雪花 的 故事 - SNOW FLOWER'S STORY

Chloe Coy

"Children aren't coloring books. You don't get to fill them with your favorite colors."
(Hosseini 21)

All of my stories have begun with being lost then found, abandoned then rescued, unloved then loved. The Introduction explains that I was left on the doorstep of a teacher's college in a basket; I went to an orphanage. The Body is how I became adopted and joined my wonderful new White family. The Conclusion is that I am happy.

"The adoption story I'd heard so often growing up was supposed to remake me, give me everything I needed, make me feel whole. In the end, though, real growth and healing came from another kind of radical change—from finding the courage to question what I'd always been told; to seek and discover and tell another kind of story."
(Chung 222)

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I do not exactly know how my story truly begins. But I want to acknowledge, because I never have before, that it does *not* begin with an infant in a basket. I was four-months-old when I was reported to the government officials as an orphan on a doorstop. Four months of relationships, memories, and places / spaces are not accounted for in this story.

"Your age at finding increases the chance that you may have come from outside
the Shaoyang area, but if Family Planning was involved
a local birth would be nearly certain. Both of these characteristics create
significant complexities to making the connection necessary to locate a birth family."
("Birth Parent Search Analysis for Shao Xue Hua")

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The dozens of babies, held or led by their caretakers, are for a different set of expectant families. His new baby daughter is not amongst this group of orphans-soon-to-be-children. But he gets out his camera anyway, just to document the moment. He zooms in. The quality is grainy — definitely a

'90s video recorder — but you can still make out the rosy, chubby-cheeked girl he is trying to focus on. You can discern her light green winter snowsuit, even amongst the dozens of other babies and eager adults. You can hear the filmer's voice, even amongst the excited squirming of younger children, chattering of parents, and crying of infants. Resting on the frame solely on the rosy, chubby-cheeked baby in the light green winter snowsuit, he says (to the camera, to himself, to his wife, to his three daughters next to him), "Oh my gosh. Look how cute that little girl is...."

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Veronica [sister] and I are standing at the bathroom counter. She ties my coarse, black hair in a ponytail. "I look Chinese with my hair like this."
"Ha! That's because you are Chinese, Chlo."

"It is difficult to find the survival and revival of African cultural forms using our surface-sighted cultural eyes. Those surface-sighted eyes assess a cultural body by its skin. They do not look behind, inside, below."
(Kendi 86)

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Throughout my second year of college, I truly started to understand myself as Chinese. I became closer with my Asian friends, had my first mentor who is a person of color, and attended APIDA Tea Talks on campus. These interactions exposed me to language for what I had (and continue to) experienced, such as *model minority, inferior minority, white*

savior complex, and *perpetual foreigner*. I found myself connecting to class readings, especially those from the Writing Center Theory & Practice course, which discussed essential social and / or political subjects related to racial identities and power dynamics.

> "'I wadn't aware that words could hold so much.
> I didn't know a sentence could be so full.'"
> (Owens 103)

During the Spring semester of my second year, I had a professor who decided to organize her course in four sections: Regionalism & Local Color Writing, Literary Realism, Social Darwinism & Naturalism, and finally, Multicultural Voices. For this last section, we first were assigned to read selected pieces by Indigenous authors and then to write a reflective discussion post of at least 100 words. My post was 500+ words. Drawing from my research for my recent paper on Great Lakes Native American boarding schools (for a different class), I wrote:

> These well-intentioned [boarding school members] are what Stefanie Kunze, a scholar in Indigenous studies and international relations, describes as "benevolent perpetrators." … Honestly, I feel like this Unit that we are currently starting, "Multicultural Voices," may signify this mentality to some degree. Although it is extremely important to include a variety of perspectives and to discuss voices from people of color, making them a whole separate Unit feels othering…Why can't Native American voices be heard in the context of Regionalism and Local Color Writing? Are there no Asian Americans at this time who wrote in the Literary Realism genre? The list goes on.

I am home for the weekend, and my mom and I are taking our regular walk around the neighborhood. I start talking about how frustrated I am with this professor.
"Isn't it ridiculous??" I ask without looking for an answer as we pass some neighbors and do the awkward neighborly *nod* and *smile*.
Our conversation begins to grow outside of my Literature classroom and beyond my professor.
"Isn't othering immoral?" I ask, now looking for a more validating response. "Yes, it is," Mom admits.
"Then how is it that what happened — othering — not immoral?"
"I have to think about it. I can't just deem it immoral or moral. That sounds so extreme. She was coming from a good pla—"

"But that doesn't make it any more acceptable! That's exactly what some of those boarding school teachers thought — that they were *helping* Native children. Just because they *thought* it was right doesn't mean they *were* right. That's what I was implying in my discussion post, and that's immoral!"
We're quiet for a few seconds as we pass the same neighbors, but now we just do the obligatory *nod*. They can obviously sense the tension.
By the third time around the neighborhood, I'm lying in the middle of the road, crying. Mom looks down at me, confused and sad. Fortunately, the neighbors seem to have gone home. Or maybe they saw me and turned around.
Between heavy, shaky breaths, I say, "It just hurts that you don't understand this. That I have to explain to you why this matters, why it matters in general, and why it matters to *me*. Because othering isn't just a frustrating topic to me — it's my experience. And it hurts that I have to explain... when I know that Ammu and Rish [two of my roommates and close friends, both of whom are people of color] don't have to explain this to their parents, because their parents have also experienced it. And I know there are just things you'll never fully understand, but it just hurts that I have to explain it to my own family, my own mom."

"My growing awareness of my in-betweenness peaked during this time in graduate school in a way that wasn't possible growing up."
(Conard-Salvo 92)

Mom sighs, "I know. Well, I don't know. But I'm sorry....How have you felt othered? At school? By us?"
"Both. At Northpoint [the homeschool co-op my siblings and I had attended growing up], in class, whenever anyone mentioned anything about Asia or China, everyone would instantly look at me. Obviously, Grandpa. He is such a... white savior, Mom. Calling Meg [sister], Bella [sister], and I "Orientals" and going on about how smart we are."
"But he does really love *you*. I think he says some of those because he's proud of you."
"No, he's really proud of you. And himself. He's proud that he raised such a selfless daughter who married a selfless man, and together, they selflessly adopted — saved — three Chinese babies. There's also the time when I was talking about Grandpa with James [cousin] and Veronica, and

Veronica totally cut me off. She started telling the story for me, like *she's* the one who experiences it. And when I was talking about it around Val [my maternal aunt], not even *to* her, she stopped me. She said that she wouldn't hear any bad stuff about Grandpa, that he has been such a great father, and nothing can change that. But that's such a key example of white privilege. She has the *privilege* of knowing Grandpa like that — as a loving father."

"I encourage adopted people to tell their stories, our stories, and let no one else define these experiences for us." (Chung 20)

I conclude, "He can be a loving grandfather, but I also have to know him as a racist; I don't have the choice or the privilege to just ignore that part of him."

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It's Thanksgiving Day 2006. I'm following Jenny [sister] and Avery [cousin] around. They are ten years older than me, so they're naturally cool, and I naturally want to hangout with them. They reach the garage door. Avery rushes through, and as Jenny closes the door behind them, separating me and her, she laughs, "Go back to China."

Looking back now, what pains me the most was my mom's response. I remember her comforting me, so at least she acknowledged that I was upset. But really nothing was done. She wasn't especially angry or disappointed at / with Jenny. It was like Jenny just called me a "brat" or some other insignificant insult siblings throw around almost every day. I recently told my mom how much it hurts that she didn't defend me. She nodded and said, "You didn't feel seen."

Randall: You just don't get it.
Jack: What don't I get?
Randall: What you said before. You felt uncomfortable on a golf course, and I probably wouldn't have been allowed on it.
Jack: Son, I'm sorry. That was a stupid thing to say. When I look at you, I don't see color. I just see my son.
Randall: Then you don't see me, Dad.
("The Club")

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"...words like 'other,' 'alternative,' 'marginal,' 'non-traditional,' etc.

These terms imply a norm, a stable center in which a 'main' rhetorical tradition exists
and is augmented by 'additive' traditions.'"
(Powell et al. 1.1)

Gotcha Days are like birthdays without presents. Instead of celebrating the days we were born, we celebrate the days we were adopted. Instead of being told about how my mom went into labor at *X* time and was rushed to *Y* hospital and how I was *A* pounds and *B* ounces, I'm told about where I was found and approximately how old I was and how long I was in the orphanage and how I cried for the first 30 minutes when I met my new family, but then I was a happy baby. My mom says, "You just needed to be loved." This is one of the few instances when we talk about my past and I feel comforted.

"I'd always found it difficult to imagine my birth mother pregnant with me, difficult to grasp
that my existence had been entirely dependent on a woman I would never know….
When I pictured my birth mother, I did not picture her pregnant.
I pictured her holding me and saying goodbye."
(Chung 68)

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It's Bella's 14th Gotcha Day. Gotcha Days are the one time a year we intentionally make an effort to acknowledge our Chinese heritage.

But when Veronica enters the house and sits at the dinner table by me, things shift. Nothing is the same since Thanksgiving, when everything fell apart. She begins talking about the Black Lives Matter movement, and we all, especially Bella and myself, engage in the conversation. But she doesn't just have a discussion with you about the topic — she acts like she's convincing you that Black lives really *do* matter, that "all lives matter" is missing the point, that the protests have actually been quite peaceful, that media coverage is biased. All these things I knew, researched, and agreed with. I respond with acknowledgement each time she mentions something in the news or pulls up a video or an article: "Yeah, yeah, totally! ... Yeah, I've already seen that video ... Right?! ... Oh, I actually read that a few days ago!"

It's seriously starting to annoy me.

Veronica leaves shortly after dinner, and I immediately share

my frustration with Mom, Meg, and Bella.

"She acts like she knows what it's like to be non-White in America more than we do. I don't mean I know what it's like to be Black, by any means. But I know more about not being White more than any textbooks or news articles can tell her."

My self-education and increasing (re)engagement with my Chinese identity does not just consist of interesting historical facts and personal relationships. It also involves confronting how I, and my people, have been complicit and have perpetuated racist, white supremacist, Eurocentric beliefs / attitudes / actions. Namely, anti-Black racism. As people of color, Asians can relate to how other non-White people experience White, American hegemony. Yet, many Asian Americans have turned against their Black neighbors in order to be perceived as the "honorary white" and / or the "model minority." To prove ourselves "better" so that we are treated better.

"...we must learn our own people's stories of how they've come to be in a place, and of how they've lived in that place, in order to walk a path of accountability and solidarity."
(Doughtery)

In a recent op-ed piece I wrote for one of my English literature courses, I drew from Deanna Pan's *Boston Globe* article "Asian-Americans, Long Used as a Racial Wedge, Are Confronting Anti-Black Racism in Their Own Communities." Pan recognizes how the Asian American community has and has not confronted their "fraught histories of anti-Blackness." I connected her article to the assigned course reading of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, writing:

> Swift's intentionally unreliable and biased narrator reflects the same issue Asian Americans continue to deal with today: the distancing of oneself from a marginalized group, particularly Black people, in order to promote their own superiority. Gulliver does this with the Yahoos, and Asian Americans have (and still do) perpetuate social injustice with anti-Black racism. Therefore, it is necessary for Asian Americans to avoid following in Gulliver's footsteps, and instead, stand with the Black community in their fight for equality, inclusion, and equity.

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Mom, Meg, Bella, and I are sitting on the family room couch, staring at the family laptop. On the screen, there is a Google Hangout meeting with Veronica, Danielle, [my third oldest sister], and Sue [the therapist]. This is the first time Meg, Bella, and I have joined family therapy. We begin with introductions and the questions for why all of us are here: *How / Why are there two distinct sides in the family? Do we want to bridge this gap? If so, how?*

Meg shares that, to some extent, the gap is natural. Veronica is sixteen years older than Bella. Dad died when the older girls and the younger girls were at very different stages of life, with Veronica being in college and Bella having recently been adopted. Veronica and Danielle counterargue that the parental roles they have been forced to take on are unnatural, too much, unfair.

Bella mutters, "Well there's also the fact that we don't look like each other."

"I know my place in my adoptive family is secure.
That is not the same thing as always feeling that I belong."
(Chung 207)

And I feel my floodgates open.

"I'd broken one of our unspoken rules: We were always supposed to pretend
our life was one long and incredibly fun adventure."
(Walls 69)

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Before my parents adopted me, my name was Xue Hua Shao. Xue Hua means "snow flower." I always thought it was fitting, given my love for the winter season. I also liked to romanticize the meaning by thinking of myself as a bright flower surviving — even thriving — in a harsh snowstorm. I shared the name Shao, which is the equivalent of a last name, with all of the other children in the Shao orphanage of the Hunan Province.

My name is now Chloe Xue Hua Coy. It implies a mix between two cultures, two races, two families, and two very different overarching stories. It's not always a harmonious blend, but the name fits.

While my identity/ies as a Chinese American, transnational transracial adoptee is just one part of who I am, it has been the most difficult piece of me to learn, understand, and appreciate. It has been filled with excruciating sadness, devastating hurt, and deep anger. Nevertheless, the experience and practice of educating myself has also brought me closer to others who are truly, imperfectly, and compassionately willing to see and love all of me — Mom, Meg, Bella, Phoebe, Ammu, Anne, Rish, Paul, Noel, Nick, and more.

> "I am breaching the sacred pact of our family, our once-shared belief that my race is irrelevant in the presence of their love. But withholding hard truths and my honest opinions would also sell short the love I have for them, and they for me." (Chung 208)

Now my stories will begin with belonging then abandonment then security. The Introduction explains that I was born to a Chinese mother and a Chinese father; for whatever reason, I did not remain in their care for long. The Body is how I joined a White family that is just as complicated, painful, and joyous as any other. The Conclusion is that I am learning to be content.