

Dreams

Nine years. That's how long I've been in Canada. This number could either be a lifetime, or a minute to some people. To put it into perspective, 60% of my life has been in Canada. 60% of my time sleeping, 60% of my time reading, and 60% of my time spent playing video games. Sometimes, lying in bed, playing with my cat (and occasionally in English class), I daydream about what my life might've been like if we had stayed in China. Those daydreams always give me mixed emotions, speculations, fear and hope in equal measure.

On the crowded streets of Shanghai, stand dozens of small stores. Neon LED signs flash overhead, vendors shout their discounted items, and people play chess in front of shops. As I walk with my grandma, I feel the cool breeze on my arm, as I concentrate on avoiding the pedestrians. The smell of soup, strong incense, and exhaust fumes wafts through the foggy air. And on those streets, in those markets, everyone looks like me.

I didn't notice it at the time, but only as I deeply thought about those dreams, did I realize that everyone looked the same as me. Digging deeper, everyone on that street liked the same music, listened to the same radio station, liked the same dishes, and wore similar clothes. All of my friends watched the same cartoons, played with similar toys, and learned the same things.

Walking around the neighbourhoods of Toronto, though, rarely do I see someone who resembles me. A halal restaurant and McDonalds can coexist at the same intersection. I could be playing volleyball with a person whose birthplace is an ocean away from mine. There is a road on which sits a Synagogue, a Mosque and a Buddhist Temple in the same block. These things I would have never been able to see, much less dream about, if I had stayed in China.

In 2014, my parents and I, after careful deliberation, leaving everything and everyone we knew behind, boarded a plane to Saskatoon. Why this particular city I ask? Still to this day, I have no idea - I'm sure my parents had their dreams. After I exited the plane, no longer did the airport security agents have familiar faces, but instead they were replaced with faces with new complexions. Walking to the conveyor belt with my luggage, I saw people wearing hijabs, some dressed in formal attire, others in shorts and sandals. Everyone around me was totally different. I even went to a Catholic school. I was now in a class with Canadians, Filipinos, Americans, someone from Africa, and only one person from China. Long gone were the days where everyone looked, dressed and liked the same things. After sports practice, I would have sleepovers with my Asian friend and spend the whole day playing Xbox. The next day, I

would be eating poutine and listening to rap music with my Canadian buddies. I had friends with different religions, cultures, music taste, and everything.

Now, I live in Toronto. I've discovered the trombone, and music has become a passion of mine that I don't know if I would've picked up if I were still in China. The friends I've made along the journey I would never have met if I hadn't moved here. The diverse culture surrounding me encourages me to see the world through different lenses. The experiences people share in the classroom and outside are eye-opening. I might've never understood and learned what it was like to be a minority. Taking into account other people's lives broadens your view. Living in a mono-culture environment, you often have a narrowed perspective, whereas in a multi-culture, you are in the middle of a cornucopia of food, cultural celebration, music, and most important of all: perspective. Yet, I still don't want to lose my own culture. I still dream about what life might've been if we didn't immigrate. I want to be rooted to the ground with my culture, as losing that would be equivalent to losing a part of my identity, who I am, and what I have to bring to the cultural mix. But I want to be a vibrant part of that mix.

Would I change anything about Canada? Nothing. I would not want to change anything I have learned, experienced and endured through immigrating to Canada: the shelter from problems, the water that enables the crops to grow, the mind to learn, the views that have been shared. All of this has enabled me to flourish as a person, friend and musician, and has become the fuel for my dreams.