

FEATURE

Learning to Live in My Very Own Middle Kingdom

BY EMILY GE

Contributing Writer April 7, 2014

My first history class began before my memory did. Instead of Dr. Seuss, my dad reserved bedtime for reading passages from “San Guo Yan Yi.”

“San Guo” is an epic of ancient literature, kind of like a Chinese “Iliad.” Written during the third century, it is the 65-volume historical

to power, Chinese history suffered a terrible blow. While my parents were growing up, their school curriculum was centered around and filtered by the Communist Party. It was only after Mao’s death and their move to the U.S. that my parents fully realized how much had been whitewashed from their history classes.



account of the bloody Three Kingdoms period in Chinese history. I don’t know how long it took me to understand any of what he was reading, but it seems like I’ve always known the three sworn brothers – Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei – the tyrant Cao Cao and the sage intellectual Zhu Ge Liang, who has always been my favorite

In a culture more than 3,000 years old, history is of the utmost importance; even today, any Chinese person will recognize “San Guo” or Qin Shi Huang if questioned. When Mao came

My father, in addition to countless others of his generation, is currently in a sort of midlife-educational crisis, watching hours of documentary footage and revisionist lectures to try to recapture some of his past. Chinese people care deeply about history, even if it’s been bastardized to suit fleeting political needs.

As strange as reading “San Guo” to an infant might be considered, my parents want me to know where we came from; however, they recognize that there are some things you have to be born in China to understand. Because of their

own scrubbed-out education, they now appreciate my and my sister's American education that much more. They want to give us the chance to learn about everything that they were never allowed to know.

Although they have certainly looked back to China, my parents' lives are here now. When we're in a foreign country and someone asks my parents where they're from, they always say America. This is how we live now.

I am often angered by misconceptions about China. I find it so unfair that outsiders only know about government repression by way of media-fueled exaggeration and not much beyond that. They don't know the look on my grandma's face when I compliment her cooking, or how my grandpa insists on holding my hand whenever we cross a street.

How can they not know the joy of sitting around a table for hours, eating food spiced with love and laughing in two languages? Bluntly sincere language, steadfast humor and hospitality, respect for elders and 4,000 years of my people's collective memory triumphing over the blips of a few decades: This is what China is for me, not a government under a red rectangle and some yellow stars.

I am also angered by misconceptions of Chinese-Americans (basically, I live in a constant state of fury). Every time I hear someone say "that's so Asian," I cringe a little bit inside. I'm not overly concerned with political correctness, but these backdoor compliments make my hackles rise.

I wouldn't mind if people made generalizing statements if they stopped to wonder why these stereotypes exist in the first place. Family is the holy of holies: an integral and inviolable key to the Chinese mind. It is no wonder that we children work so hard to achieve, as our drive stems from the gratitude, mutual respect and unshakable loyalty to our families that are hardwired into our consciousness.

Mythical "Tiger Moms" aside, in my experience, we pressure ourselves more than our parents do. We want to succeed on our own terms, and we want to make our parents proud.

I've been called both "not really American" and "not really Chinese," but I hope that by now I've managed to grow a sureness of self that allows me to shrug off the cynicism. It is utterly impossible for me to choose one nation and one people over the other. It's not so much a matter of choosing between them as of learning to live with both sides of myself instead of with neither.

China may be Zhong Guo, the "place at the center," but America is Mei Guo: the "beautiful land."

###

Emily Ge, a junior at Charles Wright Academy, lives in Gig Harbor. She is one of five reader columnists whose work appears on this page.

Email her at geemily26@gmail.com.

Read [more](http://www.thenewtribune.com/2014/04/07/3136817/learning-to-live-in-my-very-own.html?sp=/99/447/) here:
<http://www.thenewtribune.com/2014/04/07/3136817/learning-to-live-in-my-very-own.html?sp=/99/447/> #storylink=cpy