations and am an unwelcome guest on this land.

Introspection

As mentioned above, I was born here, in East Van, on the traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations. My father is second-generation, raised by parents who came from Taishan, Guangdong. My mother was born in northern British Columbia to a Métis mother

and European-Canadian father. Our Métis family spoke Nêhiyawêwin and lived on Treaty 8 territory. My Métis family names are Laboucanne and LePretre, and my Chinese family name is Yue. I myself, identify as both Chinese and Cree-Métis, though I acknowledge the various other Settler roots that are also thrown into the mix.

Perhaps it was seeing *A Seat at the Table: Chinese Immigration and British Columbia* (2020-2023) combined with my fresh first-year university student eyes that made me spiral into an existential crises of unknowing. Maybe it was just the plethora of information that I was consuming in justice-forward classes that made me question my identity. Either way, I found myself reckoning with this question of *what does it mean to have a seat at the table, when the table itself is on unceded land?*

There is always a complicated conversation, or rather internal dialect, in which I am forced to reckon with what it means to be a racialized settler while simultaneously being Indigenous. In asking these questions, I am reminded of Melissa Phung's own question of "Are people of colour settlers too?" (2011). Understandably this question tends to upset people belonging to racialized groups. Perhaps this is because of a perceived shared or similar positionality to Indigenous peoples as the receiving end of harsh, unfair, and negative treatment. As Henry Yu (2016) writes, "British Columbia, as a settler state similar to others developing around the Pacific, used a democratic process restricted to "whites" to displace and remove indigenous peoples and to exclude and remove Asian migrants" (p. 118). So how do or can I acknowledge the suffering and sacrifice of my Chinese grandfather, while simultaneously rejecting the colonial processes placed upon my Indigenous family and kin? Is there some intangible aspect that somehow levels the two?

Reckoning

Growing up, I did not know anyone else who was Chinese-Indigenous; it seemed to be this mythic property, one which I have learned that white people love to label as “exotic”. I have managed to take it in stride, but questions of “where are you from” continue permeate everyday conversations, often times inducing a panic state in which I have to decide what I will say. It is a split-second decision that I make that ultimately changes the direction of the conversation. It becomes a way to legitimize certain aspects of my identity. As Rocha (2023) writes “...mixed heritage becomes a question of authenticity...” (p. 11), which is most definitely true when trying to find a place in which you fit into. Being too much of one race or culture for the others, while simultaneously being too little for that one lead to this constant and sickening feeling of sticking out. This fundamental Othering effect of mixedness is created and in turn reproduced by colonial systems. In “Mixed Race, Mixed Identities, and Indigeneity: Context and Theory” Zarine L. Rocha (2023) addresses this concept writing that “...colonial oppression has left a significant mark on how belonging is conceptualized” (p.6). Navigating these rocky waters as someone who is mixed has been challenging, though there are more contemporary ideas that see being mixed as a benefit - there exists a new possibility of being able to bridge communities together (Cheung 2024).

Experience

Undoubtedly part of a generation that is much more interested in and at peace with their roots, looking back has come with its own roadblocks, especially when trying to do family research. What I assumed to be more difficult – researching my Indigenous roots – has proven the opposite, thanks to those very systems which were detrimental to Indigenous peoples across so-called Canada. While my mother’s side of the family has never shared

much around their roots, perhaps due to things being less socially acceptable then, I have been able to do a very macro search into roots using Scrip applications and documents. Missing however are these simultaneously heartwarming and heartbreaking stories that share what life was *really* like. On the other hand, I have so little ‘real’ information about my father’s side. I have heard stories, visited the sites of old apartments and laundromats in Hong Kong and Montréal, but things that I consider to be hard facts like names, birthdates, hometowns, etc. are a mystery. Of course this was partially due to the Canadian Government’s policies of the Chinese Head Tax (1885) and other anti-Chinese movements, which forced families like my own to adapt paper names in search of a better life (Yu, 2016).

A rather sobering thought I have faced lately is that we do not share what we think is important until it is too late. We think that temporal constraints are beyond us. The reality is that I did not know any of the stories from my Grandmother before she passed in 2019. Now my 95-year-old Grandfather is in assisted living. It was not until we prepared their house to be sold that old photographs and possessions from China, along with the stories that came with them began to surface. I am at an age now where I have taken the rose-tinted glasses off. While I still have this sense of wonder and curiosity, I know that there are some things that will never come to surface. Some things are just lost, leaving fragmented pieces of identity un-mended. Nevertheless, I move forward, seeking out new information where I can find it, connecting to both my Chinese and Indigenous roots in the good ways which I have been taught. Always grateful for the cyclical nature of unlearning and learning, teaching and listening.

Full Circle

It has been three years since I started post-secondary school at the University of British Columbia. In those seemingly short years, I have changed drastically. In writing this today, I was reminded of a piece I wrote just last year, when I guest edited the Ubysey's Truth and Reconciliation Supplement with my dear friend Aquila Underwood. We had shaped the theme of the pieces to be around the idea of rekindling – around reconnection and the many forms that it takes. The piece I wrote centered around the othering I felt, and still do feel. While my gap in between my lack of knowing has certainly narrowed, there are still parts of me that long for certainty and affirmation of my identity (Yue, 2022). Work like this, in academia, alongside work I do on my own time to reconnect has been vital in how I interact with and even understand myself and my positionality. I realize now that identity is not static nor is it monolithic. Instead I know now that it flows and shapeshifts, and part of that has to do with how I interrelate with it, how I manage changes or even implement them myself. Projects that allow me to contextualize my thoughts (i.e., this paper, work at the Ubysey, traditional art forms, ceremony) allow me to continue exploring.

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