

American Translation of Chinese Character

As much as four-year-old me cried and fussed on the plane to America, she fell in love with its macaroni and cheese, princess fairytales, and *waiguoren*, foreigner white people. Four-year-old me did not understand that she was the *waiguoren* in the land of the free. After two weeks of living in America, I had forgotten half of my Chinese and the English words bubbled effortlessly from my lips. In those two weeks, I embraced my English name, the first name I was given at source and wore it proudly and shamelessly, an enigma that puzzled me relentlessly until I unearthed my destiny.

By age thirteen, my English name clung to me magnetically as if skin-bound. My Chinese name, by contrast, slipped away, drowning in a pool of what could have been. At age thirteen, my mother charted my entire future from adolescence to adulthood: take every STEM-based AP class possible, patent some nanotechnology, win the Intel Science Fair for biochemical engineering, all for the coveted acceptance letter from MIT. At age thirteen, I rebelled through the verses of poems that my English name birthed. At age thirteen, I chose the pen and ink, letters and words, over digital commands, numbers, and code.

To me, America was the land of the free and the home of the brave because of its surging rebellion -- the rebellion that nurtured independence and inspired awe. By the time my fourteenth birthday rolled around, learning how to write became an exercise in learning how to see the startling clarity the culture clash between the Asian American dichotomy. It was then, after drafts upon drafts of cleaving open my most intimate frustrations with the pre-charted course my mother meticulously planned that I began to see the meaning behind her well-intentioned, albeit misguided motives. Growing up in Communist China at the peak of Mao Zedong's regime and raised by two ill-prospected rural farmers as a girl, my mother had only one option: the technical field. STEM was my mother's salvation, the catalyst to her heart-wrenching immigration narrative. For me, STEM symbolized the oppression of a culture that I had fought so hard to escape. I was not fashioned from the same sp³ hybridized molecules that my mother integrated into her DNA; I emerged from the tears of her suffering, from the joys of her laughter, from the poetry and prose that spanned inky vistas in boundlessness.

I was born to transcribe my mother's immigration narrative, to unravel the red coursing through our veins and trace its origins back to the cries of our people who boarded rickshaws and rafts toward Lady Liberty's kindled torch, our people, *waiguoren* themselves, mismatched among other *waiguoren* until their traditions converged into new chapters. I was born to write the story of Chinese character with American opportunity -- the contradiction of two distinct worlds fused so perfectly into the blossoming bouquet of yin and yang harmony, the promise of immortal Chinese names knit tightly in lineage with their English counterparts.