

# WHAT WE EXPERIENCE | THE "NEW WORLD"



# Artist Reflection: Gabriella Ignacio

This issue's theme immigration and generation stories, and because of this I thought it would be interesting to show the contrast that many immigrants feel when they move to a foreign city. Warmer colors were used for the left side to indicate a sense of comfort and familiarity, and darker, cooler colors on the right to demonstrate a new and unknown place.



## *Letter from the Founders*

Dear reader,

Thank you for taking valuable time out of your day to read our magazine! We are so grateful for all your support and engagement.

If you are new to our magazine, our names are Jeenah Gwak and Hope Yu, and we are two high school juniors in the greater Seattle area. Our project began as one of our many ideas. As Asian adolescents living in American society, we have witnessed countless instances of discrimination, xenophobia, and social injustices against people of Asian descent within our communities. Despite living in a relatively Asian-dense region, we have been exposed to various forms of social injustice against Asian Americans, such as Asian representation in academic curricula and recent COVID-19 related events. These occurrences galvanized us to take action.

Taking into consideration our abilities, we decided that promoting awareness through written works would be the most appropriate for our course of action. In our magazine, we strive to share the untold stories of Asian-American experiences surrounding racism and societal pressures that are often overlooked in society. Through these publications, we hope to educate and inspire you to take action.

Our magazine, *What We Experience*, will be released on a quarterly basis covering the experiences of various Asian identities. This second issue focuses on the experiences of Asian American immigrants with an emphasis on differences between generations. We also feature community submissions!

That being said, thank you for supporting us in our journey to advocate for the Asian-American community. We hope you enjoy our magazine, and feel inspired to share it with others.

Sincerely,  
Jeenah Gwak and Hope Yu

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photo by Trevor Kwan



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# THE AMERICAN DREAM

*\*Names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.\**

**Written by JEENAH GWAK**

**A**ll immigration stories begin here. Well, not all. Just most, including Grace's story. Though the ideology of the American Dream has existed since the first of European immigration – when immigrants began to move here in search of a “new” life with new jobs and opportunities – the term “American Dream” wasn’t devised until 1931 by James Truslow Adams. The American Dream is defined as the belief that anyone can attain success, through sacrifice and hard work, in a society where upward mobility is possible, regardless of their country of origin or socioeconomic status. This idea is found deeply rooted in one of our nation’s founding documents, the Declaration of Independence, which states, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” In American society where these principles guide the way of life, individuals can live to the best of their abilities.

Among numerous factors that give the United States an advantage over other countries, a stable education system, an open economy with plentiful investment opportunities, and government protection over civil rights contribute most to immigrants’ decision to move to America.

Just like how the West was idealized in the early 17th century, motivating early European settlers to migrate to the West where the frontier was represented as a place where Americans traveled for better lives, Asian immigrants migrate to States in search of improved lifestyles. For some, improved lifestyle means government protection of individual rights. For others, it means greater educational or investment opportunities. For most, however, it means freedom and equality.



"Rebuilding" by Trevor Kwan

## THE TRANSITION

Grace's family immigrated to the United States when she was in first grade from South Korea. Just like countless other Asian immigrants, they came for bigger and better opportunities in America. Grace's parents had read countless newspaper articles, watched various movies about American culture, and visited multiple times. Like many others, when they moved to the States, they had made the most significant decision in their life. They wanted to provide better opportunities and show their children the developed world outside of South Korea. One of their relatives, Grace's aunt (mother's oldest sister), had married a white man who had served in the Vietnam War – they had met while he was stationed in South Korea – and was residing in Washington state. Grace's parents resolved to stay

with her and her husband while they settled into the new country and considered their family's housing situation.

In the adjustment period of just a year, Grace and her older sister had fully learned English, her parents owned a learning center, and they soon relocated to a nearby town in an apartment complex.

In their new town, which was where her parents worked, Grace began the third grade and her sister entered the fifth grade. Despite being in the ELL program the previous school year, Grace successfully tested into the gifted program in the district, and instead of attending the school across the street from their home, she attended a school that was more than ten minutes away. Her father drove her



*Grace's family's first home in America*

to school every morning in the only car that the family owned.

## THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

Not surprisingly, learning the language was much smoother for the children than the parents. While Grace's mother had earned a PhD in English Literature back in South Korea, English was completely foreign to her father. As years passed, he showed significant improvement in his comprehension of the language and speaking skills; yet, he wasn't fluent. On the other hand, the children adapted to the new language with ease; by their second year in the States, they were considered fluent in the English language.

Whereas children learn new languages due to the elasticity of their brain and rapid formation of neural connections (this period is known as the "critical period" when children learn languages during this time), adults go through this ordeal with much more difficulty and far more time because their brain has already developed. Thus, it is not uncommon for Asian immigrants to have limited English proficiency, and this language barrier is prevalent among countless residents of Asian descent in the United States. According to a report published by the Center for American Progress in late 2014, around a third of

Asian Americans have limited English proficiency. This results in significant barriers for a big percentage of the Asian-American community; their access to medical care, public support, and other social services is often inadequate, which inevitably results in poorer quality of life.

For Grace's father, this language barrier was significantly challenging. At first, he could not go into grocery stores without his wife or one of his daughters because he was concerned that people would not understand him. He even took the initiative to attend a local community college to improve his language skills. However, despite notable improvement, he never became completely fluent.

## THE NEW LIFESTYLE

Aside from the language barrier, Grace's family adjusted to the new lifestyle relatively smoothly. Sure, hardships arose here and there, but with support from family and friends, they soon relocated to a big city less than an hour from their previous home. Like the first time, when they had immigrated to the United States in hopes of better educational opportunities for the children, Grace's parents moved to this city for greater educational opportunities, as the district was recognized state-wide for its phenomenal education system. This was the third adjustment to a new school for the children, but they settled in with no significant challenges and quickly made friends. Grace even tested into the gifted program in that district within the next year.

Albeit the similarities, each and every immigration story is unique. For some, the ride may be smooth. For others, the ride is bumpy and full of dead ends. Nonetheless, these immigrants persevere. With all the discomfort and troubles in the new country, their grit is unmatched. It's about time that we recognize the bravery and determination of these Asian immigrants.





Jeenah Gwak is a junior at Newport High School in Bellevue, WA. In her free time, she enjoys playing piano, reading, and spending time with her loved ones.

# IMMIGRATION: AN UMBRELLA TERM

*Part story, part analysis of Asian immigration to the West Coast told through the lens of Hope's grandfathers narrative, Yu Suk-Chong.*

**Written by HOPE YU**

*Be prepared for my usual historical tangents and inconclusive thoughts.*

Most of what I know and understand stems directly from my experience in education. Sure, I learned how to deposit checks and operate a car from others, but my knowledge on most immediate fact, and concept based ideas comes from school. That's where I learned to read (albeit quite late compared to others and there were many painful nights at home sounding out words), where I learned to manipulate numbers (ah those days counting pennies at the dining room table with my dad were always enjoyable), and where I learned the power of paying attention to teachers (kids, it works, they'll give you higher grades).

However, after years of somewhat enthusiastically participating in this form of organized education, I have come to the conclusion that many individual experiences are left by the wayside in favor of other stories. In my opinion, this selection is more likely based on the abilities of the narrator than

than the importance of the narrative. One can argue for either side of that debate but more importantly, there should be a way for people to learn about very specific experiences, hence why Jeenah and I began this magazine.

Specifically for this issue, we decided that we wanted to focus on the lack of discussion surrounding Asian immigration to the United States. Furthermore, bring specific people from

our communities into the spotlight to tell their stories. I really hope you read these articles and come away with a feeling of deep respect for these people. Additionally, I will be somewhat briefly recounting the history of Asian Immigration to the United States. I know I covered that a bit in the last issue, but I worry that many still don't really know how we all showed up here and thus I will continue to talk about it. Before we get into it, I wanted to begin by quickly giving a brief overview of Asian immigration to the United States. Pre-1830s, there was the first wave of mainly Filipino immigrants known as 'Luzonians.' Though they did not immediately settle into our current

definition of the US, some settlements in the Louisiana area were eventually recorded. Furthermore, there are records regarding the settlement of a few Chinese merchants by the early 1800s. During the period between 1830 and the early 1900, many Asian's immigrated specifically to the Hawaiian

Islands. With this movement of people came the establishment of missions and large plantations driven by this labor. Instead of all coming at once, those who ran the plantations got wave after wave of a specifically different ethnic group, each time a demand was needed. The Chinese in 1825, the Japanese in 1885, and many Koreans in the early 1900s.

The first major wave of immigration to the US specifically,

**...many individual experiences are left by the wayside in favor of other stories...this selection is more likely based on the abilities of the narrator than the importance of the narrative.**





occurs between 1850 and 1917. The biggest draw being newfound gold in California, this phenomenon is now dubbed the Gold Rush. Most of the recent immigrants were young men with the desire to acquire riches to send back to their families in the East. Within 4 years, the Chinese American population had increased by tens of thousands. Korean, Japanese, and Filipino's did not participate in true immigration to the mainland until the late 1800s, though many were in Hawaii. However, after the Chinese Exclusion Acts that went into effect during the second half of the 19th century, many people found themselves unable to meet the production quotas they had, thus they began to encourage other Asian ethnic groups to fill the demand. In the early 1900s, even more labor seemed to be necessary. Men from around South Asia, mainly India, came

## PRE - 1830 1850 - 1917 POST - 1965

to fill the demand. At that time, there was a large increase in hate crimes and anti-Asian behavior throughout the US, but as there was the highest concentration of Asian Americans in the West, many horrible events occurred there.

The last wave of immigration is from 1965 to the present. This is around the time when many of our relatives, if you are first or second or even third generation immigrated here. Some of

the driving reasons at the time were the war and the quota restrictions the US placed on Asian immigrants. With the second World War over, there was a greater emphasis on familial based permanent immigration. Later on, with the ending of many wars throughout Asia, many refugees immigrated as family units. The population of different subgroups of Asian American ethnicities depended entirely upon the quotas. One example is how the laws geographically spliced up China as Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Though the majority of 'Chinese' immigrants were from Taiwan for the first 10 years, there were many college students that came from Hong Kong.

Okay, history time over, story time starting. First and foremost, this is the experience of my grandfather, Yu Suk-Chong.

Korea was under martial law for the

majority of the time that my grandfather grew up there. This military government was led by then president Park Jung-Hee who had seized power by way of a coup d'etat in 1961. Note that it was, in fact, much more complicated than that sentence. Many of the laws instilled because of this form of government included the suppression of freedom of speech, including tight control of the media. My grandfather wasn't able to, "function as editor of <Christian Thoughts>," a "very provocative magazine," in the sense that it presented thoughts about Christianity and religion in ways that pushed the boundaries of the time. Furthermore, he was unable to do his job as a professor of journalism at Joong-Ang University.

Yu describes how in Korea he, "had no telephone, no TV, no car." The automotive industry in South Korea didn't take off until after 1970, the television industry was just being developed, and telephones weren't commonplace until the 80's. This is in direct contrast with the technological superpower Korea has become over the past decades.

Additionally, Korean culture requires the upkeep of formalities. This can mean dressing up for work everyday and respecting all elders. Specifically within the language, there are terms for almost every position you can think of and seven different levels of formality that depend on a multitude of factors. Yu explains, "In Korea, formalities were so important that I had to dress up everyday in suit with a necktie at work places. In that society there is no word for 'you' except talking to the children. Everyone has a title and the title is very important when addressing someone." From a Western perspective, that can seem harsh or at least very weird. Keep in mind that this practice stems from concepts such as filial piety that have existed for eons before places such as America came into existence. To Koreans (and likely many other Asian identities), this is simply the way that society works.

**"...My younger brother was adopted by an American couple at the age of nine after my mother died. Our father was assassinated by the communist during the Korean War..."**

In 1975, Yu, his wife and 4-year-old son flew to America. However, his particular set of motivations for this decision began much earlier. As it was a military dictatorship, the government had the authority to track people who they deemed suspicious in some capacity. Yu remembers how he was, "under surveillance because of my two elder sisters who went to North Korea during the Korean War. They were communists. I felt like [I was] wasting my life and wanted to go abroad to pursue an advanced degree." Though not an unknown feeling for many Americans, any sort of government surveillance and tracking must have been incredibly uncomfortable and scary. Yu also had, "siblings who were already in the US. My younger brother was adopted by an American couple at the age of nine after my mother died. Our father was assassinated by the communist during the Korean War... I was able to come to the US as an immigrant by the invitation of my younger brother who was naturalized as a US citizen." Evidently, Korea was perhaps not the best place for him to be at the time.

I asked my grandfather to give a summary of the entire timeline of his immigration so I could share entirely his words for this segment:

*My wife and I with our four year-old son came over to the US in 1975 and settled in Everett, Washington where my four siblings were. In two weeks after our arriving, I was hired by Mr. Alfred Holte, my brother's adopted father, who was president of Pioneer Savings and Loan. After three months of training, I began to work as a construction loan officer. Since I am an ordained minister, I was appointed to Vashon United Methodist Church (a Caucasian congregation) on Vashon Island in January, 1977 as their pastor. For a while I was so nervous that I had a stomach ache every Sunday after preaching in English and meeting the people. I pastored at Fern Hill United Methodist Church (a Caucasian congregation) in Tacoma from 1981 to 1985. During this time, a Korean congregation was developed in the same church and I served the Korean church as pastor for two years. I was called by the United Methodist Publishing House in Nashville, Tennessee to be editor of Korean curriculum resources for I had previous experiences in editing and publishing back in Korea. Then, I moved to San Francisco to serve San Francisco Korean United Methodist Church which is the oldest Korean church in the US continent founded in 1904. I was senior pastor of the church for 11 years. In 1999, I was appointed by bishop as Superintendent of Nevada-Sierra District, California-Nevada Conference of United Methodist Church. I was in Reno, Nevada until retiring in 2006. In 2012, we moved to Seattle to be close to our son and his family.*



*At home in South Korea pre-immigration. From L to R: Yu Suk-Chong, now Dr. Yu Joon-Ho, Yu Yonsil.*

From this timeline, you can see the extent to which the family had to move around. My grandmother, Yu Yonsil, was also an ordained minister and my father was going through school for the majority of the time described above. I can't imagine the fear of trying to get your ideas across in a completely different language to people who were very different from yourself. My father was likely affected in some way by the amount of times he had to change schools, something that is much more prevalent in immigrant populations. Furthermore, my dad experienced his early years speaking entirely in Korean, then at 4 (ish) he started all over with English, something he attributes to Sesame Street.

Once in America, there were many cultural and societal things to adjust to. They all of a sudden had access to things such as cars, telephones, and television. The lack of military

government control meant that things like journalism and the general expression of ideas was allowed and somewhat encouraged here. Yu describes this particular aspect in quite the positive light. "I found a new world of freedom when I immigrated to the US. The US is the land of freedom." As someone who has lived here my entire life, especially in Seattle, I am used to having the discussion on how in reality the US is not a free place and there are so many social constructs as well as actual legislation holding people in place. While my personal opinion has yet to largely differ, America is quite a free place from the perspective of someone who did not grow up in the states.

Of course not everything was a smooth and easy transition. Though they teach English in Korean schools, they focus mainly on grammar, which can make actual conversation quite difficult. Yu explains, "I studied English in high school in Korea, but entirely focused on grammar, reading, and translation, no conversation at all. It was hard for me to follow English pronunciation in conversation with people here in the US. In English there are many variations in pronouncing a same vowel. The hardest part is to understand English jokes, slangs, dialects, and idioms. One example: When I was asked "How come?" in the middle of a conversation, I answered "I came by airplane." While writing this article, I attempted to count the amount of idioms and phrases with dual meanings that I used; I used a lot.



*Christmas!*

Previously, I mentioned the importance placed on honorifics in the Korean language. In contrast, those titles have very little meaning or weight in the English language. Of course you may call your teacher Ms. or Mr. but some schools have begun to shy away from those terms for a multitude of valid reasons. However, in Korea, you would say what translates directly to 'teacher,' and you would change your speech to something that fits that relationship.

That transition can be difficult as my grandfather explains, "In the US, I found life rather informal. You can say 'you' to anyone even to your grandparents. It took me a long time to become comfortable in using the word 'you' to seniors." Additionally, It must have felt very weird to have younger people just talking at you with no additional respect.



*The Zoo!*

The last thing I emailed my grandfather, (COVID-19 safe everyone don't worry, I basically can't leave my house), was if there was a noticeable difference in the way he was treated in the US than in Korea. His response was interesting as I would like to think that it accurately portrays the treatment of English fluent Asian Americans in the West Coast. However keep in mind that this is an account from a pastor, others in similar positions may not be nearly as forgiving.

*I personally didn't experience any racism toward me in America. Rather I met a lot of people who were interested in me as a person from a different culture. I felt like they respected the culture that is embedded in me.*

*In some way or other, I experienced xenophobic behaviors by a white individual who was very self protective. It happened when I was pastoring a new Korean congregation in Tacoma, Washington. The Korean ministry was started in a Caucasian church. In early development stage of the Korean congregation everyone in the Caucasian church was proud of the new ministry treating it like their baby. But as the Korean congregation grew rapidly while the Caucasian congregation was dwindling, some of the members from the Caucasian congregation felt threatened thinking that in a very near future the growing Korean congregation would take over their church building. Especially a retired member on the board of trustees gave the Korean congregation a hard time hoping that the Korean congregation would leave. I found out that the antagonistic member had stationed in Korea as an army dentist right after the Korean War and his prejudice against the poor Korean people was formed during that time. From this incident I learned that when the sense of superiority in an established group is threatened by outsiders racism develops.*

*On the other hand, I suffered with a sense of inferiority to some degree mainly because of the English language deficiency on my part. The only way to overcome my inferiority complex was to do my very best to reach excellence in what I was doing even with some laps in*



*Yu Yonsil died December of 2019 surrounded by loved ones in the greater Seattle area. She is survived by Yu Suk-Chong and their son and his family.*

Here we can see so many things about culture and societal norms come to play. Here in the West Coast, there have been Asian Americans for decades. By 1975, organizations such as the Asiatic Exclusion League were long gone, the massacres were over, and ethnic enclaves had been established and cultivated for years. This means that no matter what race or ethnicity you were, by 1975 in Washington you likely had been exposed to people of many different backgrounds. Now what is really interesting is the power dynamic in the example Yu provided. This structure has been present and pretty easy to identify for quite a while throughout history. The idea that White people will be willing to provide space and help BIPOC, but the moment their control and apparent superiority is threatened, they become defensive and suppressive.

**"Many people are quick to blame but if we understand where the prejudice and fear cultivates, interesting patterns emerge and can be addressed."**

My grandfather did a very good job not only identifying but analyzing what in this specific person's background is making this situation threatening to him. Many people are quick to blame but if we understand where the prejudice and fear cultivates, interesting patterns emerge and can be addressed.

Immigration is so often used as a filler word to provide context to the movement of an entire people's. My critique is that an immigrants story is so unique and detailed that it does them an incredible injustice to just refer to their peoples immigration as say, Asian immigration to America. Now, yes, I am being entirely hypocritical but I can't quite figure out what the alternative would be. Perhaps you use that term only when identifying patterns? I have no idea.

I hope this story and analysis provides you with another story of another person's experiences in the world. I'm not sure what part you will take away, but I hope you learn something. Thank you for reading!



Hope Yu is a junior at Garfield High School in Seattle, WA. She enjoys reading swimming, and painting in her free time.

# EDITORS' COMMENTARY: Crazy Rich Asians

As two female Asian-American adolescents residing on the West Coast, we had never encountered movies with an all-Asian cast and an Asian-American lead, until the release of *Crazy Rich Asians* on August 15th, 2018. The Warner Bros. romantic comedy film features Constance Wu playing the lead role as Rachel Chu, and Henry Golding, as Nick Young. This chartbuster follows Rachel Chu, a native New Yorker, as she accompanies her boyfriend, Nick Young, to his home in Singapore for his best friend's wedding. Rachel finds out that Nick's family is one of the country's wealthiest families, from there, things become complicated. Since its release, the film has received an immeasurable amount of praise, garnering numerous accolades, such as the 76th Golden Globe Awards nominations for Best Motion Picture. However, along with the acclaim came harsh criticism for various aspects of the movie, including inaccurate representation of the Asian population, the biracial actors in full Asian roles, stereotypes and cultural accuracy, and Asian representation in Hollywood.

A key point of contention has been the film's inaccurate representation of the Asian populations in Singapore. Though 15% of Singapore's population are Malay and around 7% are Indian, the film completely erases these two ethnicities. It holds true that the Chinese make up the majority of the country, with more than three-fourths of the population identifying as Chinese, but as journalist Cat Wang adds, the film "renders minorities invisible" in the context of Singapore. The characters of non-East Asians, when featured, are in service positions to the wealthy Chinese characters, depicting the "dominance of east Asia in the worldwide imagination of who constitutes the idea of Asia is troubling, especially since brown Asians make up a sizable portion of the continent," as stated by Sangeetha Thanapal, a Singapore-Indian activist and writer, who explores Chinese privilege. While Constance Wu, the film's female lead, "indirectly addressed" this on Twitter by admitting that the film "won't represent every Asian American," critics have continued to rail against the inaccurate Asian-American representation in the film.

Another piece of critique has stemmed from the selection of the cast; many argued that some of the chosen actors were not "Asian Enough." This

especially applies for the male lead of the movie, Henry Golding, who plays Nick Young in the movie – Golding is actually half-British and half-Malaysian, in contrast to the full-Chinese character that he stars as. Of course, both the Asian and non-Asian people of Hollywood as beyond had much to say including, 'Actress Jamie Chung referred to Golding's casting as "bullshit" in an interview. (She later apologized.) One op-ed about Golding had the candid title, "We'd Love to See a Full Asian Lead for Once," (Pai). Truth to be told, there is very little precedent for a situation like this. Asian representation in Hollywood is minimal except for the few stereotypical nerds and doctors. Any films that have attempted to tell a story with a full Asian cast, think *The Joy Luck Club*, have been met with extreme critique regarding the idolization of the 'Asian experience.' Other films such as *Ghost in the Shell* and *The Great Wall*, though originally Asian stories, faced their downfall when they decided to cast White actors as the protagonists. After the controversy that came out of those casting decisions, one may think that Hollywood has learned their lesson. They have not. In the Netflix 2019 RomCom, *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*, based on novels by Jenny Han, she initially turned down the deal when they wanted to cast a white actress as the lead. In *Crazy Rich Asians*, the first suggestions for Rachel Chu was to cast a white woman. Evidently, Hollywood still believes that white people can be cast as BIPOC characters.

Though *Crazy Rich Asians* did quite well in theaters and streaming platforms with high positive reviews, not everyone was pleased. Many Asian people were not happy with the lack of diversity in both actors and plot. Citing instances in which Asian's with deeper shades of skin were cast into assisting roles and the Western influences on others. The Guardian cited that, 'the film's director, John M Chu, said the film would never be able to live up to all the expectations placed on it. "We decided very early on that this is not the movie to solve all representation issues," he said in a press conference. "This is a very specific movie, we have a very specific world, very specific characters. This is not going to solve everything," (1). Other accounts share responses such as, "My [American-born Chinese] friends loved the film, but my Chinese friends really hated it," (1). Showcasing a very interesting point of view. This American-born

# ASIANS

# THE ONLY THING CRAZIER THAN LOVE IS FAMILY

Chinese friend likely grew up with very little media representation; in contrast the Chinese friends are surrounded by people quite similar to them. The modern day portrayal of Asians in Hollywood is desperately in need of work. Taking a step back to think about cultural representation as a whole, there seems to be a similar sense of differing opinions. To some Chinese, "There are many traditional Chinese elements in the movie, such as the mahjong scene, although some consider the elements too old-school and conventional. For many Chinese, the storyline is a bit of a cliché but the comic moments appeal to them." Additionally, unlike many Asian and non-Asian Americans, Malaysian Henry Golding's portrayal as, "a rich Singaporean in the movie..." Moved many Malaysians to watch the movie to support him and to see some of the scenes that were shot in Malaysia. Evidently, similar to the Joy Luck Club debate, people are not going to agree anytime soon.

Though this film may not accurately portray the diversity of the Asian population, this blockbuster movie was nonetheless groundbreaking. As the highest-grossing romantic comedy in the last 10 years, it amassed 239 million dollars from audiences worldwide. Personally, both of us thoroughly enjoyed the film; however, looking back, we weren't so absorbed with the details of the production, but more of the entertainment it provided us. The real question at hand is if we, as Asians, should be grateful for the representation we get or actively critique glossed over details until a 'perfect' film is produced? Honestly, who knows?



Jeenah Gwak is a junior at Newport High School in Bellevue, WA. In her free time, she enjoys playing piano, reading, and spending time with her loved ones.



Hope Yu is a junior at Garfield High School in Seattle, WA. She enjoys reading swimming, and painting in her free time.

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# BASED ON THE BEST-S CRAZY RICH ASIAN ASIAN ASIAN



Poet Jinno Vicencio's

# FLOWERS FOR BROWN BOYS

COLLABORATION WITH A QUEER POC ILLUSTRATOR [GRACE KIM](#) (IG: @KEMO.CHI)

## I Don't Know Where the Trauma Began

maybe it began before me  
before my parents  
before my Lolo and Lola,  
a learned trait of helplessness of the  
need to constantly survive.  
maybe that's what got me through all my  
sadness,  
the slurs  
the slothful days

I don't know where the trauma came  
it just kinda happened  
along with its bag of antics

in fetal position I cradle  
arms because it hurts so much,  
I yell into the abyss of my legs,  
hoping to make friends with the rock  
I tell myself this is my bag to bear,  
I don't share, because  
I know it hurts.  
When I relive my pain it  
renders me into my  
most intrinsic  
physical  
shape  
a  
small  
ball



so I hold the depth of my visceral whomp  
until it spirals to my knees  
maybe,  
that's why I hold them.

"With this poem, I was trying to paint a normal interaction you would see between a dad and his young kid. As you continue to read, the poem takes a turn and it transforms from a feeling of lightness into one of emptiness and feeling swallowed. I wanted to show how keen children are on understanding situations and their ability to shift their focus. How it goes from the child worrying about the snack, to his worry if his father would be able to digest him. The difference in gravity between those two ideas is pronounced. I felt like I was constantly living in between the idea of these two concepts. The last line is to show the quickness in which this interaction happened. That even though we bear witness to these traumas every day, however they manifest, we continue on."

- Jinno Vicencio

"This poem was written after an argument with my father. I felt so unseen and unheard. Being in the thick of my despair, I began to think of the experiences and traumas my dad had to endure in order for us to have that very argument. I had to remind myself that my parents have unresolved traumas from their upbringing that influences the way they interact with me. For many First-generation children of immigrants, it can be difficult to try and vocalize their emotions, because our parents were not taught how to handle their emotions and express them in a constructive way. It's up to us, to choose whether we want to carry those teachings with us, or not."

- Jinno Vicencio

## Moments Before Boarding a Boat

I watch a baby throw a tantrum

while the father threatens to leave  
the cap open

on his favorite snack

it's the threat  
that evaporated the tears

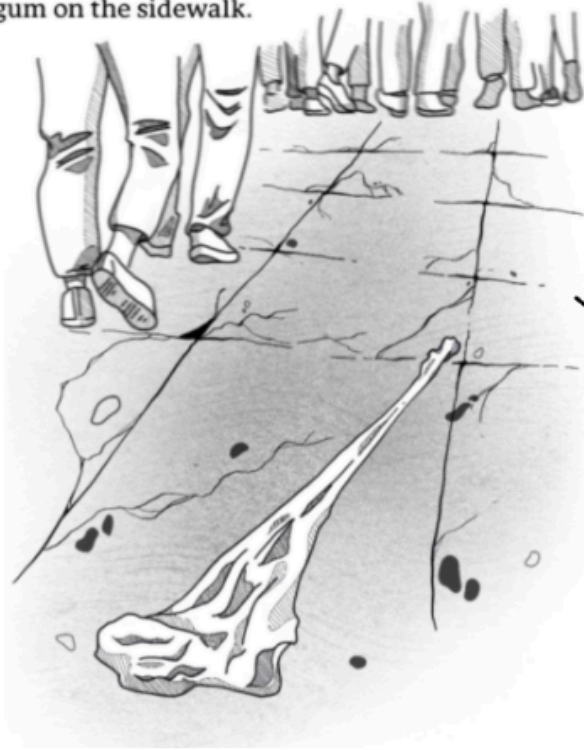
stale becomes the salted cheeks  
delicious they were,  
as I watched  
The father consume his child

The child? now doesn't  
fear the snack  
but his father's ability  
to digest him.

Then I went on the boat...

## What is a body

but to be stepped on  
Trampled over  
Somehow the world is okay  
with that.  
We living like  
that.  
what is the craziest thing you thought of?  
mine was thinking we could make this work  
Knowing we could never be  
gum on the sidewalk.



"I love this illustration! If you look close enough, there is a face hidden in the gum! That was a clever idea from my illustrator, Grace Kim.

The poem begins with a question, asking the reader to ask themselves what they think a body is. Is it a temple, or something to be chewed up and spat out? It takes a quick turn as the poem begins to describe ways in which bodies, specifically queer bodies, are treated in today's world by drawing comparisons to a piece of gum on the floor. This poem seeks to evoke similar feelings/themes to Moments Before Boarding a Boat. How people will continue to live their days, despite seeing the trampled piece of gum."

- Jinno Vicencio

## Talking to My Parents

they say speak your mind  
yet,  
we get met  
with thorned vines  
wrapped around tongue

it's a familiar feeling  
almost get used to  
the taste of your own blood  
never knowing what  
to enunciate  
because I got

aphids in my teef  
pesticides on my gumths  
thorns on my tongue transplanted  
the hate my caregivers told me to nurture so well  
the thorns got larger  
the self-doubt took root  
the mind rotted  
so how can a

pile of mulch,

speak its mind?

"I think as well-intentioned as my parents were, the rhetoric they used towards my queerness and identity inadvertently damaged the way I viewed myself and put into question my self-worth. How speaking your mind... isn't really speaking your mind. Especially in shame-based families. The pain I felt by trying to vocalize my feelings, was met with power and control by my caregivers. That left me with only a handful of things I could feel safe talking to them about. Through constantly contorting my language and boundaries, it led me to the eventual rot of the self, and rendered me a 'pile of mulch'."

- Jinno Vicencio

"All these poems give voice to this idea of intergenerational trauma. How the actions of the people we look to the most, end up delivering the self-fulfilling prophecy of trauma. What's different this time around is that we are able to recognize the abuse and call it out for what it is. To hold our truths and know that those experiences are apart of us, but don't define us. We create the future, one full of compassion and love. That our trauma doesn't have to continue to become, a family heirloom."

- Jinno Vicencio



#### **ABOUT THE POET:**

Jinno Vicencio (he/him) is a queer artist and poet based out of Orange County, CA. Vicencio is 22 years-old child of Filipino immigrants and is pursuing a degree in Agricultural Science at Cal Poly Pomona. Vicencio created "Flowers for Brown Boys" when the pandemic hit back in March. Vicencio had been writing and performing poetry since 2018 with his Forensic Speech team at Orange Coast College. Developing his artistic vision and public speaking skills, he became a Nationally Ranked Speaker in 2019.

Vicencio looks to make a full-time career out of creating art and visual performance. If you like his work follow him on:

IG: jinno.etry

TikTok: jinno.etry

# *What You Don't Realize*

by Jeenah Gwak

When you first see me, do not ask me what kind of Asian I am;  
My background is just as valid as yours.  
What if I asked you what kind of white you are?

When you glance over at me, do not ask me if I speak English.  
My skin color being a different shade from yours  
Does not translate to my language being exotic.

What you don't realize is that I speak English better than my native language,  
I've lived here longer than I've lived in my native country.

When you examine my face, do not tell me my eyes are big for an Asian.  
We all have different facial features that make us unique;  
This is how God created us, perfect in our own ways.

What you don't realize is that Asian beauty standards are rooted in these remarks,  
But you pulling your eyes into tiny slits does nothing to me.

When you eye my lunch, do not ask me why it smells so bad.  
Just like how hamburgers are a "must-try" American food,  
Kimchi is a part of my regular diet.

What you don't realize is that this fermented cabbage seeming the color of blood,  
Is actually a gift from our ancestors.

What you don't realize is that we all come from somewhere.  
This is what makes each person who they are.

Our identities include the color of our skin.  
The languages that we speak.  
The facial features that are unique to us.  
The food we eat.

This is the culture we are accustomed to.

"I wrote this poem from a place of bitterness in my heart from my experiences. While brainstorming the topic for this piece, I recalled the confusion I had felt growing up in American society regarding my racial identity. The second stanza, for example, refers to the moment that started this whole project, when a white man shouted to me and my mother, "Don't speak English, huh?" This encounter was infuriating, to say the least. I grew up in an area with a relatively large Asian population, and this was a new experience. Despite living in this region, I was still given questionable looks for bringing kimchi to school in third grade (as expressed in the sixth and seventh stanzas), and for this, I remember begging my parents to pack me an "Americanized" lunch. This experience, however, isn't unique to me. Many of my Asian-American peers have faced this as well. I sought to give voice to my peers by compiling my most significant experiences being an Asian-American into this one poem."

- Jeenah Gwak



#### **ABOUT THE POET:**

Jeenah Gwak is a junior at Newport High School in Bellevue, WA. She founded this magazine with a partner, Hope Yu, in hopes of providing a safe media platform for Asian-Americans to voice their stories that they've never shared. In her free time, she enjoys playing piano, reading, and spending time with her loved ones.

# A Survey

By Hope Yu

What are you?

They ask

Uhhhh

Brain fumbles,

Ensnared in the decision between words of nationality and race

Half Korean, half Norwegian

My usual answer.

How do you say

Immigrant

kinda

Outsider

American

Asian

White

In one phrase?

These are just words right

Words used to welcome

Words used to condemn

To identify, to claim,

To assume

What do you assume?

I spent years ignoring those words

I can be American

Exploiting the White half of me

Clinging onto that sliver like a moth to flame

Hoping it would get me somewhere

I can be American

Right?

American means White to America

How could I be American if I wasn't White?

I'm Korean

I'm Norwegian

Immigrant

kinda

Outsider

American

Asian

White

How do you say it in one phrase?

"Similar to many other children of mixed race, I've always had some very small identity problems. My parents can likely attest to this as I have always worried over what box I should fill out for my race or ethnicity when the forms ask. I spent many years dressing and consuming media like those around me. Though there is nothing wrong with that, I had completely dismissed both my Korean and Norwegian roots. Looking back on that experience is where this piece comes from."

- Hope Yu



## ABOUT THE POET:

Hope Yu is a junior at Garfield High School in Seattle, WA. She founded this magazine with a partner, Jeenah Gwak, in hopes of providing a safe media platform for Asian-Americans to voice their stories that they've never shared. She enjoys reading swimming, and painting in her free time.

# THE AMERICAN DREAM IS JUST A DREAM

*The dark side to the American Dream, when it's just not meant for everyone.*

**Written by KAILA KARNS**

**W**here do dreams of immigration begin? And, consequently - where do they end up? There is definitely something inspiring just in it of itself based upon what that dream can stand for. Opportunity. Change. Happiness. The concept of the American Dream is that this country can be the land of opportunity and that anyone can achieve success through hard work. This being said, however, the fact of the matter is that the "American Dream," is - for many - a myth, often perpetuated by popular media and the stories of those who did make it. When the point of departure to the American Dream is not seen as an option, one of many paths towards a better life, but as a means to escape for survival or in the longing for what could be - instead of what is, then many hopefuls would, unfortunately, come to the conclusion that the American Dream just wasn't made for everyone. That's just a dream, and nothing more.

Ofentimes, people will come here as a means to escape a worse situation. If they lack the proper understanding of what the immigration policies entail however, many find themselves in the position of being in the country as an "illegal." Contrary to popular belief, most illegal immigrants find themselves in this position due to a green card or visa expiring, as opposed to the wild imagination from conservatives who picture families sneaking to the border and dropping kids off to try to get across (which is often not at all the case, as American Border Patrol are often the ones behind separating families).

There are a number of misconceptions about those who immigrate to America illegally, from things like, "well if my family did it, there's no reason why yours can't," which often overlooks financial and educational differences, as well as a general lack of understanding towards other people's struggles in life. Immigrating to the U.S. is not a walk in the park by any means, as America's immigration system was designed to only welcome those who fell into distinctly different categories. If someone doesn't fit those categories, as many hopeful migrants do, lawful immigration goes from a potential option to something near impossible.

With all of this being said, not every immigration story is the same. While people can share similarities within their stories, those however tend to be limited to those within their own immigrant generations, or into even smaller groups of those who were fortunate enough to immigrate legally. Here, we will be going through the story and details of one such person, first generation Asian immigrant: Mary Kim.

Mary Kim is a 21-year old DACA recipient, first generation Australian-Korean immigrant. She was born in Sydney, Australia - but grew up in both Van Nuys and Orange County, California as her family moved around often, as an immigrant family that struggled financially. She remembers her childhood in a kaleidoscopic blur, where up till the age of ten or eleven she felt that it was healthy and happy but starting around the age of twelve her parents divorced, which was when the wave of change came crashing through - especially so on the financial level as her mother was left to raise 5 children on her own.

She was only a toddler when her mother decided to immigrate to the US in the year 2000, and was later told the reasoning behind it stemmed from the fact that her mother's friends who had been previously living in Australia told her about how many more opportunities there were available for them in America. She didn't have any other information of how to go about that process, and as a result went about this immigration thanks in part to the sponsorship of a local church. This, unfortunately, would later backfire - as one of the complicated means of immigrating legally to the U.S. is by an employer sponsorship. Even if they were willing to at one point in time the sheer number of hoops that employers would have to go through just for that to happen often turns businesses away from continuing their aid to individuals previously promised help. These "hoops," include things like certifying that hiring the immigrant wouldn't displace an American worker, to being willing to pay thousands of dollars in application and legal fees and to potentially wait several years for one to even reach the front of a visa line. And that's not even the half of it. Not knowing what was going to happen to her sponsorship, Mary and her family of 7 then pulled up their roots and immigrated to the aforementioned Van Nuys, California from Sydney, Australia.

Because she grew up in a community with a number of Koreans, and had immigrated to the U.S. at a young age, Mary didn't find herself experiencing any sort of culture shock from the move. What she did experience however, was racism - which was something that had afflicted her parents even back before coming to America. Mary could recall that her mother actually only experienced racism in Australia instead of in America, but her older brother being made fun of for not being white like the other kids was something that didn't change, even in moving to another country on the other side of the world. Such is life when perpetually seen as the forever foreigner in white dominated countries, unfortunately.

Something that was often a recurring experience for various Asian immigrants in the US regardless of how they got there was that of feeling either extremely proud or extremely ashamed to be Asian in America, and this was something that afflicted Mary as well. She had grown up in a very strong version of Korean culture, in which there were often many rules that set up how she should be, strict gender roles, a lack of concern for mental health, how to act, how to confront people, how to be angry, and how to be successful in life.

Growing up with those sorts of patriarchal ideals being so prevalent in her life was challenging for her, as she identified with so many things that were in stark contrast to the culture she grew up in. Mary identifies as nonbinary, queer, and pansexual, she holds herself to being an intersectional feminist who also is very passionate about race relations in America and went into studying the arts with a minor in film studies.

She feels that she's the kind of person with a lot to say, but often holds back - likely partially due to how she was raised. She aspires to find a job that can allow her financial independence, while also being artistic - as she wants to keep screenwriting and creating films that revolve around radical theories with an emphasis on the visual aesthetics and designs in the film. Mary likes being able to dip her feet into various different mediums, in film, as well as in life and hopes to continue this exploration as it helps her grow both as an artist and as a person. These are all things that are heavily against traditional Korean culture, and yet these are all things she really sees herself as - an Asian. And Mary never wants to shut that out.

It was previously mentioned that Mary was a DACA recipient. DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) is a US immigration policy that allows some individuals with unlawful presence in the US after being brought to the country as children to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation, and become eligible for a work permit in the US. Unlike the DREAM Act, DACA does not provide a path to citizenship for recipients. Since Trump's election, DACA recipients have not been allowed to travel outside the country, as there has been a ban issued on DACA recipients to even petition to travel abroad - when they previously had the right to. And since 2017, President Trump has actively been trying to get rid of the DACA program in its entirety.

There are so many obstacles in America when it comes to immigration policies. Mary's family hit hurdle after hurdle, but now - due to something that fell completely out of their hands - her family will likely never attain that American Dream that they spent so much time on trying to achieve. Being DACA is the total antithesis to that kind of dream, as it means that Mary's parents have no status at all. The only one in her family that was ever legally allowed to work was Mary, which put immense pressure on her to survive at a young age. From middle school, Mary was responsible for rent and paying for groceries - and this carried on and over into her life as a high schooler as well as her life as a college student today now while studying at the University of California, Irvine. Her mother, as well as her brother not having any means to work legally stripped the family of any opportunities they were told about when they decided to immigrate here, and Mary's DACA status is only yet another nail in the coffin of an American Dream that just wasn't ever built for everyone on equal grounds.



Consequently due to all of these things Mary has never visited Australia since leaving it. Due to the changes to DACA policies, she feels that she needs to get her status in order here in America and establish residency before looking into traveling, which is something she'd really like to do - but if she were to leave before doing so she would be blocked from re-entry permanently (even though she grew up here). Meanwhile, her mother has held onto the hope to gain US citizenship for forty years - where she hasn't ever left the US at any point during this time to see her own mother - yet she still has gotten nowhere near obtaining citizenship to have the rights the average American immigrant has here. Mary is still the sole provider for her family, and with all of this in mind Mary feels that it's hard to want to stay in a country like the US with such backwards policies. However upon remembering how many sacrifices her mother made in search for the ideal of a better life that is the American Dream for all of them - she feels torn. She doesn't want to just throw all of that work away, even if she feels they might be better off for it.

Every immigration story has it's trials and tribulations, but the sad reality for many hopeful, would be American immigrants is that the American Dream feels like a myth. Even if it once existed, nowadays it's gone - as the decrease in social mobility has led to the American economy being a mere shell of it's former glory. It is far harder now for any American, citizen or not, to improve their circumstances. There are some core issues in the system itself, and if the country doesn't look inwards to try to fix those problems of it's own accord, then it's likely that the American Dream will remain just that - a dream.



Kaila Karns is a college student currently studying communications in Orange County, California. In her free time, she enjoys rollerskating, working on music, and playing with her cats.

# PERSPECTIVES OF THE SECOND GENERATION

BY GABRIELLA IGNACIO

Being a melting pot of cultures, the United States is no stranger to people from across the globe, as immigrants from many different places have flocked to America and contributed in forming the country we know today. In particular, Asian immigrants have become increasingly more prevalent throughout the years, and are now important figures in society. Since their arrival to America in the mid 1800's, the Asian American subgroup has exploded, and currently makes up around 5.6% of the population (about 18.6 million people). The original newcomers to this country, also known as the "first generation" immigrants, typically came to America in search of the American dream. They wanted better opportunities in terms of jobs, education, and life in general. As these immigrants began to raise families and prosper in America, second generation immigrants (or the children of first generation immigrants) started to emerge. With a very unique experience that is unlike their parents, these second generation offspring often grow up in an environment influenced by a dynamic mix of cultures.

What is it like growing up as a young second generation Asian American in the US today, and how is it different from when our parents were growing up? As a second generation immigrant myself, it was interesting to learn about the experiences of a couple of my parents' friends and see how they compare to mine.

Growing up in America as a second generation immigrant with Asian descent has its unique qualities. For one, you can be exposed to cultural practices and traditions simply because that's how your parents choose to raise you. Butch DeCastro, a 50 year old Filipino-American born in LA County, mentions how his childhood was full of interactions with extended relatives, and that they played an important role in exposing him to a Filipino lifestyle. "We would have a family function nearly every weekend", he says, "And at any given gathering there would be at least 100 people." Therefore, he was constantly surrounded by Filipino customs, which included practices like "mano po" (a traditional greeting gesture), as well as popular music and food.

Although these gatherings contributed to a considerable part of his identity, DeCastro says that he did not realize it at the time. When recalling these events, he states that, “It probably wasn’t until I got into high school or even college when it dawned on me that the things we were doing were actually Filipino, and that not everyone did things the way we did.” Additionally, he describes how easy accessibility to relatives played a part in this unawareness, saying “I now understand the importance of family, and having access to family. But back then it didn’t sink in that it was a meaningful part of my life. It was just there.”



*Butch DeCastro*

DeCastro's earlier mindset in life is one that many younger second generation Asian Americans like myself experience as well. As kids, we are exposed to certain practices and people, which creates a worldview where the standard is only what we are shown on a frequent basis. It isn't until we hit teenage years that friendships, relationships, and social awareness become more meaningful, and we realize that we may have become unintentionally blind to experiences outside of ours.

This cultural identity that we have come to embrace growing up starts to compete with the reality that we are living in a country that has other varied practices and traditions from what we were exposed to in our younger years.

There is no denying that one of the most important factors that impact the degree to which second generation immigrants connect with their culture is through food. In DeCastro's case, a major link to his cultural identity happened during those family gatherings where traditional Filipino dishes such as adobo, pancit, and lechon were often served.

Though he was heavily exposed to Filipino cuisine, however, American food greatly contributed to his diet as well. The things he ate day to day consisted of common food that came straight out of the freezer such as pizza and burritos. Due to this, he states that, “Growing up, there was a sort of dichotomy, where my everyday diet, American food, contradicted the Filipino food I ate on the weekends”. Regardless of this, DeCastro is a firm believer that Filipino food is a great way to connect with his culture even today.

Growing up in America as a second generation immigrant, there is the natural tendency to be exposed to both an American and ethnic diet. In my case, Filipino food was introduced to me by my mother when I was still a baby. While I like and eat American food, I believe my love and preference for Filipino dishes to this day has certainly been influenced by this early and continued exposure by my parents. To me and many others, food remains one of the biggest physical links that has maintained the cultural identity of most immigrants and our connectedness to our cultural community.

Another significant part in the lives of nearly most immigrants is language. When it comes to second generation immigrants in particular, the importance of learning their culture's language is quite varied. Because they grow up in an English speaking country, learning to speak their parent's native language depends a lot on the importance their parents place on it themselves. In DeCastro's case, Tagalog (which is the official language of the Philippines) was not very present during his childhood, and was only spoken to him by his grandparents. His parents believed in the notion that in order to become more successful in America, they had to focus on teaching their kids and letting them be fluent in the English language itself. DeCastro clarifies that his parents may not have used those words overtly, but states that "though speaking Tagalog was never discouraged, it wasn't encouraged either." I find this scenario of growing up in a predominantly English speaking household similar to mine. While my mother speaks her native tongue fluently and occasionally uses it when talking to her relatives on the phone, she never really encouraged us to learn the language. In her defense, she states that learning a different language like Spanish would be more advantageous to us in the long run.

While there are numerous shared experiences within second generation immigrants, there are some cases that do not fit the typical story. Such is the case with Beth Johnson, a 45 year old Vietnamese-American from Washington State, who was adopted by a caucasian family when she was just a few months old.

Despite having very limited exposure to her culture while growing up, Johnson states that "I always felt comfortable in my own skin, and I loved my family and felt like I belonged. I always kind of knew I was adopted, and I never had any sort of curiosity or identity crisis about what my biological family was like."



*Beth Johnson and her adoptive family, 1975*

Nonetheless, Johnson eventually had that curiosity to learn a little more about her ethnicity. She got the opportunity to visit Vietnam when she was in her late 20s, and says that seeing the country in person truly gave her perspective on where and how she was raised. "The country is beautiful," she recalls, "But a lot of it is impoverished, and when I looked around, I could really see what my life would've been like had I not been adopted."

I imagine a lot of immigrants could relate to this feeling. Acknowledging what life is like in their home country allows them to gain perspective on their privilege, and can ultimately be a motivator of success in America. Johnson makes a note of this, saying “Even though I’m adopted, most immigrants have what I would call an “alternative reality”, where we know what it’s like to be somewhere [other than America]. We know what our life would be if we stayed in our country of origin, and I think that makes us work a little bit harder and makes us more humble, because we appreciate everything and every opportunity that’s given to us.”



*Beth Johnson (right) and her adoptive mother (left)*

These words are not foreign to me, as I remember almost the same words coming from my mother every now and then. When she tells me stories of how it was for her growing up in a third world country like the Philippines, I can’t help but feel grateful for the opportunities that we are given almost every day, and sometimes even take for granted.

The experiences and perspectives of second generation Asian American immigrants can be varied but they certainly have similarities that make them unique and interesting. The common thread seems to be the curiosity and affinity for cultural influences like food, the value of family and hard work, and gratefulness for the opportunities that come with living as a second generation immigrant in a country like America. Despite the many shared experiences, there are also many differences, and there are lessons to be learned within each individual story.



Gabriella Ignacio is a sophomore at Newport High School in Bellevue, Washington. Her interests include visual arts, such as drawing, and reading. She is passionate about their cause because Asian heritage is a big part of her identity.

# THIRD GENERATION DISCONTINUITY

*Where some might find themselves lost in-between with an identity crisis.*

**Written by KAILA KARNS**

It's all too easy to forget how different life experiences can be for even those within the same cultural backgrounds. For those spanned between generational gaps, in the same way, that a second-generation Asian American feels that they can't relate to that of their immigrant parent's woes, the third-generation Asian American feels even more disconnected from their cultural heritage. It doesn't help that even on top of that, many Asian Americans from first or second generations often gatekeep their cultures from those in later generations - deeming those that can't speak the language as fluent as them or those who haven't grown up with the same standards as "not Asian enough," to call themselves whatever ethnicity they are. Also due to the "forever foreigner," perception held of Asians in America by the dominant population of white people, third-generation Asian Americans also often feel excluded to even the American cultural experience. Due to this, many third-generation Asian Americans opt to just refer to themselves as Asian American as an identity within itself, and often better relate to those who grew up like them (with higher marriage rates between those of the same generation versus that of those in separate ones, which is quite low). Third generation Asian Americans face substantial discrimination from both the Asian ethnic identities that reject them and the non-Asian American society that doesn't see them as "American," enough, which leads to a very different experience in their upbringing, as well as to how they see the world & what causes they care more about.

One such Asian American who has grown up with many of these kinds of experiences is that of Emily Lim, a 25-year old Asian American citizen hailing from San Francisco, California. The city of San Francisco in itself actually holds a lot of history for multi-generational Asian Americans, particularly for the Chinese immigrant population. As early as 1848, Chinese immigrants came to San Francisco in droves during the Gold Rush happening at the time in hopes of a better life. Starting in 1862, the Transcontinental Railroad began to be built across the country from the Pacific to the Atlantic, and even that was primarily built by Chinese immigrants who were also underpaid and discredited upon its completion. Emily's family spans even these generations, as her great-great-grandparents on both sides of her family worked on the Transcontinental Railroad's completion, but they had returned to China before her grandparents immigrated back to America to stay permanently. The reason for this leave and return was due to the Asian Exclusion Act that sent many Chinese immigrants back home even after their contributions to America's growth as a developing nation, as white Americans felt threatened by their very presence. Many years have passed since then to now, and yet Emily still feels that white Americans are always shocked about how fluent her family is in English, and even more shocked when she shares how she's a third-generation Asian American - which is something of a double standard in itself as you'd never think twice about a white person saying the same thing.

Emily is currently a college student, currently studying for her Masters at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. She grew up alongside many other Asian Americans, from all backgrounds and generational influences. As I've learned from Emily, most public schools in San Francisco hold Asians as the ethnic majority, which reflects the long Asian American history in the city. Due to this, she never felt like she was physically any different from her peers, but the difference in treatment stemmed from the generational differences as some 99% of her school friends were second-generation Asian Americans. In her elementary school years, she was questioned about her "Chinese-ness," or "Asian-ness," because she didn't fit into their idea of what an Asian person was supposed to be like. So anytime Emily said anything that strayed from the cultural box of understanding, she found herself ostracized, and told she was too white for an Asian to actually enjoy country music by choice, or for not being able to speak Chinese.

On top of this, in mainland China there's a Chinese saying called "jook sing" which means "empty bamboo," which is the term that people in China use to describe Chinese Americans because we're "empty of culture inside" to them, and this was extremely hurtful to hear for Emily as well. In the same way that non-Asian Americans would often generalize Asian Americans as a whole by stripping away the ethnic differences between individuals, the second generation Asian American community did this to Emily, by trying to fit her into a box that they themselves didn't like to be categorized under. And because white Americans didn't see her as white, she found herself feeling like she didn't belong in any community - and had an early identity crisis.

Oftentimes something that happens when Asian immigrants of any generation feel social rejection for just being themselves, or for partaking in their version of the cultural upbringing they had, they internalize these comments and take it out on themselves by trying to distance themselves from their own ethnic background by trying to embrace the dominant culture. This is something called internalized racism, and Emily herself admitted to struggling with it when she was younger. Internalized racism often goes hand-in-hand with cultural assimilation, which is often called "being whitewashed," by newer generations of any kind of POC American immigrant. She felt that even her family as a whole - due to the time period in which they immigrated to America - had an extremely different immigration experience even just based on that alone. Emily never had the chance to learn from her grandparents, as they passed on before she ever had a chance to really know them or learn things like the Chinese language from them - which definitely impacted her intake of a "traditional" Chinese cultural upbringing. Her parents (who had assimilated to survive) were born in the US long before the model minority myth was created and they grew up extremely poor in a segregated San Francisco. Just to elaborate on that, the model minority myth is the idea that a group of people who have experienced prejudice and discrimination succeeded in doing so without violence or confrontations with white people, based on the fact that relative to other immigrant groups, Asian Americans are seen as educational over-achievers. This is often used to put down the hard work that went into the well being of Asian Americans all throughout the country. While no such "model minority" privilege actually exists, many later generations bought into this mentality themselves (not realizing how damaging it was), but Emily's family grew up before it even existed. Later generations ended up with stereotypes that Asians from China were rich (for instance), which Emily felt benefitted them in ways that her parents never would've had the chance to know of. As for how all of this affected Emily, she felt that because there was a misconception of how people saw Chinese Americans today versus how it used to be when her parents were growing up, that this contributed to her loss of identity, which was compounded by the lack of Asian American characters on television or in books that weren't just first or second-generation characters.

Emily hadn't realized how much of this affected her until she had gone to college in an area that was predominately white, with approximately 5 total Asian Americans in her entire graduating class - as she attended a very small liberal arts college for her bachelor's degree. But there she felt that she was finally seen as just Asian and as an American (due to the lack of Asians to tell her otherwise) and Emily felt like she could embrace her definition of being Asian in peace. Because she didn't speak Chinese, she felt that she could relate better to non-Asians growing up, and this contributed to her feeling like she had found herself in college, alongside the ability to exist within her own Asian identity which hadn't been seen reflected for her anywhere else. Because she's also a speech-language pathology graduate student, Emily knows there will be times in her career when her ability to teach the English language and it's speech skills will be questioned because of her race. For Asian Americans regardless of age, their ability to speak English fluently will most likely always be a shock to others instead of a given. She feels that it would be nice if with more Asian Americans being born here and becoming more visible in the media and in politics, that this will become less of a problem, but for right now, this is an issue that truly appears as if it's here to stay.

It's strange how in our own quest to uphold the identity that the dominant group in America often makes it hard to keep up, that we end up potentially alienating those who are also of Asian descent because they don't quite fit into that image we think we have to fit and vice versa for those outside the racial group. I would say that it's within human nature to want to categorize things, in order to make better sense of things we don't understand, but there's definitely a line that shouldn't be crossed on both sides, and more often than not it gets crossed in ways that are beyond painful for others. At times, third-generation immigrants feel like they're betraying their community to say that they don't feel as comfortable with them as they do with others outside of it, but for Emily Lim, this is her truth. In her experience, second-generation Asian Americans always made her feel like she wasn't good enough for them, or that she needed to prove her worth as an Asian to them, so she just gave up. She now feels that thanks to her college experience, she's found a middle ground and is close to some second and first-generation Asian Americans that would never treat her that way, and has realized that making generalizations in the same way they did to her when she was growing up was equally wrong to do. But that's life, we grow and we learn and we do better.

Going back to a term called, “jook sing,” from earlier, Emily reflects on all the time that’s passed since it was first used against her. She now thinks the term comes from a place of a complete misunderstanding of what culture is and how it changes. When first-generation Asian immigrants made their move to the United States, they probably feared that their children and grandchildren would “lose” their culture. In that process of learning more about American culture and being integrated into a new society, some of the elements of Chinese culture those of that generation would have wanted to hold onto were not present in the way that a second-generation would experience their own version of that Chinese culture, and in some way, the first generation probably felt that their children had “lost” some part of the culture. Emily is certain that this sentiment carried over to her grandparents and parents, as they were saddened by the fact that she didn’t speak proficient or even conversational Chinese, and that they likely felt that in some way she had “lost” that connection to our heritage even more - in the same way, that second-generation Asian Americans at her school would likely see her as (through that same lens). And after so many years of Emily working through her identity, she came to realize that she isn’t empty like bamboo and that she hasn’t lost anything at all. She thinks of herself as holding 3 cultures within herself at once: Chinese, American, and Chinese American. Emily feels so lucky that she can take the best of the cultures she grew up in to create a new identity that is unique to herself and to her family. The term “jook sing” still brings her anger to hear even now, but she finds that she is comforted in knowing that her life and experiences are continuously being enriched by the combination of her cultures, and that is who she always will be, regardless of the opinions from those around her.

It often takes third-generation Asian Americans a long time to come to this conclusion, that the food that they eat, the music they listen to, the media they consume, and the people they surround themselves with don’t always have to be made up of socially pushed “Asian” things in order for them to feel accepted as they are. Emily, like all third-generation Asian Americans, will always be Asian enough because she is Asian. Being Asian American doesn’t have to only be the food or media or language; it’s also the values and beliefs one has that are inherently Chinese or Asian American, and at the same time, being Asian American means one can shed the Chinese beliefs (as well as the American beliefs) people find that they don’t align with. Emily feels that people who act as gatekeepers for Asian American culture just end up alienating other Asian Americans that don’t immediately agree and push them away from a community that could be made stronger and diversified by those of us who express our Asian American culture in a different way. Not every Asian American is the same, nor are the stories that led them to where they are today.



Kaila Karns is a college student currently studying communications in Orange County, California. In her free time, she enjoys rollerskating, working on music, and playing with her cats.



# Media Corner

# 2020 in Review

*As we head into the year of 2021, I wanted to share and celebrate some of my (and friends) favorite pieces of asian media from the year. Note that since this is personal recommendations, everything is biased towards what I am most inclined to consume. However, I tried my best to pick works that encompass different types of people and places. When I wasn't sure about a particular piece or thought that perhaps there were more options than I was aware of, I asked friends who gave me their excerpts to paste in. I also tried to think about general accessibility to people here in the states (I tried to avoid platforms that are harder to get here). Thank you for reading and check out these artists and writers! Here's to a better 2021.*

## Music

### Dis-ease by BTS

Music choice for me is almost entirely based off lyrics. I listen to really only Korean music and I have yet to find a group that does lyricism like Bangtan. If you don't agree then just move on.

I'm the one who eats three meals a day  
My sin, a dog biting me while I rest  
Don't do that

I'm ill, yeah, I'm the job itself

This hits your head like a glass bottle

Everybody's got a lot of diseases, I'm  
confused by that  
That humankind is inherently disgusting

This song is a big throwback to their older hip-hop albums. Like the rest of their recent album BE, the tracks are the product of Covid times. The genius in this song begins with the name, 'dis-ease' shows how the disease, Covid, took away our ease in life. I could spend a long time talking about the brilliance of the bridge music theory wise but I want to focus on 'i'm ill, yeah, i'm like the job itself.' This is a triple entendre that crosses languages: 'ill' as in sick, '일' as in work or labor, and '일' as in #1 in the Chinese/Sino-Korean counting system. Additionally, 'This hits your head like a glass bottle' is Korean wordplay. The word, '병' is used which means sickness/disease. However, in Hanja it means 'bottle.' The line could either be 'This hits your head like a glass bottle' or 'This disease hits your head like glass.' Pretty cool right? Go listen.

## Music Video

### Black Swan BTS

I found this music video absolutely beautiful. Park Jimin's contemporary dance was incredibly well done and the overall concept of an artist losing the passion for their art in direct contrast to 'Dionysus' is well encapsulated by the dark themes and the orchestral elements. They kept some of the dance moves similar to the ballet elements of the actual Black Swan movie and storyline. I would recommend watching some of their other performances of it, especially the orchestral version at 2020 MMA's and on the Jimmy Fallon show.



An ocean where daylight  
never touched...My lost  
feet stuck in the mundane

## Special Mentions

### Strange by Agust-D ft. RM

With dreams as its collateral, the capitalism injects the  
morphine called 'hope'  
Wealth breeds wealth and tests greed

Polarization, the flower that's already bloomed  
A round nail that has been hammered into a square hole

Someone who wishes for peace, someone who wishes for  
war  
The wordplay that changes as easy as the flipping of a palm  
It's the kind of world where a dream has become an option,  
but  
There's no answer, that's the answer

I won't say too much about this song but it is basically just pondering what 'normal' is in the current capitalist society. It talks about how materialistic objects control us and our sense of identity. Briefly, the use of 'polarization' can be thought of in a scientific sense, a political sense, and it's also a homonym in Korean for 'anger' in some contexts. Additionally, the idea that we are being taught to become a certain thing molded by society is expressed through the round nail to square hole line.

# Movies



Reflection done by Kaila Karns

"Overall, I really loved this movie, especially its incorporation of a multilingual background in an Asian American immigration story that I feel so many could relate to. The narrative and the emotional draw excelled as it focused on intergenerational experiences, but could've been improved a bit as far as the pacing went. There were parts of the plot line that were lacking, but the movie still flowed well in spite of these missing pieces and it didn't show these loose strings for the casual watcher.

Recently this film has also been the center of some controversy as the Golden Globes opted to place it in the "Foreign Films" category, citing that it was due to it having less than half of the film in English. However, this film was Asian American made and there have been films in the best picture category before that held even less English dialogue (most notably that of "Inglourious Bastards, which had only 30% of the film in English). Many consider this decision on their part to be a racist move - as if to say that Americans cannot be non-white Asians. Actor Daniel Dae Kim equated it to being told to "go back to your own country when your country is America." This is the story of an immigrant family trying to build their life up from nothing, so how could this not be more American?"

- Kaila Karns

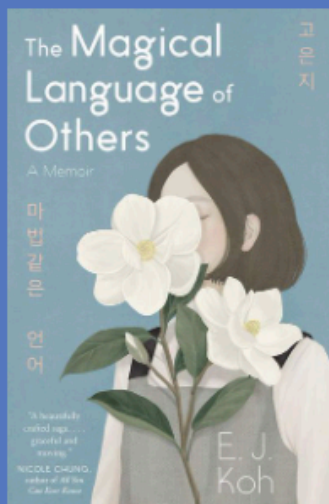
# Video Games



Quote from Goodreads

# Literature

## The Magical Language of Others: A Memoir by E.J. Koh



I received this as a gift for Christmas of 2019 and I remember getting to go to the signing at Elliot Bay Book store. It's a beautiful and humbling book full of letters and anecdotal stories of a young, Korean American women's life growing up.

It touches on some of the ore horrifying parts of Korean history during Japanese occupation and what that meant for the coming generations.

\*TW: suicide & eating disorder

I highly recommend it for it is incredibly moving and a work of art. Here is the synopsis: "After living in America for over a decade, Eun Ji Koh's parents return to South Korea for work, leaving fifteen-year-old Eun Ji and her brother behind in California. Overnight, Eun Ji finds herself abandoned and adrift in a world made strange by her mother's absence. Her mother writes letters, in Korean, over the years seeking forgiveness and love—letters Eun Ji cannot fully understand until she finds them years later hidden in a box."



So I know absolutely nothing about video games, never mind where their manufacturers are from. Kaila has told me that these are some very popular games from 2020 that come from Asia or Asian companies in some capacity. Here are her notes on said games: games: "Animal Crossing: New Horizons" (BIG quarantine hit, like this game really went mainstream this year), "Final Fantasy VII Remake" was very long anticipated, and "The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel IV" was a really cool JRPG that came out in October.



# Incomprehensible Truth

By Grace Park

"This piece depicts the language barrier that I experienced when I immigrated back to the States from 7 years of living in Korea. At school and on the news, I remember everybody would discuss the tragedy and violence that were occurring in the world at that time. However, as a recent immigrant who could barely form a proper sentence in English, I couldn't comprehend anything, which is illustrated through the letters not entering the bottle that I am holding."





# Colorful

By Grace Park

"This piece depicts the numerous cultural facades that I own as a bicultural Asian American. I often encounter discriminatory stereotypes that classify me as simply "another" Asian who is just like "all the other" Asians. My identity is so much more intricate and colorful than that. I am an embodiment of the beautiful Korean culture that has so many "colors", or unique aspects to it. The Korean culture is so diverse in itself and it becomes even more colorful when I fuse it with the American part of my identity."



## ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Grace Park is a junior at Bellevue High School in Bellevue, WA. She loves spending time with her family and friends, listening to music, and learning about medicine. As a recent immigrant, she loves to share her story of being an Asian American through art.



"The far-ranging experiences particular to the ethnic identities represented under the umbrella term of "Asian and Pacific Islander" are diverse and multi-layered, impossible to express in just one illustration. Yet, as east and west come together in the embodied forms of our experiences that we swallow, one thread that rings true is our food. Our food and its history reach deeper than the particular adversities and injustices suffered in the US. We eat to connect, to survive and to persevere. We eat to show and receive love. We eat together in resilience and hope. And, we are also more than what we eat, more than the sum of what we experience."

- Judy Ko

#### ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Judy Ko is a multi-disciplinary visual designer who is currently finishing up a counseling degree at The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology to practice art and play therapy. Her area of focus is on mind, body & soul care, walking alongside others to move towards deeper self-discovery, meaning-making and transformation through the lenses of faith, beauty and imagination.

# MEET THE TEAM of WHAT WE EXPERIENCE



**Jeenah Gwak**  
Co-Founder / Editor-in-Chief

Jeenah is a junior at Newport High School in Bellevue, WA. Some of her hobbies include performing piano, reading new novels, and spending time with her family and friends. She founded this magazine in hopes of spreading awareness about the experiences of Asian peoples living in American society.



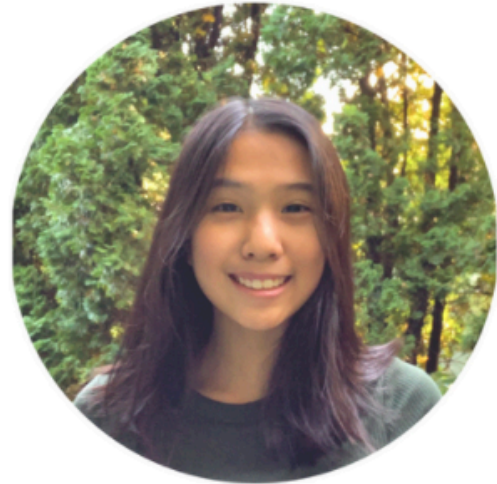
**Hope Yu**  
Co-Founder / Editor-in-Chief

Hope is a junior at Garfield High School in Seattle, WA. Some of her hobbies include reading, painting, and swimming. She helped to found this magazine because of the lack of Asian representation throughout all forms of media and politics in the U.S.



**Ashley Chen**  
Content Manager

Ashley Chen is a junior at Interlake High School in Bellevue, WA. Her passions include running her own blog and playing piano. In her free time, she likes to watch Chinese dramas and talk with her friends. Her favorite topics to write about are Asian American mental health and the history of Asian American racism.



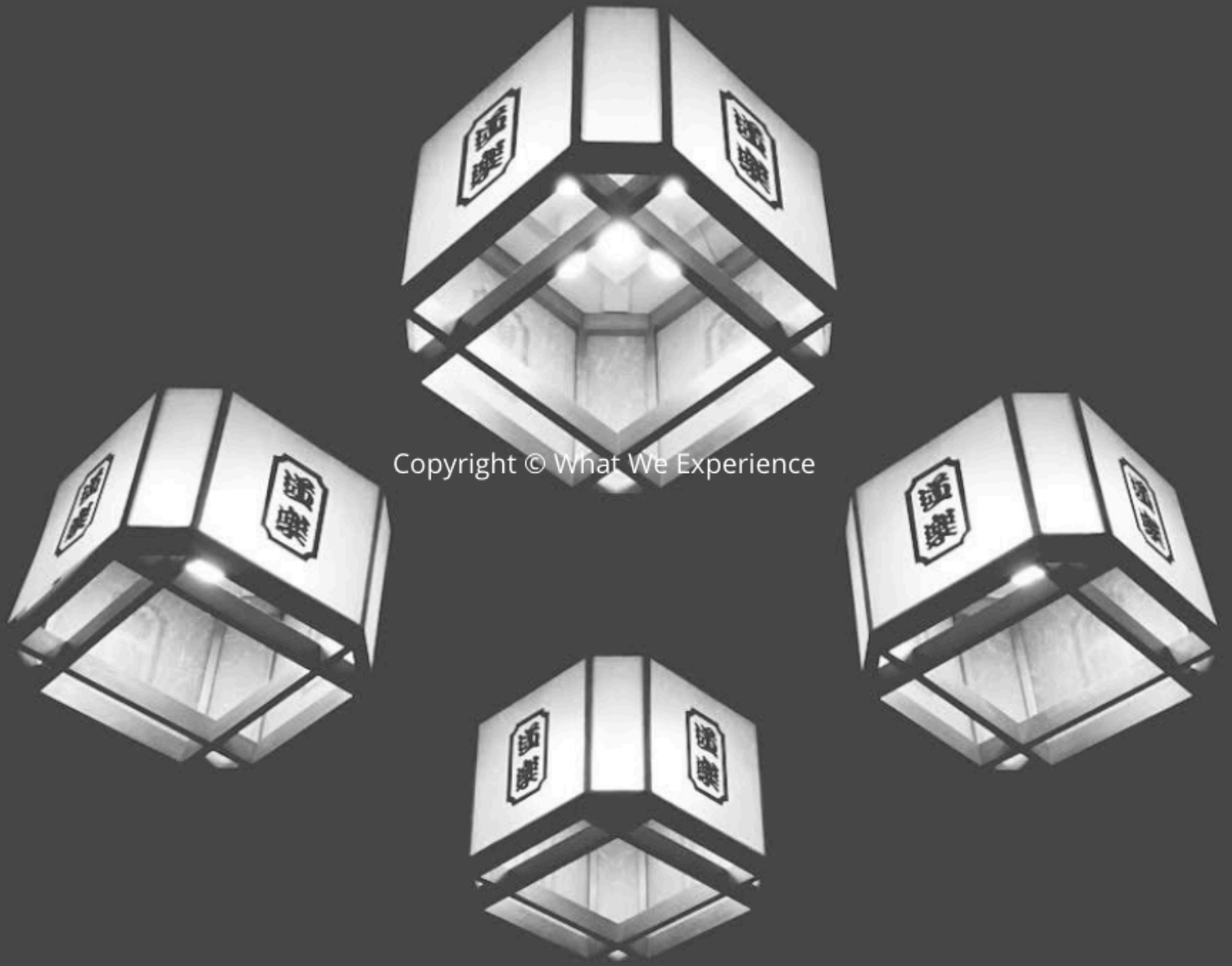
**Gabriella Ignacio**  
Art & Design Manager

Gabriella Ignacio is a sophomore at Newport High School in Bellevue, Washington. Her interests include visual arts, such as drawing, and reading. She is passionate about their cause because Asian heritage is a big part of her identity.



**Kaila Karns**  
Staff Writer

Kaila Karns is a Welsh-Korean American fashion model and content creator from Orange County, CA. She is currently working on a degree in communications, and she loves to work on music, write, dance around her room, and rollerskate.



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