



DIASPORA BIRDS

Luo Yang's *Asian Immigrant Series* is a profound exploration of the immigrant experiences within the Asian community, particularly focusing on those living in Europe.

Over the past two years, Luo Yang has lived and traveled extensively across Europe, experiencing firsthand the struggles between Eastern and Western cultures, and the quest for self-value and identity within Western social systems.

During her travels, Luo Yang encountered many Asian diaspora from various countries whose stories deeply moved her. These narratives reveal the conflicts they face between cultures, issues of racial discrimination, struggles with self-identity, difficulties integrating into Western society, and the sense of being unable to return to their homelands. These immigrants come from China, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, Cambodia, and other nations, and they include first and second-generation immigrants, LGBT individuals, orphans adopted into Europe, political refugees, and recent students who have decided to stay.

Each generation and each country's migration history and family fate are deeply intertwined with the social and historical context of their new countries. Through the process of this project, Luo Yang has also found deep solace and inspiration, hoping to showcase these rich and compelling stories of the Asian immigrant community to the world.

Her work not only documents the external lives of these immigrants but also delves into their internal spiritual experiences. Through her lens, Luo Yang aims to capture their emotional fluctuations and inner struggles in foreign lands, allowing viewers to experience their complex emotions and resilient spirit as they navigate the intersection of cultures.

In today's globalised context, displacement and immigration are common phenomena. Luo Yang's project seeks to shed light on these groups' lives and emotional experiences, fostering greater understanding and empathy among audiences. She hopes these works will prompt viewers to reflect on cultural integration and the importance of respect and inclusivity towards different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, she aims to provide strength and hope to those going through similar challenges, affirming that their stories are worth being heard and seen.

Through the *Asian Immigrant Series*, Luo Yang aspires to not only give voice to the Asian diaspora community but also to encourage dialogue and understanding between different cultures, highlighting diversity and the shared emotional bonds of humanity.

Text by Stephan Klee



LUCIE ZHANG

Actress, second-generation Chinese immigrant living in Paris

I was born and raised in Paris. My parents come from China and they met in a cute Chinese restaurant in la rue de Choisy, which has now become a McDonald's. My mom comes from Henan, my dad from Yunnan. They have a 15-year age gap and didn't arrive in Paris at the same time. Everything is "fate", as they would say. I was an accident, as they almost decided to abort me, but they eventually chose to keep me. They would say our family is created thanks to that accident! I also have a little sister, who's a movie director, and a little brother.

I was sent back to my maternal grandparents' place in Zhengzhou in my early childhood, around 2-3 years old, and spent a very magical and unforgettable time there. Those memories with my grandma and my grandpa, are blurry yet extremely profound. It's deep-rooted in me, in my subconscious. They made me listen to Chinese, eat Chinese, laugh, cry and shout in Chinese — it was as easy as breathing. Chinese is my mother tongue, so whenever I wanna express something in the most familiar, immediate, and intimate way, it has to be in Chinese! But since I came back to Paris and received my entire education there, I'm more used to communicate rational ideas in a very formal and polite, friendly way when I speak French.

If I think about it, in fact, my sense of responsibility for school life, social life and professional life, all the "outside of the house" life were inculcated in me by France. I've never studied nor worked in China since I was 3, so the only time I spent there was mostly fun times, vacations, to play and chill. So obviously, my impression of this country is full of playfulness and comfort. The last time I was in China was in 2019. Not playful and not comfortable. I was there with my mom to say one last goodbye to my beloved grandpa. He's my favourite person in the whole world, the person who made me feel loved and cherished in the most adorable way possible. In my childhood, I've never lacked love, my mom always listened very patiently to every small details about my life and my little wonderful universe I would share with her. She's the most powerful woman in the whole world. She taught me what freedom is. Freedom of feeling, expressing, and giving love.

In 2020, I had my first acting experience in a French feature, "Les Olympiades" by Jacques Audiard. I've always dreamed of becoming an actress. In 2020, my dream came true, and will continue to become true everyday.

In the movie, my character speaks French and Chinese, both languages are part of my identity, so it was something I could easily relate to. One day, during rehearsals, my director told me he found me much more easily and naturally authoritative when I play in Chinese. Then I understood: we can have a different personality or even become a different person when we speak another language. English for me, so far, represents the perfect distance with both my heart and my mind. That's to say, some words I've spoken or wrote in English, I would have never said them in my Chinese or my French, I would feel too embarrassed! But whenever I get into a fast rhythm, whenever there is any sort of urgency: impossible to speak English.

My identity is like an incomplete part of Chinese culture mixed with a very incomplete part of French culture. When I'm surrounded by my Chinese friends, they tend to find me "not enough" Chinese. Same for French friends. I'm "not enough" French. I've thus been always fascinated by people who naturally express a very strong color or tone of their own culture. It's radical, extreme and straightforward.

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LUCIE ZHANG



LUCIE ZHANG





Thérèse

Musician, second-generation Chinese and Lao immigrant,
living in Paris

I go by Thérèse, Claudia, Maniseng, Lin Fu Xian (林馥賢) and my family calls me Bao Bao (宝宝).

I am half Chinese, a quarter Lao, and a quarter Vietnamese, born in France, in Ivry-sur-Seine, near Paris. I grew up in places where I learned that some people celebrate Christmas not just for the presents, some don't eat pork, and others don't even believe in God. But it didn't really matter because we were all friends.

My parents worked in the Paris suburbs, selling hair relaxer kits, okra, attieke, as well as jasmine rice, nuoc mam, and oyster sauce. It's impossible to run out of Lao Gan Ma sauce, cheese, cumin or peanut butter at home. I've moved more than 10 times in my life, both in France and abroad (Barcelona, Beijing, Munich). I also speak or understand around seven languages. I don't even know how I learned Spanish and Italian.

I worked for a big luxury brand before burning out and quitting about nine years ago to help refugees. Then I became a fashion editor, and after that, I transitioned into an artist (singer/songwriter), fashion stylist, model, and speaker—all at once. I love Rosalia, Lexie Liu, Kendrick Lamar, Rihanna and Saint Levant. Animals and fast fashion. Noise and silence. Yin and yang energy.

Who the hell am I? Is it written on my ID, on my face, on my skin, in my songs and outfits? Why do some pricks call me “Ching Chong” in the streets? Why does my own community consider me a “banana”? Why should I have to choose between men and women? Is my passport enough to tell the world where I'm supposed to go or not? As someone transplanted, am I one or two people? When will I be allowed to be multiple? To be me. Free.

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Thérèse



Paris, to me, if I had to choose the most accurate word to name the Paris in my heart among all the words, it would certainly be "richness." Richness is the best word I can think of. Here, the different shades of light in human nature converge and are allowed to flourish. I've witnessed diversity here, which has made me open up again. Having lived in Paris for just over nine years, I've grown an increasing sense of belonging. "But what exactly is this sense of belonging? Is it merely geographical? If you leave your homeland and step outside your borders, it could be pan-Oriental; standing by the skyscraper-lined Huangpu River, it could come from the mountains and fields; when you are in the North, it's in the South; when you think this way, it seems always to be in the opposite direction. Yet it's also clearly within reach, in the spices, in the humid air, in the familiar and unfamiliar languages and accents, in the music and dance, in the ancient rituals and costumes of different peoples, in the totems and reinterpreted texts, in the boundless steppes, deserts, and oceans, in cutting-edge technology and traditional craftsmanship, in the smiles and embraces, and under the rising sun and moonlight, wherever they may be. When you think this way, it seems to be everywhere."

There must be a thread that connects Guizhou to Paris.

As a creator and fashion designer, my coming and going are written in my blood. I am always looking for myself in my creation. The Miao culture is a significant character in my creation, yet I often feel like a stranger to it. We move at a rapid pace but we also live in a rapidly developing digital age. This convenience gave nomads like us the ability to drift, depart, and leave home with a lighter emotional baggage. If the soil has borders, let it become the Earth. We are all footless birds. We can all be nomads in our own spirits, in our own lands, in other people's lands. I am lucky to grow in love. Be daring and be deep in love. Our roots will always be there to return to. Be daring to see the world. It doesn't matter where. Let's escape. Let's go home.







Mei Mei

Model, living in Paris. Mother is Chinese, father is Canadian

I feel like I have kept quite a lot of values from my childhood, concerning family and ways to behave.

My Asian friends sometimes are surprised and say I'm quite "old school" after all hahaha. I grew up with a little younger sister and older cousins. Unlike western families, there are many rules hahaha. So I always tried to look after the young ones and respect elders.

My mom and I fight all the time but there is a lot of love hahah!

It feels like I do everything wrong but I know she is actually proud of me. We have always been very very close and she's been like my best friend since I can remember. I think I am like her a lot, both very creative and talkative. Maybe too honest sometimes and very dreamy. She passed on to me her musical side and her passion for clothes and fashion.

She was taking care of us when my dad was working, so both my sister and I speak fluent mandarin.

My experience was quite tough in the beginning. There were a lot of ups and down.

I started modelling in 2010. I was scout for my unique face. However at that time, Asian models weren't popular at all in Europe. I was sometimes told they "weren't looking for Asian face". Eventually, clients started taking interest in Asian markets. Then, the problem was I was not Asian enough. I like to think of myself as stubborn and persistent haha!

The only thing that might have changed with time is that I now have a very strong sense of belonging in France. I feel very French now. However, my Chinese roots are very much still present.

Growing up, my Chinese side of the family was very present. Even though my sister and I stood out from the family pictures, we never felt the cultural gap with our Chinese family. My mom had big influence on us at home always. She doesn't give up easily. And I usually try my best to surpass obstacles. In another perspective, growing up multicultural, I was able to learn many languages, so I was able to achieve a small career for myself in Asia. I worked a lot in China and Korea, as well in Tokyo. In China, I believe they liked my appearance but also really liked the fact I could also speak Chinese.

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Theppie

Musician. Second generation Thai-Chinese immigrant living in Paris.

Born in Strasbourg, France—a small town nestled on the border of Germany—my journey is deeply rooted in a mix of cultures, experiences, and a lifelong passion for music. My parents, both of Thai-Chinese descent, arrived in France at just 16 years old. My mom came for her studies, while my dad fled from the communist war in Laos, his love for American culture and music placing him at odds with the regime. In a bold escape, he swam across the Mekong River to Thailand, dodging gunfire in the dead of night. He never looked back. His arrival in France marked the beginning of a new life, one filled with freedom, music, and a deep love for the culture that he passed on to me.

My childhood was filled with the sounds of my dad's favorite rock bands—Lobo, The Police, Rod Stewart—and my siblings' R&B and hip-hop, all while the world of electronic music was calling my name. I'll never forget how, at 16, I begged my mom for two turntables and a mixer. For an entire month leading up to my birthday, I mimicked the spinning motions every day until she finally gave in. From that moment on, I was hooked. I produced mixtapes for my classmates in Thailand, diving deep into electronic beats, first hearing the likes of Eric Prydz and Benny Benassi, and later being introduced to EDM, dubstep, techno, house and drum and bass by my friends. Techno, Jazz, and House became a staple in my playlists, and music became the passion that fueled me through life.

Yet, I never lost sight of my studies, completing six years of education across Thailand, Hong Kong, the USA, Canada and France. Education was important to my parents, and I honored their sacrifices. But music was always in my heart. It was my escape, my way of connecting with the world. From Thailand to New York to Paris, I danced, partied, and met incredible people, while working as a consultant by day and immersing myself in the Parisian nightlife by night.

But in that darkness, I found light. I learned that, as humans, we are all connected, and the love we have for each other is what carries us through. My relationship with my father deepened during this time. We became best friends, often chatting after my gigs—sometimes at 4 or even 5 a.m.—talking about life, love, and the funnier sides of life. He was my biggest supporter, and I realized how similar we were, even down to the tattoos that marked our skin.

My tattoos, a blend of my Thai-Chinese heritage, my values, and the blessings of my ancestors, are a reflection of who I am. My father, a tattooed rebel in his youth, once offered to introduce me to his artist, but I declined, knowing that my ink tells my own story—unique and unfinished.

Growing up, I feared the passage of time, the unknown of death, and the infinity of the universe. But life has taught me to embrace it. We are all temporary, and the most important thing is to live fully, to act with kindness, and to leave behind memories that matter. I'm ready to face the challenges and make the sacrifices they didn't dare to.

If you don't doubt, you don't grow. And I've learned that the time is now—because nothing is new, and everything is beautifully, terribly human. To those who have shaped me—my family, my friends, my lovers—thank you. I am a product of the people I've met and the experiences I've lived through. You've taught me, guided me, and made me who I am today.

And to my grandma, who now watches over me from heaven, I remember your words: “Be kind and loved by people.” Now, I understand.

Through it all, I've come to realize that the journey never really ends—it just evolves. Life is now, and I'm living every moment with purpose. I choose love. What do you choose?

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Cat Yen

Graphic designer, model, Taiwanese living in Berlin.

People say my life could be made into a movie, even split into two parts.

I was in Taiwan until I was 17, then moved to Australia for school. I didn't study seriously, but at 18, I got married to an Australian.

We lived in Taiwan for four years and then moved back to Australia for three years.

But by the infamous "seven-year itch," I fell in love with a girl from Estonia. I divorced my ex-husband for her, and she moved to Australia for me.

This was my first time being with a woman, and I felt the intensity of that love was overwhelming.

Despite the immense fear of divorce and the uncertain future, when it came to choosing between love and stability, I chose love.

When I divorced, all I asked for from my ex-husband was the car I was driving at the time. No alimony, because I felt it was my fault.

When my girlfriend moved to Australia, it was summer. I moved out of my ex-husband's house and packed all my belongings into the car, filling it to the brim, like a refugee.

We stayed in a trailer in a friend's backyard, which was part of a shared house. The trailer only fit a mattress, and to shower, I had to walk to the house with my toiletries. There were four people living there, so I had to wait if someone was using the bathroom.

One day, while lying in the trailer with my girlfriend, I was so hot I thought I might combust. Looking around at our surroundings, and remembering the beautiful apartment I used to live in, I started to doubt whether I'd made the right decision.

My girlfriend said, "As long as we're together, everything is perfect."

I just thought, "I'm about to die from the heat; what's perfect about this?"

I left my ex-girlfriend when I was 31 and moved to Berlin, looking for a fresh start. I sold all my things in Australia, sent half back to Taiwan, and left behind a ton of design books. To this day, I'm afraid to buy books again.

I don't even know where I found the courage at the time to move to a non-English-speaking country, a city where I didn't know a single person.

I've always believed that things will work out as they should.

But being that naive and overly trusting also meant I faced a lot of situations where I was taken advantage of at first.

Berlin is a place that forces you to grow quickly. There's always something to do here, so finding a balance in life is crucial.

After moving to Berlin, I realized that 80% of the people here are in open relationships, and the other 20% are probably bi-curious. I've been here for almost 10 years, and most of that time, I've been single.

I've been married and divorced, so now I understand that loving yourself is what truly matters.

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Cat Yen



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Cat Yen





Mey Provost and Thalia Provost

Dancer, model, performance artist based in Paris
Cambodians twin sisters adopted by a French family

We are Thalia and Mey Provost, twin sisters of Khmer origin, adopted and raised in France. From birth, we have shared an unbreakable bond. This close relationship naturally extended into our artistic journey, particularly in dance. On stage, we are in perfect harmony: we share the same energy, the same breath, as if our bodies speak a secret language that only we understand. We complement each other at every moment, sometimes without even exchanging a glance.

However, in everyday life, this closeness can sometimes be a challenge. Being twins means constantly living with the other as a mirror, which often leads to comparisons, expectations, and even tensions. While dance allows us to express ourselves together and harmonize our differences, outside of the stage, it isn't always easy to find our own individuality. Yet despite these moments of friction, our bond remains deep and unbreakable.

Our adoptive parents played a fundamental role in our growth. Their open-mindedness and constant support allowed us to grow up in an environment where diversity was celebrated, and where our Khmer roots were never forgotten. They always encouraged us to follow our dreams without imposing limits. Their unconditional love and respect for our origins nurtured in us a desire to reconnect with our Cambodian culture.

Our connection to Cambodia, although sometimes physically distant, has always been present in our hearts. As we grew older, we felt a deep need to better understand where we came from and to reconnect with our heritage. Dance became our way of honoring this culture and drawing inspiration from it. Through our art, we seek to build bridges between Cambodia and the rest of the world, to showcase its artistic and cultural richness while adding our personal touch.

Our project to contribute to the cultural development of Cambodia stems from this search for meaning and roots. We were fortunate to receive a quality education and grow up in an environment that valued self-expression. Today, we want to use this privilege to give back to our country of origin by sharing our skills and passion for dance.

For us, this return to our roots is self-evident, a way to reconcile these two parts of our identity. We want to create lasting connections between Cambodia and the international community, and to make our unique experience as adopted twins a symbol of resilience, unity, and openness to the world.

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Mey Provost and Thalia Provost



Mey Provost and Thalia Provost





Justine, Bálint and Céline

Vietnamese immigrant family living in Paris

Justine Daughter, Curator

A bit of my experience as an Asian woman in France. I am a third-generation immigrant of Vietnamese descent and was born and raised in Paris, France.

Growing up, like many kids with immigrant backgrounds, I was teased, called names, and sometimes even assaulted because of the way I looked. I have a very French name and a very French-looking father, so when he went to enroll me in school when I was three, the director felt comfortable telling him we were “lucky because there weren’t too many Asian people in this school” (we were living in the 3rd arrondissement, where many people of Chinese descent live). I don’t know why this memory stuck with me—probably because we laugh about it now—but it’s such a clear reflection of where things stood and still stand. Anti-Asian racism, even though it’s talked about more now, is completely trivialized and even more so during the 2000s and 2010s—throughout my childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood.

As a kid, I didn’t know how to respond, because I didn’t understand the hate. I felt isolated and didn’t talk to my parents about it. My father, a white man, though well-meaning, could never fully grasp what I was feeling. My Vietnamese mother, who had arrived in France as a child, had faced much tougher challenges, wouldn’t be able to relate to my “first world problems”.

Throughout my teenage years, I was never the girl guys wanted to date. I spent so much time thinking how my life would be better if I looked more like my dad. I have pages and pages of diaries where I wrote about how painful it was not being the blonde, white girl everyone seemed to find beautiful—the kind of beauty that dominated the media we were consuming at the time.

To fit in, I began making jokes about myself before others could. I’d stress that I was mixed, “only half-Asian,” as if that made me more relatable. I distanced myself from my heritage, pretending not to know our cultural traditions, until I actually didn’t anymore —because I didn’t want to engage with them. I focused on blending in, bragging about my dark brown hair (not black!) and my double eyelids (no monolids here!). I think when I started to receive attention, I dove right into it.

I totally accepted the fetishization — the “I love Asians”, “I’ve never been with an Asian before” comments, or the sexual stereotypes rooted in anti-Asian racism. I think part of me was seeking validation from the wrong people, trying to heal the childhood wound of not being the one chosen, picked or loved by the boys.

I didn’t think of myself as pretty until I lived in Asia and realized how much racism and asiaphobia I had unknowingly absorbed over the years.

Living in Asia gave me a glimpse of a world where the daily comments I had endured didn’t exist. It was a chance to focus on other parts of my life, especially in my early twenties. Being there connected me with a culture that felt both new and familiar, and it made me want to embrace my heritage again.

My experience as an Asian person in France is indivisible from my experience as a girl and then as a woman. I see things through an intersectional lens — the struggles I faced and still face aren’t just about one or the other; they’re tied up in a bigger mess of patriarchy and racism. I can’t really reflect about one of these issues without also considering the other — they are intertwined. Both are crucial to understand if we want to change how racism against Asian people is perpetuated, especially in France today.

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Justine, Bálint and Céline





Justine, Bálint and Céline

Céline Mother. Child psychologist

I was born during the Vietnam war. We fled Viet Nam with my mother and my little brother in 1975 for France. My father had to leave before us and finally got to a refugee camp in Guam. My mother told me that we could not bring anything except some pictures with us. I remember being taken out from school one day, having my mother teaching me at home some French words and one address in France that I have to learn by heart in case we got separated. I remember having to repeat all those words and that sentence with the address every night before sleeping, like if it could stay in my sleep, then it would stay in my mind when I woke up the next morning.

My grandmothers and my aunts were saying that we were going to vacations in France but everybody was crying when they were talking about that. Then, the airport in Sai Gon, in April; lots of noise and people, lots of cries and tears, lots of long lines waiting, pushing, walking fast. We had to speak French, we had to stick together; if something happened, I have to keep running to the plane with my brother.

The dining table where we are sitting at now is my mother's first extravagant and brand-new piece of furniture purchase in 1978. Before that, all we had were given to us or bought in some second-hand stores, or from some garage sales. This table and its four chairs came from a design store. My mother was very proud of being able to have a nice aesthetic piece where we can all gather around and that could belong to our daily routine. It has been since part of lots of family meals, Wednesday and Sunday homework hours, lots of ancestor celebration for Tết (the Vietnamese new year), lots of party buffets with friends, lots of long nights writing my PhD-thesis. Then, it has been one time transformed into my daughter's desk for her study group to prepare her exams, and another time into my son's computer table for all his zoom interviews to Art Schools during the Covid time. Actually, it has been a kind of transitional space from our 46 years of mixed and cross-cultured family life.



Justine, Bálint and Céline

Bálint Son. Musician, artist

«My name is Bálint, I'm twenty-three and I live in Paris. because fouoy who got me trad baded. It might be

- making me repeat my name for the third time - taking me for a tourist
 - assuming I was shy and obedient
 - doing your dubious Bruce Le imitations
 - essentializing and fetishizing me
 - caling me Ching, Chang or Chong
 - thinking i'd end up in tech, pharmacy or in a tobacco shop
 - questioning my legitimacy as aFrenchman, as a Parisian
- when I know Paris better than the stray rats.

Justine, Bálint and Céline





Luo Juning

Chinese living in Paris. Photographer /Restaurant manager
Husband: Akira TAKAHASHI 高桥晓 Son: Sola TAKAHASHI 高桥空(son)

Many were surprised that someone like me—bold enough to shave my head when I was young—would choose marriage. But rebellion was never to fit anyone’s image of me.

My husband, of Japanese and Turkish descent, brought no cultural gap I couldn’t bridge with my quirks alone, I was already a puzzle, not the easiest person to be with. My parents divorced as I began university, though my father’s affair had been long hidden. For my exams (GaoKao), they held back, but there were fights, table-flipping, and broken dishes. Though I was already an adult, it left a scar; even now, I can’t bear a man’s raised voice. I burst into rage, then tears steam down my face. Nor can I stand being left alone, which feels like being abandoned. So after graduation, I escaped to France. Five years later, I returned to work at an American company in China, creating video content. But the intense, competitive atmosphere and disrespectful clients exhausted me. I escaped again to France, choosing pastry school as a new beginning, where I met my husband.

Akira is deeply devoted to family, infinitely patient, rarely temperamental. When I am busy at the restaurant, he takes care of the child all the time. He is both my subconscious choice and an inexplicable destiny. To me, marriage has value only in sparing administrative hassles; it offers nothing essential to love. The positives and negatives in love exist between two people and over time, not marriage. So when two people are together for too long, boiling water cools down and I’m someone who never drinks lukewarm water—or tolerates love that fades into routine. I still desire for passion. Seven years of marriage and a child later, I find myself asking, “Do I still love? Do I still feel anything?” Stephen Covey’s answer enlightened me: “To love. Love is a verb, not a state. If you don’t FEEL love, then TO LOVE. Love is the fruit of actions.” I began to think that maybe reigniting passion doesn’t require a new person, all it takes is to love—At this point, I realised I AM my father! And this might have been his struggle. Thankfully, I did not become him.

From 22 to 40, I’ve spent my youth in Paris. To me, Paris is the home I rush back to, and all elsewhere is a vacation. In 2020, my son was born in Paris, named Sola, as music. It comes from Sora in Japanese meaning sky and “Kong” (空) in Chinese meaning “emptiness, which carries a sense of Zen. At forty, every insight I have gathered in life rests in that word. Many times I have experienced what philosophy describes as an existential crisis. This sense of meaninglessness isn’t just about love; sometimes, the entire world feels hollow. Yet, precisely because life is empty of inherent meaning, we are gifted with infinite freedom—since everything is meaningless, then there is no “must”, only choices we make ourselves. To build connections, to invest time, to cherish a seemingly ordinary rose like Le Petit Prince—then, it becomes “your” rose. Through these, meaning is born between you and the world. Then we clear the slate and watch the tides rise and fall, unfazed by their movement.

So here is my answer at forty: for my partner, after the struggles of divorce, I choose TO love; for my son, I choose to maintain an arm’s length distance—not interfering but close enough that if he reaches out, I am always there.

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Luo Juning



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Luo Juning





Quyny

Photographer
Second-generation Vietnamese immigrant living in Berlin

My name is Lê Quyên Nguyễn, but no one calls me Lê Quyên. When I was a kid, I came up with the nickname Quyny, because it was hard for others to pronounce my name. I thought I'd make it easier for everyone. Over time, I began to identify with that name more than my real one.

As a second-generation immigrant, you create a third space where you exist—somewhere between the culture of your heritage and the one you were raised in. Whenever people ask me where I'm from, I tell them: "I'm Vietnamese, but I was born and raised in Germany." It's my way of acknowledging the duality of my identity, embracing both sides that have shaped me.

I moved to Hanoi for half a year last year because I was curious to explore this other side of my culture—something that felt so familiar, yet so distant. It was strange, though, because my parents weren't very supportive of my decision, which I understood. They left everything behind for me to grow up in Germany, and now I wanted to go back?

But my time in Vietnam turned out to be both one of the most beautiful and most painful periods of my life. There were family dramas, especially around money, which I came to understand is a huge issue in a developing country. It gave me a new perspective. I realized I was coming from a place of privilege—it felt strange and unfair that I could do things that the majority of locals couldn't, simply because I was born and raised elsewhere.

I had never been asked "Where are you from?" as much as I was in Vietnam. I thought, *Aren't I from here?* People were curious, fascinated by someone who looked like them but came from abroad.

You'll always exist in two places, and your heart feels beautifully broken because it's always a little homesick. Looking at my German passport sometimes makes me cry because I know the hardships my parents and all the other first-generation immigrants had to go through.

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Quyny





Julie Pang Stanojevic

Artist, Jewellery designer
Mauritian Chinese immigrant living in Shanghai

I loved all the cultures of life, so why confine myself to one corner of it? Her words sparked a storm of emotions—fear, anxiety, and a quiet rebellion. I was so young and I didn't want to disappoint her, but the thought of following rules and traditions at such a young age made me feel trapped. The island that had once felt so expansive now seemed small, hemmed in by expectations I wasn't ready to fulfil. Instead of staying and conforming, I wanted to break free. I craved adventure, newness, the chance to unlearn the patterns that had been set for me. The thought of a future already scripted— a life bound to one culture—felt too limiting.

I left, embarking on a journey to explore the world and, in many ways, to better understand myself. Ironically, I moved to China, thinking that reconnecting with the land of my ancestors might help me find a deeper sense of identity. But instead of the belonging I was looking for, I found myself feeling even more out of place. This was supposed to be my heritage, my roots—yet I never truly felt at home.

I tried to integrate, learning Mandarin, that had been lost to my family over generations, doing my best to fit into a culture that felt distant. But the more I tried, the more I realized that my identity wasn't confined to one place or one narrative. When I finally took a step back, I understood that I am not just Chinese. I am Sino-Mauritian, a blend of all the influences that have shaped me—my Chinese heritage on the island of Mauritius, the fusion cuisine of my island, my experiences, my multi-racial friendships, the diverse culture of the island I grew up on.

There's no need for me to conform to anyone's expectations, and no need to justify who I am. I don't belong to one label, one country. I belong to all the parts of me, and that is something I have come to embrace. I am not simply Chinese—I am Sino-Mauritian, and that is where my true identity lies.

I married a non-Chinese man and together, we had two beautiful girls.

Now, as a mother, I see the world differently. I look at my daughters and know myself better. I found my sense of belonging. And in that reflection, I find a new understanding of my grandmother. Her desire for me to marry within our culture wasn't about limiting me; it was her way of preserving something precious—our roots, our history, but mostly our sense of belonging.

Though I took a different path, I now hold deep compassion for her. She wanted me to remain connected to the lineage that shaped us, just as I want my children to feel connected to all parts of who they are. And in that understanding, I see the quiet wisdom in her wishes, even as I forge my own way.

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Julie Pang Stanojevic





Mao Jinxuan

Actor, performance artist
Chinese living in Paris

I moved to France in 2012. My relationship with my origins has been evolving a lot. There was a period of time where I was trying so hard to “fit into” the French society that I kind of neglected my Chinese roots. I’m not even sure if it was conscious or not, but I think somehow, I believed that I couldn’t really embrace my life in France while being “attached” tightly to my origins. This way of thinking is very directly related to the immigration politics in France which can be summed up in one word: assimilation. Eventually, I started to understand how problematic it was by making immigrant people think that they have to erase or abandon all aspects of their culture, heritage and roots in order to fit in. Nowadays, I grew to be more and more proud of my origins, and one of the most significant things through which I’ve been reconnecting with my roots is food.

We’re very lucky in Paris now, because we have wonderful restaurants for amazingly various Chinese food. Also, I’ve been enjoying cooking a lot, and only Chinese food obviously, haha! I’ve been trying to recreate lots of flavors that I loved from my childhood. Recently, I followed some tutorials online to make my own Chinese chili sauce, or as we call it in my home region: 熟油辣子。And when I tasted the final result, it was a true Proust’s Madeleine moment: I had in my mouth all the flavors that infused my entire childhood, and I was so happy to find them again in my home in Paris, and also proud of making the sauce, even though it was not that complicated haha! I love cooking Chinese food for my friends. Funny thing is, as a child, I used to dislike lots of things: tofu, eggs, tomatoes, noodles in general... Now they are the main characters in my kitchen. Whenever I make for my friends the noodles like my mother used to make for me, I’m the happiest person on earth.

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Mao Jinxuan



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Mao Jinxuan





Cat Jimenez

Performance artist, dancer
Second-generation Filipino immigrant living in Vienna

There's a certain vulnerability in showing yourself, just rawness—no filters, no masks. Nakedness, not just of the body but of everything beneath and around it. A truth that surfaces when past and present meet, like the photos Luo Yang captured of me.

My story begins with a leaving. My mother was pregnant, and my father was gone. When I was only two, she left the Philippines, and I stayed behind, passed between family homes until, for a while, I forgot about her. My grandmother became my main “mother” in my mind. She was the one I thought of that way—until the day we left together for Austria when I was four.

Meeting my “real” mother for the first time, alongside my new Austrian father, felt strange. It was like being handed a new life I hadn't asked for, in a place where I was welcomed but still a little bit of an outsider.

As a 5-year-old child, new to Austria, homesickness gnawed at me, especially in winter. One day, my stepfather took me to an Austrian friend's café. She made chicken schnitzel with rice. My heart filled with warm glitter at the sight of rice—it felt like home again. I took a bite. It was parboiled rice. And I had to cry. It wasn't home, and everyone in the room was confused. My mom still tells this story, always laughing at how rice could break my heart.

Then came the market days, where my mother sold goods from the Philippines—wooden crafts made by my family back home. I watched her navigate those spaces, negotiating with neighbours, facing stares and unspoken prejudice. Sometimes she handled it with a smiling lightness, other times with fierce Filipino pride. She was my hero.

It was chaotic, this blend of Austrian and Filipino, but I realised it wasn't about fitting in or standing out, or any kind of duality. It was about finding comfort in the chaos, where every facet, every experience belongs as part of the whole—where life is a little messy, just like the market.

She left to give us a future where life could open up a little, and now, wherever I am, I carry that sense of home with me. She is my hero.

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KAT

Artist, Architecture Student
Chinese German mix blood living in Vienna

My father passed away in 2012; Shelly was 41 and I was 8. Everything parents do for their young is likely going to be taken for granted—how could children know better, when they’ve never experienced being any better?

The subtlety of death begun solidifying, and (perhaps) as an unhealthy trauma response, Shelly and I started to harvest a particular anger for each other.

The root of our emotional rupture was her metamorphosis; she had scraped her timid yet benevolent ways to become a sharp character, one capable of building a prosperous life for the both of us. She had done so alone, without putting much effort into healing herself, or healing me. Either way, I was too young to understand.

In 2017, at 13, I was sent to boarding school. I went to two boarding schools, in Switzerland, then Germany, for a total of five years. Two of those years were met with COVID-19 lockdown and long periods of postponing. School was closed but I couldn’t go home. Flights to China were severed, and even if they weren’t, I had no valid visa.

Autumn 2000: my parents came to Vienna. They were living in Shanghai and came for vacation. It seems unnatural to use the word “they” when referring to my parents, as it is difficult not to see them as entities with segregated paths... culturally and generationally.

My father was German, and my mother is Chinese. My mother, Shelly (or “Yan”, though she definitely identifies with “Shelly”), gave me a briefing of their trip which summarizes like: staying at a hotel next to the cathedral, visiting a building with weird windows (the hotel by Hundertwasser), taking the tram to the opera, having schnitzel in a gasthaus, bathing the sun, going to bars, and taking photos.

Twenty three years later, I came to study at the Vienna Academy of Arts, next to the opera.

Before her Europe trip, Shelly had bought that red top that I wore in the photograph. It’s vibrant and cool... she wanted a selection of clothes that could make up for her shyness—for her first time exiting China, and into an overly saturated version of Europe.

My parents’ relationship is another story. To me, their love had abruptly become a relic; one that would continue to redefine my relationship with Shelly for many years to come.



KAT

My German family took me in. It wasn't easy for them, but they did their best. During 15-17, my life became a series of experiencing new "norms": there is a different "norm" for every household, every family and every friend group who had ever offered me a place to stay (literally and figuratively).

Language was almost impossible, I mean, German is so hard! I never bothered beforehand, but suddenly I had to. Either way, I left high school with an extremely average grade, functionally sufficient German, leftover teenage angst and a blurry vision for what's to come.

Then, at 18, I moved to Berlin alone as a juvenile attempting to arrogate an unfamiliar milieu. After Berlin, I moved to Vienna. School, job, university, friends, new families, new networks, paths and discoveries, daily. Art. Architecture. Music. Anything.

Somewhere along the way, I decided that Shelly no longer needed to be informed, because she could no longer understand. I did not return home to Shanghai for almost four years (since the pandemic), and did not see Shelly for exactly three years.

During that time, I grew apart from her in a very particular way. It was as if she only existed as an idea, like as the version of her on that Vienna trip for example; since her actual self had become foreign and impervious to me... her absence resembling that of my father's. I could not talk to her, so I began to inspect my surroundings and belongings over and over again, seeking for patterns within my behaviour that suggests our genetical alignment.

I can not, or do not, want to reach out to her. So instead I tried to be her.

Shelly always talked about writing a memoir. I encourage it, because her life as a self-made Chinese business woman who had witnessed the booming of Shanghai in the 90s is beyond insightful, and interesting.

I, too, am waiting to share my journey, maybe even in words and texts. Truthfully, many people are waiting— waiting to be interviewed, waiting for someone to ask them their story, waiting to be cared for by strangers.

What makes Shelly and I stand out? Nothing. Everything. Something. But it doesn't matter because it is my story, and I am eager to be a vessel; a vessel that could carry two identities, two heritages, two minds and two hearts... or plenty more

8 February, 2024: I finally returned to Shanghai. No longer 15, but still my mother's daughter.

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KAT





Kat's mother in Vienna in early 2000

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ELI

Actress
Second-generation Vietnamese immigrant living in Paris



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Aries Liu Performance artist, dancer, Chinese living in Berlin



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Aries Liu





Kai Chun Chuang

Performance artist, dancer, Taiwanese living in Berlin

Looking back, I left home at the age of 15, driven by the desire to do what I like to do. As I grew older, I moved to a place with a completely different culture and language. As a performer, we constantly combine other people's stories, finding places we can connect with to interpret our characters.

Drag, for me, is a transformative process, both physically and mentally—it's not something that can be defined by outward appearance alone. I've never forgotten the original purpose of being a drag queen: bringing people happiness, freedom, and mutual respect. Taking responsibility for our own self and lives is something everyone in society should embrace. I also hope that, through drag, I can influence and remind our generation that *respect* and *freedom* are things that are truly difficult to attain. We should all constantly remind ourselves.



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Yilang Jiang

Painter, Designer My mother is French and my father Chinese, in France I'm Chinese and in China I'm French. In my heart I hold them both.



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Lilou

Musician. Cambodian immigrant living in Paris. Adopted by a French family.



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Lukresia

Performance artist, dancer, Filipino living in Berlin



ioi Choi

26-year-old interdisciplinary artist born and raised in Macau, living in Paris. I moved to Paris to expand my artistic practice as it's a place with many creative opportunities and inspiration. Most of my family members have moved out of Macau to build a life in another country, so over time home became where my loved ones are. Macau will always have a special place in my heart and I'm proud to be raised in such a unique blend of the Occident and Orient. This place will continue to be the core of my essence.



Richard

First-generation Vietnamese immigrant, worked as a singer in the American Club in Saigon in the 1970s, with his own band. When the Vietnam War broke out in the 1970s, he moved to Paris and opened a unique Vietnamese restaurant, “Le Sourire de Saïgon”.



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KEVIN

Performance artist, drag queen. Filipino immigrant.
Came to Paris alone when he was 18 and has been living in Paris since



Wei Wei

Designer, Writer

I came to France in 1994 and studied for a master's degree at the Paris Higher School of Business Management.

Until today, I feel that I do not have a physical homeland. My father passed away this year, and my mother still lives in Xinjiang, China. If my mother passes away one day, then I will be an orphan on this earth. I do not plan to return to my hometown anymore. I was born to leave the place where I grew up. I don't have much identity. I think only my mother tongue and my stomach deserve the word "homeland".



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Wei Wei





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Migrant Bird Space is a Berlin & Beijing-based art foundation and gallery, providing a showcase for artists as well as art agency services in China & Europe. Working out of the gallery space at Koppenplatz in the heart of Berlin, the foundation offers a professional platform for cross-cultural communication between China and Europe with a focus on contemporary Chinese art. Promoting both established and emerging artists, Migrant Birds provides gallery spaces for exhibitions in Beijing and Berlin, an artist-in-residence program, regular talks and lectures, as well as support in liaising with Museums, universities, private institutions and more.

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