

ASIX 300a Final Assignment

On the concerns of cultural maintenance in second-generation immigrants &  
media and the internet as mediating solutions

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Identity can be defined in many ways, however when it comes to the Hong Kong diaspora, nationality and heritage identity are both integral aspects to carving out the nature of one's being. Unlike folks who grow up and reside in Hong Kong for the majority of their lives, immigrants and the generations that come after them experience particular challenges in regards to these aspects of identity. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory shows how people – specifically those closest to an individual, like parents, in the microsystem level – as well as greater societal influences in one's macrosystem intermingle to create a sense of self (Bronfenbrenner). Despite this, in this essay, I will make the argument that motivations to assimilate to norms of one's host country, as well as the ineffectiveness of parental influences in maintaining heritage ties for second generation folks creates a concern for the long term prospects of heritage identity in the Hong Kong diaspora. In the face of the lack of consistent reliability of local cultural touch points across Canada, I will thus pose media and the internet as necessary components in combating this issue, and examine particular positive functions they can have for this group.

Nguyen and Hale's article “‘You Just Don't Understand Me!’ Determinants of Second Generation Asian and Latino Youth Self-Esteem” states how assimilation is positively correlated with self-esteem in their study on folks in the US. Through their comparative study – by way of examining data on Asian- and Latino- Americans from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study – the researchers aimed to illuminate any racial/ethnic influences on relations between acculturation and self-esteem outcomes (Nguyen and Hale 45, 47). They make the important distinction that – in regards to findings on Asian Americans – although Asian youth may appear to be “‘doing well’”(as a result of stereotypes that boast their rate of high achievement), that “‘being well’” mentally should be distinguished from this concept, as the pressure to succeed

may be partially causing lower self-esteem in this population(55-56). Specifically, the researcher's focus on the self-identification and language proficiency/dominance aspects of acculturation are of particular interest (48). Overall, they found that Asians had lower self-esteem than Latinos (44). This was due to the fact that – although fluent bilingualism was generally predictive of higher self-esteem in both groups – English language dominance showed particular major benefits to this part of Asian folks' mental wellbeing (54, 55). Additionally, more than identifying with hyphenated identities(e.g. Asian-American, Chinese-American, etc.) or national origin identities(e.g. Chinese), Asians who self-identified with their panethnicity/race(e.g. Asian) were found to have the highest self-esteem, with those identifying as American to have the second highest self-esteem levels out of all four identification methods (48, 56).

From Nguyen and Hale's research it is clear how – in second generation Asians' strive to reach a holistic sense of wellbeing that includes healthy self-esteem levels – assimilation to the culture of one's host country is beneficial. Although this study focuses on Asian Americans, and not Canadians who are children of Hong Kong immigrants, the similarities in culture between America and Canada(in regards to English being both country's official language), as well as how the model minority myth connected to stereotyping of Asians as intelligent and high achievers applies to Hong Kongers, renders these findings applicable to this paper's group of focus. Particularly, since Cantonese language loss in Vancouver in particular (as well as in Hong Kong amidst political tensions) is such a relevant subject of concern, the fact that Chinese Canadian youth are more inclined to focus on English language advancement to gain a sense of belonging over studying heritage languages like Cantonese is undoubtedly a worry for future generations' access to viable, community-based, intergenerational heritage connections (Chiang

and Shen). On an overarching level, while one's self-identification as American shows an increase in self-esteem (and thus the assumption of a similar effect in identifying as Canadian), with identifying as Asian overall as being indicative of the highest levels of self-esteem, this raises another unique concern. While solidarity amongst panethnicities may be a positive side effect of panethnic identification, with it arises the concern that a homogenization of cultures may occur, resulting in the loss, or at least, a lower prioritization of maintaining each culture's distinct features. In Vancouver for example, this could be theorized through the threat of the loss of Chinatown due to gentrification, where children of Hong Kong immigrants may not feel the need to assist in maintaining sites that distinctly highlight Hong Kong culture if there is generally a tangible sense of Asianness throughout the city.

While aspects of assimilation have thus been shown to be a threat to heritage culture maintenance in second generation immigrants, it would intuitively appear that parental influence by way of proximity would be an apt solution to this worry. Despite this common belief, Louie's article, "Growing Up Ethnic in Transnational Worlds: Identities Among Second-Generation Chinese and Dominicans" illuminates the complexities of these relationships, and by way, the difficulty in relying on them to maintain heritage ties. Through her interviews with 40 Chinese American postsecondary students, Louie found that authoritarian parenting styles were the root of this cause (364). In Su and Hynie's research on parenting styles of Mainland Chinese, Chinese Canadian Immigrant, and European Canadian mothers, they describe authoritarian parenting as a style which expects high demand from their children, but are contrastingly low in warmth and sensitivity to their needs (Su and Hynie 946). Like Su and Hynie, Louie notes these qualities in Chinese-American parenting and how they cause a lack of emotional connection and physical affection between second generation immigrant children and their parents (Louie 371). To further

Nguyen and Hale's revelations on language loss due to self-esteem in English dominance, Louie notes how a "lack of Chinese fluency [in second generation Chinese folks] and their parents' lack of English fluency" creates an additional barrier between communication, and consequently, inhibits their ability to tap into their parents' cultural knowledge (Louie 372).

In Louie's research, while some showed action towards closing the gap of cultural knowledge through post-secondary courses (language learning, humanities courses) many could not access those specific to their own Chinese heritage (e.g. language courses in Mandarin, but no delivery of Cantonese courses) (375). Moreover, to rely on post-secondary education as second generation folks' main form of cultural connection is incredibly elitist, and while many Hong Kongers immigrating to Canada have stronger educational backgrounds – thus pointing to financial prosperity as well as a greater priority in encouraging academic growth in their style of parenting – it would be unfair to generalize these characteristics to all Hong Kong immigrant families in the search for a widely accessible solution to bridging second and further generation's gaps in cultural identification. Although the majority of Chinese Canadians live in Vancouver and Toronto, which provides them with greater opportunities for heritage culture engagement through prosperous physical sites (e.g. Chinatowns, malls that distinctly serve Chinese Canadian communities, etc.), for folks residing outside of these metropolitan cities, this issue still persists (Chui and Anderson). Thus I look to Heuman & Gambarato and Kang's research to pose media and the internet as accessible solutions to this problem.

Heuman and Gambarato's "The learning potential of streaming media: cultural sustainability in a post-digital society" states that on a world that has transcended technological integration, and now focuses on "how knowledge is created and shared," the possibilities of historical fiction works as methods for education should be appropriately considered (2). They

emphasize technology's accessibility, as in Kemp's 2022 research, two-thirds of the world's population were found to use mobile phones (qtd. in Heuman and Gambarato 3). They argue that thus historical fiction on streaming platforms contributes to greater frameworks which preserves and reshapes cultural memory, allowing for new stories outside what Berger calls "national master narratives" to be told, sustaining cultures by platforming reruns of old programming to create generational unity, and ensuring future generations with access to cultural resources (qtd. in Heuman and Gambarato 101)(4-7).

With the mark that the Hong Kong new wave cinema made on the film world as a whole, not only does it aesthetically and entertainment-wise pose as content of interest, but furthermore for the Hong Kong diaspora, it can act as a stepping point into historical education. Wong Kar Wai – who's discography is available on The Criterion Channel – for example is one of the most well known directors to have come out of this era. Through his dreamy 2-act story in *Chungking Express*, the concept of time running out is played out through a cop's purchasing of his ex-girlfriend's favorite fruit – canned pineapples – for a month to entertain the possibility of their April 1st breakup being a joke (Wong 17:40-19:52). At the end of this sequence, he remarks that "Even plastic wrap expires. I'm starting to wonder: Is there anything in this world that doesn't" (Wong 19:31-19:39). While the film, set in mid 1990s Hong Kong, contributes to preserving the visual cultural memory of a bygone era, second generation folks are not only able to gain a temporal glimpse into the history of Hong Kong through this film, but furthermore, with aspects of it's narrative are able to gain insight into the metaphor of the anxiety surrounding the 1997 handover through expiration dates (Gagliano 16:00).

With more recent works depicting second generation immigrant experiences, media can work beyond the aforementioned master narratives to bring to light lesser known aspects of

particular happenings. While this is significant historically in platforming underrepresented voices, for second generation immigrants, this media approach can be instrumental in validating their experiences through representation. *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, 2023's sweeping Oscars Best Picture winner in particular comes to mind. Its representation of Cantonese, like any other Cantonese language works, undoubtedly characterizes it as content that can act as language learning support. Furthermore, in its depiction of Joy – a second-generation Chinese American – reflections of language barriers with her parents/grandparent, as well as the bluntness of her mother's initial interactions to her queerness and attempts at facilitating parent-child dialogue mirror themes that interviewees in Louie's article discussed (Kwan and Scheinert). Due to the film's transformative ending, *EEAAO* hold the potential to act as a form of reconciliation in place of second generation immigrant's parents who – in real life – may not be willing to grow like those in the film did. As a result, narratives like this that focus specifically on aspects of the immigrant experience can provide a synthetic sense of healing that may prove fruitful for nurturing one's future openness & interest in cultural engagement.

Aside from fictional media, non-fictional media and its methods of distribution are also instrumental in second generation folk's ability to make deeper, involved efforts in cultural connection. While Kang's "Homeland Re-territorialized: Revisiting the role of geographical places in the formation of diasporic identity in the digital age" article visits first-generation immigrants' use of the internet to strengthen ties to their homelands, and speaks of tech devices that are not as commonly used now, I believe many of their general concepts can be applied to second-generation's reconnection with Hong Kong culture. For example, they speak of how first-generation Chinese immigrants often used Hong Kong radio programmes to reproduce homeland audio environments, and P2P applications to access tv programs in China(334-335).

Through TVB's YouTube channels, @TVBBestDramaChannel and @tvbnewsofficial, second generation immigrants are able to access popular entertainment content as well as currently relevant issues of folks in Hong Kong to be more presently engaged in its happenings today. Local Cantonese radio stations in Canada can also provide a similar effect while being more applicable to these folks' locality. Kang also speaks of ways London's Chinese community used the internet to show support for political movements & created unity amongst their diaspora; specifically how they gathered photos online to create a collection to be displayed in their Chinatown, and their usage of online spaces to organize an in-person gathering in light of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake (336-338). For second-generation Chinese Canadians, this can clearly be reflected in the online open letter of support towards Hong Kong's democratic movement (Asian Diaspora for Hong Kong Opinion). As a function of the internet's core ability to house current events as they progress, and create connections amongst networks, it is clear how it is thus crucial for second-generation immigrant's ability to stay up to date and become involved in actions relevant to Hong Kong despite geographical distance.

Through this paper, traditional avenues of parental influence and self-esteem related motivations to prioritize assimilation have been shown to illuminate the concern of cultural preservation amongst second-generation immigrant children of Hong Kongers. While media and the internet have been hailed for a multitude of their negative effects(e.g. addictive natures, being conducive of parasocial relationships, etc.) illuminations in this essay show its positive effects in being instrumental in delivering forms of cultural engagement for second generation immigrants. In light of concerns of cultural loss, these forms thus do not only bridge geographical distance that prevent present day connection, but furthermore acts as archival sites for deeper historical education.



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