

Cultured

I know as one who is woman.

I know as one who is colored.

I know as one who is part of a diaspora.

I am proud to know the world in these distinctly minoritized, distinctly beautiful ways. There is something satisfying about being part of a group that is disempowered, because my very membership calls me to the good fight.

When I know the world as a Canadian, I feel secure. Assured. I know when I talk to the vendors at the farmer's market in accentless English, Canadians who do not look like me will respond well to me. They banter with me, inquire after my health, ask me where I bought my dress. Sometimes they even tell me I look like Lucy Liu, which I indulge because I should feel expansive. When I know the world as a Canadian, I expect respect because I have taken every pain to attain it. I look and, most importantly, I sound like someone who will not steal their jobs, who will not make others feel uncomfortable with the wrong accent.

All of this goes away when I am with my parents.

The minute I enter a place with my parents, I know the world as Chinese-Canadian. All of my interactions with store clerks—medical receptionists—serving staff, are influenced by a persistent anxiety as I attempt to translate instructions—demands—norms. Sometimes— hilariously, absurdly— I detect a slight Cantonese blur to my English as I switch from English to Cantonese to Chinglish. Gone is the security. Gone is the confidence. I grow exasperated with my parents in anticipation of the exasperation I know the Canadians who don't look like us must feel, and I feel, at once, frustrated—defensive— protective.

When I am with my parents, our foreignness is unmistakable.

It swirls around us as we take longer to place orders at restaurants. It covers us like a miasma as we chatter excitedly in Cantonese, our lively nine tones sounding invasive to the uninitiated. When I am together with my parents, you cannot deny how cultured we are and yet there is no one admiring of it. The very idea of someone miming a Cantonese accent in an attempt to gesture towards the refined is absurd, even to hold in one's mind for the briefest of moments.

When I am with my parents, I am more attuned to how foreign they are and how foreign that makes me— how I must protect them from the perceived judgment of others and yet, how much I

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also resent them for needing my protection. Why could they not have achieved more in their assimilation? How could other Canadians be so judgmental? And finally, damningly, how could I, their daughter, resent my role?

As a Chinese-Canadian, I get to see how flimsy the concept of Canadianess really is. I get to see that to the non-minoritized, it will always be easier to be kinder to someone who looks and sounds like you, and there is truly no urgency to challenge themselves to do better than that.

To know the world as a Canadian-born woman of Asian descent means to know the world as someone who is proud yet apologetic, fluent in English and Cantonese yet feeling inadequate in both, one who is underestimated yet hyperdesired, and to be held in contempt for it all.