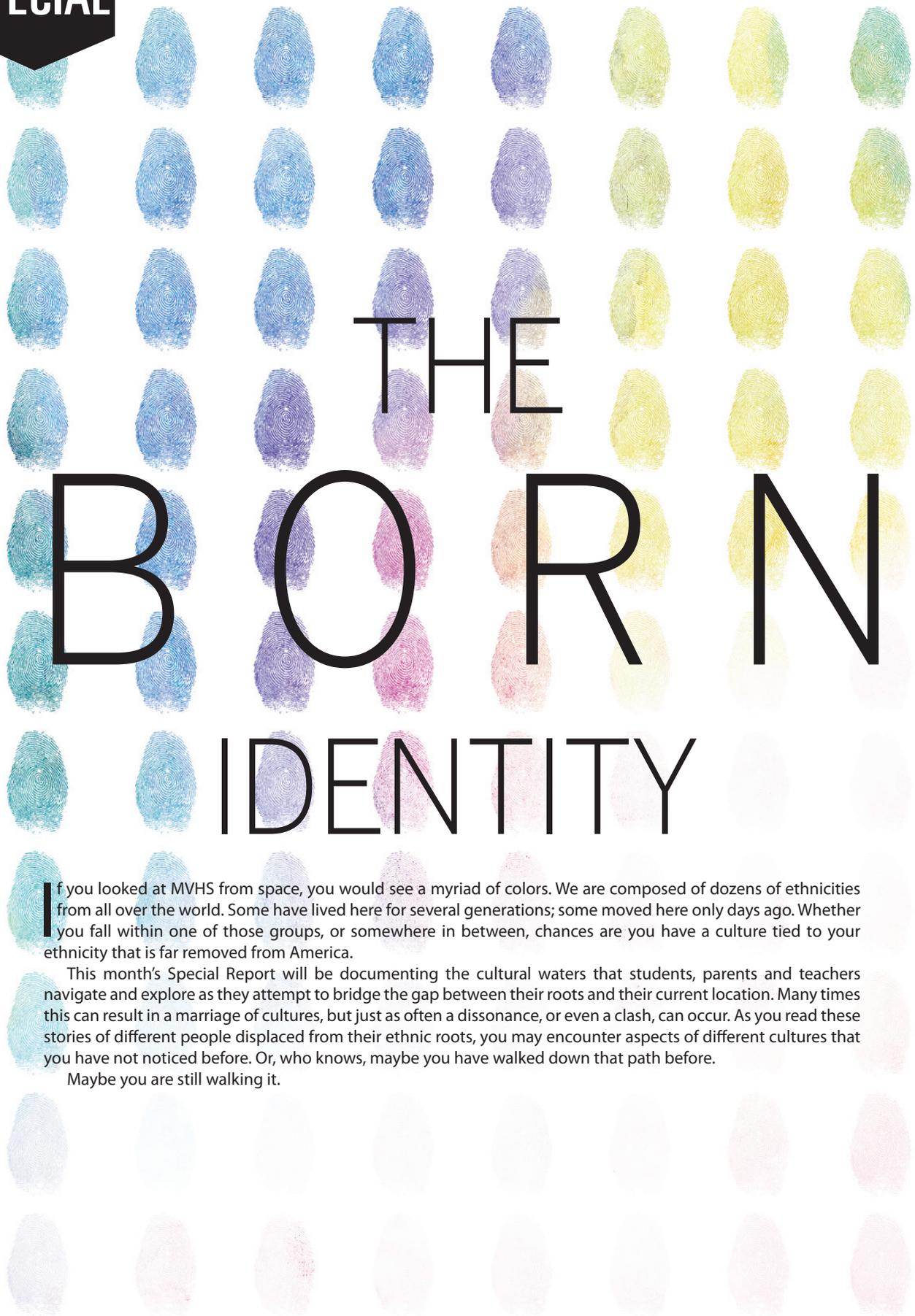


SPECIAL



# THE BORN IDENTITY

If you looked at MVHS from space, you would see a myriad of colors. We are composed of dozens of ethnicities from all over the world. Some have lived here for several generations; some moved here only days ago. Whether you fall within one of those groups, or somewhere in between, chances are you have a culture tied to your ethnicity that is far removed from America.

This month's Special Report will be documenting the cultural waters that students, parents and teachers navigate and explore as they attempt to bridge the gap between their roots and their current location. Many times this can result in a marriage of cultures, but just as often a dissonance, or even a clash, can occur. As you read these stories of different people displaced from their ethnic roots, you may encounter aspects of different cultures that you have not noticed before. Or, who knows, maybe you have walked down that path before.

Maybe you are still walking it.



**CHEESY** Had junior Qingxian Liu stayed close to her Chinese roots after moving to America, she never would have enjoyed eating American foods such as salad and cheese. Today, she enjoys eating those foods, even though her mother does not.

And there is one American characteristic Wu doesn't want to develop: their loudness.

### **Embracing the American identity**

Loud is what junior Mike Liu, a bilingual tutor for the English Language Development program, might have become. Now three years into his life in America, he remembers one time when he was visiting his home country of Taiwan and perhaps spoke a little too loudly to a friend.

"Everyone stared at me and looked me like I was a weirdo," he said.

Liu has completely embraced American culture. During his first year in America, Liu believed that he should keep as many Taiwanese traditions as possible. But he does not think that anymore.

"We need to change, to do the same thing as American people, so we basically need to change everything we have," Liu said.

Junior Qingxian Liu, another bilingual tutor who also moved to the United States three years ago, feels more American than Chinese now. One thing she has embraced is the American value of enjoying life and having fun. She sees American holidays as an example of that fun.

"In China, people don't celebrate Christmas, Halloween, but I do that in here, and I really enjoy it," she said.

The fun she has celebrating holidays is an example of Mike's reason why people decide to emphasize one culture over another.

"It's how much you enjoy this social group and how much you enjoy the United States," he said. "You feel like you're a part of the United States and you will like to change it."

Another quirky reason Qingxian believes she is now more American than Chinese is her love of American food.

"I eat salad and cheese, and in China they do not have cheese," she said "[At first] I was like, 'Ew, what's that?' It was weird."

Even though both Mike and Qingxian want to become more American, they believe that it is easy for others to continue following their native cultures if they choose to. They also agree that they should keep the most important Chinese customs, such as celebrating Chinese New Year and other traditions with history behind them. But the rest?

"The others, we totally just wipe it out," Mike said.

But it's not as easy as that. Not as easy as Wu and her family deciding to become Christians and join a church a year ago. Not as easy as Wong being able to watch anti-Chinese government videos on YouTube, which have changed her views regarding her home country. Not as easy as Mike dressing as American as possible.

Not as easy as Qingxian's mother simply telling her, "You're American now, you're not Chinese anymore."

# Two paths, one destination

Parents of different ethnicity, and how their children must balance the two

by Simran Devidasani and Cynthia Mao

**J**unior Douglas Sefton takes after his father in terms of height. “My dad’s 6-foot-3 and mom’s 5-foot-2. He’s a big fat white guy and she’s a small Chinese girl.”

Sefton’s parents also have dissimilar personalities. Sefton’s father is more jocular, lenient and messy; his mother is stricter and keeps things neat and tidy. She places emphasis on schoolwork, while he values hobbies like playing guitar and working on cars.

Adopted from Korea when she was barely a toddler, English teacher Mikki McMillion had a similar experience of clashing cultures as she grew up in Guam and Germany — two places where access to Korean culture was limited. Her adoptive parents, both white, bought her Korean books. However, McMillion was raised in a predominantly American environment with American values.

“I really grew up thinking I was white,” she said.

## Dealing with acceptance

McMillion was raised in places lacking easy access to her Korean heritage. Her childhood, subsequently, was fairly devoid of Korean culture, except for a few books and clothes. McMillion says that while she

possess “white” mannerisms and speaks English, her Asian appearance prevents any true welcome into either ethnic group.

“You throw me into a group of Koreans, and even though I look it, I don’t fit in,” she said. “You throw me in a group of Caucasians, and even though I speak the language [and] know the culture, I don’t fit in there either. I’m not really fully accepted on [either] side.”

Now that she lives and works in Cupertino, McMillion is exposed to what she calls a “mixed atmosphere,” in which both American and Asian traditions are prevalent.

In the end, physical similarity is an important factor in determining integration of cultures. “I don’t think [my kids] know it,” McMillion said, “but physically, they fit in and are not outcasted because we live in an Asian-dominated community.”

## The junction

Ultimately, Sefton values assimilation over preservation of cultural roots. This is partly because people at his age do not especially value heritage and homelands. But the main reason why Sefton downplays his Chinese heritage is because he lives in America. While his family celebrates Chinese New Year and his mother tries to get him to speak

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**ETHNIC LABEL** Because English teacher Nikki McMillion grew up in Guam and Germany despite her Korean heritage, she grew up feeling out of place among each ethnic group. Half-Caucasian, half-Asian junior Douglas Sefton is forced to merge his parents' cultures.

the language, Sefton feels strong connections to his American heritage. Although he says he has acquired his mother's predilection for neatness, Sefton considers himself more like his father and more American.

It is the opposite for McMillon, who believes that living in this area has reintroduced her to Korean culture.

"We have so much access to Asian and Korean culture," she said.

"Students bring me [Korean] food and books ... it's really cute."

McMillion's husband, who was raised in Santa Cruz, was not accustomed to different cultures. But after raising two half-American, half-Korean sons, they adopted Lauren, a six-month-old baby girl from Korea, in December 2004.

McMillion's sons, ages 14 and 11, view Lauren without any regard to her race. The boys themselves don't even seem to notice that they are half-Asian, according to McMillion.

"Sean was perplexed when someone in his class asked him whether he spoke Chinese," McMillion said. "[He and his brother] didn't even realize they were half-Asian for a long time."

In her teenage years, McMillion struggled to find some semblance of cultural identity. She felt she needed to attach herself to a race, but neither seemed to fit.

"You do grow up worrying about having some label or name," McMillion said.

Now, as an adult, she's content spanning two ethnicities. She fully supports Lauren's desire to hold onto her Korean heritage. "If [Lauren] wants to get into Korean dance ... I'll take her and we can both go learn."



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# The road not taken

Seniors Julie Qi, Julia Wang must choose whether to pursue art in college

story and photos by Rachel Lu



Vincent van Gogh, the Dutch post-Impressionist painter, is famous for pieces like “Cypresses” and “The Starry Night.” Though he is world-renowned today, van Gogh was virtually unknown during his lifetime, and thus even he struggled to make a living as an artist.

Seniors Julie Qi and Julia Wang have heard about the risks about pursuing art. Now they face the dilemma of deciding between an art major or something else. Both have been accepted into Rhode Island School of Design, which was ranked as the number one Fine Arts program by U.S. News and World Report. Qi has set her mind on two majors that fall on opposite spectrums: art and biology. Wang faces the same issue but has not decided on what she would like to pursue besides art.

Qi has been drawing ever since she could pick up a pencil, taking her first art class when she was five. Art is a mode of self expression as she finds it very introspective for her. She told her parents about her desire to pursue art as a career for the first time in eighth grade, which ended in a fight.

“They literally would not let me draw. Every time they saw me drawing they would get really mad.” Qi said.

During the summer in eighth grade, Qi recalls spending hours every day just drawing. She would wake up and draw without taking any breaks, not even to eat, until past midnight. She did this for about a month.

Wang shares similar reservations although she has never had any conflicts with her parents about the subject. Like Qi, she has been doodling for as long as she can remember. After years of drawing Sailor Moon characters, her parents finally took her to an art class in fifth grade. Since then, she has found her love for oil painting.

“My dad really wanted to be a boat designer, so he knows what it’s like to want to do something out of the ordinary,” Wang said.

Still, she indicates that there is an emphasis placed on finding a stable job.

“I think that because they are immigrants, it’s harder for them to let me do [art] because if they didn’t have a job, they’d have to go back,” Wang said. “They always told me that [a] career is the most important thing ever; you have to think really hard about it.”

For Qi’s parents, they opened up more to her having art as a hobby after realizing that it could be used as a supplement for college applications. They were also a little more open to it as a career, but not by much. Qi notes that her parents came from much harsher circumstances and worked their way to America, so she understands their reservations. Qi’s mother Kelly Zhou came to Pennsylvania 18 years ago to earn her PhD in Biology and now works in the pharmaceutical field.

“My parents were brought up in practical terms just because [of] the environment they were in,” Qi said. “My father was literally from the countryside. He literally came from nothing to America. The reason why they’re so practical is that they are afraid. They don’t want me to live like they did.”

According to Zhou, art teacher Brian Chow has explained to many parents the guidelines to an art career in that the student must find a way to apply their talent into an applicable field. For this reason, she encourages her daughter to explore other careers because of the limited job opportunities in art, or at least a career that would allow Qi to apply art to another field.

“Art is important in many aspects of one’s whole life, but as high school students, they also need to learn new knowledge, establish a solid foundation, especially math, physics, chemistry, biology, literature, history and

others,” Zhou said. “It is too early to make a commitment to become a fine art artist.”

Qi and Wang recognize that growing up in America has offered them many more opportunities than their parents. Thus they are not so much concerned with finding financial security after their parents have established it. They are able to freely explore art without worrying about creating a better future, but now, as they graduate, their future becomes their concern.

“For the longest time I was sure I wanted to go to art school but now that I’m at the point where I have to make that decision of either an art school or a normal university, I’m kind of like, ‘Oh well that’s a big risk,’” Wang said.

**Now that I’m at the point where I have to make that decision of either an art school or a normal university, I’m kind of like, ‘Oh well that’s a big risk’**

senior Julia Wang

For Qi, she would not mind choosing biology, even if it means giving up art, because she feels it is important to look at the options she has now. She does not want to throw away the opportunity to study biology just because she has

a passion for art. Qi and Wang see the risks in art, and both take their parents’ advice seriously. They acknowledge that although being able to pursue one’s passion has its benefits, the reality is that the benefits of a stable career are much easier to attain.

“My recommendation to those kids is to explore more opportunities, apply the fine art talent into applicable field, learn more in college ... then make a selection according to the passion, the job opportunity, and the reality,” Zhou said. “When you have spare time, spare money, then enjoy!”

By this time, all colleges have released their admission decisions. Qi and Wang join the hundreds of other seniors who now must commit to one school. As of now, both are undecided, and they have until May 1 to make their decision.

r.lu@elestoque.org

**THE PORTFOLIO** Clockwise from bottom left: Senior Julia Wang; Senior Julie Qi; “Fine Dining” by Julia Wang, inspired by Richard Connell’s “The Most Dangerous Game”; “Can You See?” by Julie Qi embodies an introspective perception of the world; “City Beneath the Desert” by Qi illustrates a sepulchral city with levels of separation