

ASIX300A Final Project – Artist’s Statement

My relationship with my Hong-Kongness has had a bit of a strange trajectory. I was born in Mainland China and lived in a public orphanage for about a year, then I was adopted by a Caucasian Canadian couple in 2004. We lived in Canada for another year, at which point my father was offered an opportunity to work as an expat in Hong Kong. I spent the following 14 years there, until my family chose to move back to Canada again in 2020 when COVID-19 first broke out. As such, navigating my cultural identity has been a very complex and painful process.

Under these circumstances, Hong Kong was the mainstream culture I had to acculturate to, while Canada was technically my heritage culture. Writing here in the present in Canada, I believe I did in fact acculturate to Hong Kong during that time, as supported by the sensitive period for acculturation discovered by Cheung, Chudek and Heine peaking at around age 14-15 (2011). However, I was under no such impression when I actually lived there. Literature on international adoptees typically focuses on people who were adopted out to white families and grew up in the global north, where they must face challenges associated with being an ethnic minority even within their own home (Lee, 2003). While I was indeed an ethnic minority in my household, I was simultaneously part of the overwhelming Chinese ethnic majority in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department, 2021). This meant I had the face of a Chinese, but not the expected level of cultural knowledge or language. Instead of facing racial discrimination, I grappled with feeling like an imposter near-constantly, along with intense shame and embarrassment about not knowing as much Cantonese as I perceived I ‘should have.’

In any case, being raised in a white family despite not being white-passing yourself does wonders for the psyche. It is undoubtedly true that my parents whiteness benefitted me,

thanks in no small part to Hong Kong's past as a British colony. My father's glitzy expat package allowed us all manner of creature comforts and beyond, including yearly sojourns to Canada in the summer that I cherished heavily and held onto whenever I felt particularly hopeless. However, being in an expatriate family also cushioned me from many social issues currently relevant in Hong Kong. My parents maintained a 'Canada-mindedness' that they passed down to me, where Canada was always my future. Perhaps a mirrored echo of the mythological 金山 (Gold Mountain) that many local Hong Kongers considered Canada to be. As a result, I thought it wasn't my place to care deeply about the 2019 anti-ELAB protests because I wouldn't be in Hong Kong for long enough to see the consequences. Any concern I showed, and any feeling of discomfort or detachment with my Canadianness was accompanied with guilt that I was unappreciative of how good I had it. Even as a young girl, I always thought I had such privilege to be part of a (relatively) rich white family that I would be spitting in the face of my parents to 'reject' the Canadian identity and affiliations they gave me.

Interestingly, both Lan (2012) and Li and Findlay (2021) discuss an intersection between socioeconomic status and identification with 'Hong-Konger' versus 'Chinese' labels in Hong Kongers living in the diaspora. I do not explore my Chinese identity in my comic as extensively as my Canadian or Hong Konger identities mainly due to how little time I spent living in the Mainland relative to Hong Kong or Canada, but I do think it's relevant to at least consider how the undesirable perception of 'Chineseness' in Hong Kong has influenced this decision. I actually used to say I was a Chinese before I was a Canadian, but I quit doing that as I grew older and political tensions became more salient. As outlined by Mathews (1997), Hong Kong identity usually carries with it implications of affluence, cosmopolitanism, democracy, and general western mindedness compared to Chinese identity. Now that I live in

Canada, I still prefer to call myself a Hong Konger, and I frequently wonder if my privilege has anything to do with it. Alas, if only my comic page limit was longer.

Regarding the general creative choices about the comic itself, I chose to use black and white for mostly pragmatic and aesthetic reasons, but specifically chose red to accent because it is the common colour between the flags of Hong Kong, Canada, and Mainland China. Because my art style is simplistic at certain points, I put flags representing people's nationalities somewhere visible on their bodies for sake of clarity. I would have wanted to show their nationality in a more subtle and thoughtful way if I had more spare time and chose to use a more diverse colour palette.

Regarding page 6's top panel, I wanted to clearly depict Foreign Domestic Workers gathering in public spaces on Sundays, but due to time constraints and limits on my own drawing capabilities I have not done them justice. I have written about this before in previous work for this course precisely because it's such a striking sight. From personal experience, I saw especially large clusters in Wan Chai, Causeway Bay, Mong Kok, and especially Central. As Central is known for being the business district and especially populated with expats, I thought it would be interesting to show the juxtaposition of two drastically social classes gathered in the same space and with broadly the same reasons behind why they came to Hong Kong.

Past page 6, the flowers throughout the rest of the comic are supposed to be bauhinias. They are the flower on the Hong Kong flag, and one of many emblems of Hong Kong promoted overseas (Wood, 2017). I like the imagery of petals being scattered by the wind, and thought it was fitting to depict the many different types of Hong Kongers as such. They may be spread far and wide, but they still have roots in Hong Kong one way or another. I also learned that Bauhinias of the Hong Kong Orchid Tree species are considered hybrids,

meaning they were made from two other species. Wood emphasises this and how it reflects Hong Kong's origin as a colony and the multiple influences in its formation, and I think it also reflects the hybridity of my own cultural identity (2017).

This comic was highly personal, to the point that I struggled mightily to accurately portray my feelings and still feel as though I've done an inadequate job. Being an international adoptee and a Hong Konger are core tenets of my self-concept, and I'm proud to be both, but I've never really openly discussed the conflicted feelings that arise from the interactions between the two.

Thank you, sincerely, for taking the time to read my story.

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