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### Yes To It All

My father who gives math riddles on car rides, who loves to grill burgers every Sunday night, who fixes the microwave instead of buying a new one, told me on the day before break ended-- before I flew from the MSN airport in Madison, Wisconsin to LaGuardia and returned to life at Yale University -- that he was a protester at Tiananmen Square days before the massacre. I had sat my mother and father down at our kitchen table for an interview, with our dog lying at our feet. All three of us were seated in our pajamas, and my mother was squinting because she had left her reading glasses upstairs.

My dad is not a protester, I thought. Ever since I was young, I was told the story of my father moving to America from Shandong, China getting off a bus with one suitcase, one hundred dollars, and barely any English skills. He moved in as a student of University of Michigan and worked until he made enough money for my mother to fly to America as well. My father is an immigrant, sure. Yet, for me, for whatever reason, the idea that my father immigrated to a foreign country at the young age of twenty-three, only four years older than myself, feels as if it contradicts with the image of my father at twenty-two protesting the communist government.

I find it hard to create a comprehensive picture of who my parents are. I am guilty of viewing my parents and many other immigrants, as one-dimensional. They are fighting to survive, grasping at pennies, and struggling to mail packages at post offices because of their

broken English – they do not have time to be picky or to care about complex issues such as spirituality or a personal relationship with God.

And so, when I set out to write a research essay for my English 114 assignment about Chinese immigrants and their mass conversion to Evangelical Christianity, a group of people that my parents are included in, I painted immigrants as victims – a tool in the plan of Evangelicals to spread their white supremacist ideals through conversion, a helpless cog in the machine of white supremacy.

Yet, in doing so, I ignored their autonomy to choose to convert. I neglected to consider their faith in God and their ability to self-reflect on religion. I stripped them of the full comprehensive picture of their humanity.

That is why, for me, to hear that my father protested at the Tiananmen Square massacre as a junior in college, is difficult. Beyond the idea that I was afraid for my father's safety upon hearing this, hearing that my father had the autonomy and the gumption to protest expanded my view of him as an immigrant.

My father told me that he became a Christian as a product of what happened in Tiananmen Square – not for the reasons you might think, however. Not because he saw people die, which he didn't. He left the protest when the square fell into chaos, a few days before the massacre. Rather, he told me that he converted because of how the forum of Chinese graduate students at University of Michigan treated the situation after he immigrated to America about a year later. They wanted to fabricate a story to receive a green card.

They wanted to sign a petition to say that because of Tiananmen Square, they would be “treated very badly” if they returned to China. My father didn't approve of this petition. He grew up believing that the Chinese were very smart, that they worked hard, and that they had integrity,

and for him to hear that these Chinese people were intentionally lying by manipulating the system made him feel as if he didn't know what the meaning of life was.

I chuckled at hearing this, and my father responded "No, seriously. I didn't."

My father likes to talk, so much so, that he often speaks over my mother. "Okay listen to me," he said when my mother tried to speak during the interview. However, at this point in the interview he let my mother speak. My mother told me, "Also, his dad died."

My father's father died of lung cancer in 1994 shortly after my father moved to America.

And, so, at that point in his life, my father "was thinking a lot." He had a lot of "deep thoughts" -- his words, not mine -- about how one should behave, the importance of integrity, and our purposes in this world. That is why, when he heard about Christianity, he felt attracted to it.

Christianity gave him an "anchor." He felt that in believing in God, he knew his values. "Not only value," my mother interjected. "You know the purpose of this life. You know where you come from, where you go to."

And, of course, my ever-logical and scientific father quickly added that, "Logically, it also makes sense. There is a high percentage that it is true."

For my mother, she is attracted to the grace in Christianity – the fact that it is full of love. My mother is someone who is undeniably full of love. My mother gave up her job as a software developer when she had three children, one after the other, and she again gave up her dream job as an elementary school teacher when I was hospitalized my junior year of high school, even after she had already spent late nights restarting her career in a completely different field. My mother sacrificed for me. My father explains that in Chinese culture, "you sacrifice yourself for

the goodness of your entire family, entire race, entire country.” Those were the values they were raised with.

In Christianity, Jesus sacrificed himself. He died for the sins of humanity. That concept made everything “click” for my mother. “Yeah, that’s true love,” she said. “If we love our kids, we sacrifice. It doesn’t conflict with our values at all.”

My essay neglected to acknowledge the genuine reasons my parents and other Chinese immigrants find solace in Christianity. Christianity resonates, rather than conflicts, with a deep-rooted value, values that actually come from their Chinese culture.

My parents disputed one of the major points of my essay, the linguistic hierarchy that conversion often creates: “Speaking English that other people can understand is important to your education, for your job...”

“--for survival as an immigrant.”

“It doesn’t mean that we think the Chinese are inferior to white people. There is no correlation.” Americans who go to China would not want to speak with American-accented Chinese. They would want to speak Chinese, and so it makes sense that Chinese people would want to speak English upon moving to America.

“Evolution says...those who fit better will survive,” my father said.

In their rebuttal, my parents even echoed a sentiment that we have been studying in our Racial Imaginary class. “Some white Americans maybe have white supremacist ideas, but to say the entire effort is from white supremacist, that’s not true.” They are against the generalization. My mother says that even saying the “Evangelical church” is a too broad of a term. “Maybe some of them have white supremacist ideals, but to say all? To generalize all of them is too radical.”

I do not doubt that my parents are wise and self-reflective. And yet, something sinister happens when I write about immigrants, when I think of the group rather than the individuals, rather than thinking of my parents whom I love.

My mother told me that in my essay, I sound like Mao Zedong. Mao believed “that religion is a tool for the upper class to control the lower class,” and that was the belief that my parents grew up with. My parents do not like communism. My mother refuses to vote for Bernie Sanders because she tells me she moved away from communist China for a reason.

My mother told me that her parents believed what I had written in my essay – that those who follow religion have been “brainwashed.” My mother did not have a good relationship with her parents while they were both alive. She cites her parents as one of the primary reasons she moved to America.

It hurts to think that is how my parents think I view them.

Is it possible to hold my beliefs about the institutional conversion of Chinese immigrants to Christianity to be true, while also respecting the autonomy and intellect of my parents? Is it possible, while also keeping in mind the reasons why my parents converted, why they love God, and why they choose time and time again to identify as Christian?

And so, I must conclude that a single narrative cannot embody the complexities of whom people really are. Rather, people and their stories are compilations of seemingly contradictory statements. Yes, Christianity and the conversion of Chinese immigrants can spread white supremacist ideologies. Yes, my parents chose to be Christian and their faith undeniably occupies a positive space in their lives. Yes, I love God. Yes, I love my parents. Yes, to stories that hold multitudes and contradictions within.

Yes. Yes to it all.