



Chinese

Languages in

Aotearoa

Introduction

People of Chinese ancestry are the largest Asian ethnic group in Aotearoa, making up roughly 5% of New Zealand's population.

While often spoken of as one, homogenous 'Chinese community', there is in fact no such thing.

Te Papa's Chinese Languages in Aotearoa project raises the bar for inclusive, nuanced representations of people of Chinese heritage in Aotearoa by shining a light on the myriad linguistic and cultural identities that inform our lives.

For this project, we collaborated with filmmakers and illustrators of diverse Chinese backgrounds to bring these narratives and related conversations around language loss and revitalisation to the forefront.

We also invited members of the public to share with us stories centred on their own personal relationship with their various heritage languages – whether Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka, Mandarin, Teochew, or another language entirely.

This zine, which contains many of these stories, is a tribute to all who have shared their experiences with us.

We hope it will give readers an insight into the many conversations happening in this space.

Grace Gassin

Curator Asian New Zealand Histories, Te Papa

Editor's note:

Conversations about language, power, and identity are constantly evolving and in flux. Flip through these pages and you'll find not only different languages bolded on each page, but a range of different, often contradictory meanings attached to seemingly everyday words like 'kiwi', 'Chinese', 'dialect', 'language'.

In keeping with the tradition of zine-making, we have kept our editing as minimal as possible. Instead, we encourage readers to think critically about what these dissonances might reveal about language, and cultural and national identity in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

我們的故事



Ya-Wen Ho 賀雅雯

Mandarin is my mother tongue, which can be understood as my mother's language. As I got older, I gradually realised that my mother's mother tongue is Hakka, but my mother tongue is **Mandarin**. Why did the language my mother taught me become Mandarin? Why this change? The story behind this is a bit heavy.

In 1949, the nationalist government moved from the mainland to Taiwan, and the era of martial law began in Taiwan. My parent grew up under martial law, and could not speak their minds like I can today. The National Government brought a lot of colonial policies, especially in terms of language. There were penalties and rewards. If you spoke your dialect at

school, non-Mandarin languages, the teachers may punish you physically. In the workplace, if you tried to find a job using your dialect, you were at a disadvantage to those who spoke standard Mandarin. So under these unforgiving conditions, I can understand why my mother put down her Hakka, and I understand why she taught me Mandarin.

In the Taiwanese context, Mandarin has caused a lot of harm to people of that generation. But the language itself is a tool, like a scalpel, it can hurt people, and also heal people. Language policies that promote standardisation still exist, so I have to understand how to use Mandarin now.



Watch an interview with Ya-Wen
at tepapa.nz/CLIA-Mandarin

Photo by Shijia Chen

Hsen-Han Khoo 邱盛漢

I am 35, of Hokkien descent. I grew up in Kuala Lumpur but have been in Auckland for the past 20 years. I speak a variant of **Hokkien** from the south of Malaysia which is derived from the Quanzhou variant in China where our families came from a few generations ago.

I only learnt to speak Hokkien in my 20s to connect with my roots, and more importantly to communicate with my grandmother.

Back in 2008, there were next to no learning resources and I could only learn from my mother, whom I forced to start speaking to me.

It was not easy learning a language with only one person to speak to, but we gradually built up 'til I was able to start conversing with my grandmother in Malaysia. Being so far away, it was over multiple trips that I was able to start talking to her and develop a close relationship in her later years. She has since passed on, but I will always have fond memories of her and our conversations, from the very broken Hokkien initially to the better years.

To continue using the language, I recently started a small group in Auckland that meets to speak and practice Hokkien. We try to meet at least once a month for social activities (meals, karaoke, bubble tea), but choose to speak in Hokkien.

I am still not 100% fluent and still sound like “angmoh”, but this is a journey that I am glad I chose to take.



from the illustrator, Kwok Yi:

“the Hokkien language sort of presented itself as a bridge founded on small foundational building blocks – a bridge that channelled relationships both external (with his grandmother) and internal (with cultural identity).

“Out of this, it seemed natural to present the bridge as a central piece in the illustration, as representative of the Hokkien language and the journey to learn it.”

Illustration by Kwok Yi



I was born and raised in Ōtāhuhu, South Auckland, New Zealand to parents who owned takeaways time to time. I am the youngest of four to immigrant parents, Dad from Guangdong, China and Mum from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Due to dad only being able to speak Cantonese and not much English, **Cantonese** was the spoken Chinese language at home even though my mum was multilingual from her upbringing in Malaysia.

There are big age gaps between my siblings and I: 17, 15, and 10 years, then me – they like to call me the “accident”.

There is a generation and cultural gap between my parents and I with their Chinese traditional upbringing and my Chinese home life yet New Zealand societal upbringing. I grew up watching Steven Chow, Jackie Chan, and Chow Yun Fat movies, TVB shows, some Hong Kong music, and a few cartoons that were sent on video tapes from cousins in Hong Kong.

My Cantonese was maintained that way and was better than the Cantonese spoken by my siblings, even though they used to get disciplined if they spoke English at home.

I was sent to Chinese school at the Mangere Chinese Community Centre a couple of times but I didn't engage because when I was young

there weren't many Chinese in my neighbourhood or in Auckland at the time and therefore I never learnt how to read or write Chinese.

When I was younger, every now and then I stayed with a nanny who was of New Zealand European background, so I learnt my manners off her: eating with my mouth closed and saying please and thank you. These were things not taught to me by my Chinese family, and now I still see some of my family eating with their mouth open, asking for things without please and thank you, but that's “normal” in my family.

I did sort of regret not learning Chinese in 1996-97 – there was a mass migration of Hong Kong people into the church my parents went to, the church was only Cantonese-speaking and reading so I felt isolated and alone, because I couldn't connect with the immigrant kids who would speak and read Cantonese with ease.

I get told I'm Plastic Chinese now by my Chinese colleagues, but it's water off a duck's back because now they're in my territory, New Zealand, where I know more about it than they do.

Currently I have only retained basic conversational Cantonese as I don't speak it much now, only to my cousins and my mother who require it. I do enjoy speaking it though and every time I do I pick up on words I haven't heard in a while, although there are some words I still don't understand

and my cousins on my dad's side have the strong “village” accents which is sometimes hard to follow. I do seem to impress Chinese people when I do speak Cantonese and they tell me my Cantonese is good for a Kiwi-born.

My first cousins are more attuned to the Chinese culture and language since they spent at least 20+ years of their lives in China before coming to New Zealand and I love hanging out with them. My second cousins are very Kiwi and don't speak much Cantonese and I relate to them well also – it's a great dynamic to be in between the generations.

I love being Chinese, although some people don't know what nationality I am, maybe because of my demeanour, how I dress, look, or speak perhaps.

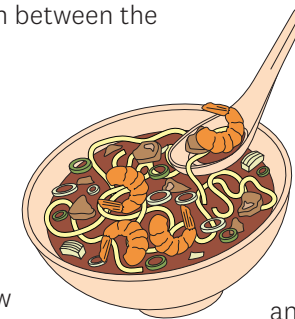
I was described as someone who “is married to a white guy, speaks and acts like a Māori.” He tried to insult me, but it actually highlighted my rich upbringing in South Auckland. I have a group of multicultural friends, and I do have a group of Cantonese girlfriends at work who I get to practice speaking Cantonese with too.

I'm not familiar with many of the Chinese cultural aspects, I am aware that only the married can give red packets and only the single can receive, chopsticks are good luck

at weddings, number 8 is lucky and number 4 isn't, I know of the moon festival, lantern festival, and day of the dead, but don't know much detail of these occasions.

Some of these Chinese traditions are mentioned by my mum, cousins, or my Cantonese girlfriends who are more informed of the traditions.

Even within my Cantonese girlfriends we have a varying degree of speaking and comprehension of Chinese and its culture. I love Chinese food, my dad was a great cook and I also love cooking and going out to eat Chinese food.



My husband and I travelled to China in 2008 and they seemed to know I was Chinese since the vendors ignored me at the street markets and gravitated towards trying to sell their goods to my European Kiwi husband. I could identify with the culture but very superficially, this is ok though as I acknowledge I was raised in New Zealand.

In 2018 I required a lung transplant so having to explain that I needed a transplant to my mum was really hard with my limited Cantonese, and I had to ask one of my Cantonese girlfriends to interpret this to my mother.

My cousins were very shocked and now when they see me they ask if I'm ok and if/when I can have babies. Explaining that I am on lifelong medications that won't allow me to have children is something I have to repeat, and it's taken me a while to get comfortable with my Cantonese to explain it, but I think they understand now, and I know their questions are all out of love.

Seeing the contrast also between my hubby's European family and my Chinese family is interesting. Chinese people can be brutally honest and my family is definitely that.

Over the years because of my medications, I have put on and lost weight and this has guaranteed one of the cousins will tell me, and they are not discreet.

I have also witnessed heated discussions in my family in front of others and it is made clear you know where each other stands. In contrast my husband's family is too scared of hurting anyone's feelings and sometimes avoids sorting an issue out.

In May last year I shared my transplant story at the ACMA (Auckland Chinese Medical Association) conference to spread awareness of organ donation.

I was asked to go onto a Chinese radio show after the conference, however the show is Mandarin-speaking so I had to decline. They did instead interpret a story I had written in Kai Tiaki Nursing New Zealand's journal into Chinese and shared it in a WeChat group they had.



Tee Phee 彭秋池



After I was married, I moved to Kuala Lumpur [from Penang]. In Kuala Lumpur, you know, everybody is educated, all speak in English or Mandarin. When I spoke to my children in **Hokkien** they looked at me and say, 'Mum, you speak funny'. I say, 'this is Hokkien. You have to learn. You will know where you come from, family, the old days, where our ancestors come from, you will understand that.'

So, when we moved to New Zealand, suddenly they're interested in learning Hokkien.

Why? When they speak one more foreign language no one will understand!

To me, this is a way we can pass on, even after generation to the next generation. I am very proud of my children, nieces, and nephew that are in New Zealand able to speak Hokkien.



Photos by Arthur Hon Sheng

Debbie Sew Hoy 徐玉蓮

I grew up in Dunedin, living next door to my mama and yeye*, and having my cousins as neighbours.

We had a close extended family, often having large gatherings at my grandparents' home, preparing and eating huge banquets, followed by the uncles and aunties playing mah jong!

I love *The Complicated Chinese Family* from Off the Great Wall on YouTube. That's how I addressed my big family.

We called all our aunties and uncles by their correct "title". I really miss that. You could tell who everyone was and their relationship, just by the name they used for each other.

My mama only spoke **Cantonese**. She didn't speak English, yet she religiously watched *Coronation Street* every night and followed the storyline. My yeye had perfect English, but we were always encouraged to speak Cantonese.

My immediate family didn't speak Cantonese at home because my sister is deaf, so English was our chosen language.

I wish I used my Cantonese more often with my grandparents, but it was too easy to speak English and they would reply in Cantonese. So as the saying goes: "sik tang, m-sik gong".

As an adult I frequently travelled to Hong Kong and China for business. I always felt comfortable surrounded by Cantonese even if I didn't understand everything.

One of my proudest moments was in Guangzhou, when I was dining with a supplier who came from North China. I asked the waitress, in my best Cantonese, for an "English menu" (for myself), and was absolutely thrilled when she brought it to the table, and handed it to my guest!

I always joke that I speak Debbie-dialect. My language skills are not very good, but when I lose my inhibitions, and just let fly, I'm surprised at how much people can understand what I am saying.

I've long decided that it doesn't matter if I have poor grammar or limited vocabulary. I'm proud to speak Cantonese, despite my limitations!



*Cantonese
for grandpa

Aan Chu 邹安

I am of Malaysian Chinese heritage, and I can communicate in a few Chinese languages to varying degrees of (low level) success.

I speak basic conversational **Cantonese** to my paternal grandparents, but to my maternal grandparents, my gōamá* (grandma) and gōakong* (grandpa), things get a little bit complicated.

My maternal ancestors are from Fújiàn, where Hokkien is widely spoken. It follows that this side of the family uses **Hokkien** at home. Growing up in New Zealand, I was not immersed in Hokkien. So when it came to communicating, I would speak **Mandarin** to my gōamá and English to my gōakong, but to each other, my grandparents never spoke Mandarin or English.

As I got a bit older, I began spending more summers with my mum and grandparents in Malaysia. When we were together, they would speak in Hokkien, the language that came most naturally.

Unable to master Cantonese, Hokkien, a language quite different from Cantonese, was even harder to grasp.

I remember understanding enough to feel frustrated asking for a translation at every sentence and alienated when one wasn't provided. 'Speak English!' I would say selfishly. The English never lasted long because my gōamá needed a translation into Hokkien, and continuing the conversation in Hokkien was more natural than the alternative.

Bit by bit, repeated patterns and specific words gained meaning, and I began understanding.

Now I can comfortably understand a fair chunk of what's being said in Hokkien. I can even speak a little too.

Hearing Hokkien in public spaces in New Zealand makes me feel like I'm with my gōamá and gōakong again, even if it's just for a sentence. I often wonder how much cultural richness I would have missed if they had listened to my younger self.

Kám siā (thank you) for staying true to yourselves and sharing Hokkien with me.



*these are
Hokkien terms

Laura Luo

I have been living in New Zealand for the last 20 years. I am from **Sichuan**, China and I am struggling with my daughter's Chinese as she is of mixed heritage.

My story is simple and ordinary. A mother trying to pass my culture down to my child. I've had to give up my dialect and only use **Mandarin** and English in our household. Sometimes it upsets me because I am really fond of my own dialect, but I have to make an easy choice for my daughter.

Every dialect comes with different cultures. I was planning to take her to Sichuan to experience the culture setting but Covid-19 changed everything.

I want to continue my own language and culture with my child, therefore I am closely connected with the Chinese community in Hamilton. I want her to experience the best of the two worlds.



from the illustrator, Anna Gan:

"Laura's story resonated with me. I feel my parents' desire to continue their culture and share their memories in my generation, so they're not alone, and their own families aren't forgotten.

"I chose to draw an illustration more realistic – Laura shared that she often read bed time stories to her daughter in Chinese, so that imagery is what I went with."

Illustration by Anna Gan





Relatively speaking, few people know about Hakka people. In New Zealand, if you tell someone you are a **Hakka**, they would probably ask if it is related to the All Blacks' haka. Even though they have nothing to do with each other!

How do we preserve our language for the future? We cannot just talk about history or the past. It is about how to let the language evolve to meet the needs of society and speakers now. Let's think. If we do not use our creativity to allow the language to expand its scope and context, then it could only get more restricted.

To really preserve a language, it is essential to have a mission. It is essential to have people driving it. People must be motivated to learn. Whether it is to connect with ancestral culture or to return to the ancestral village or to learn folk songs, at the end of the day, you have to learn the language or dialect to make those connections. There is no other way.



Watch an interview with Henry at tepapa.nz/CLIA-Hakka

My parents were born in Vietnam so I identify as Vietnamese. However, my grandparents were born in China, so when people ask where I'm from, I would answer by saying 'my parents are Vietnamese/Chinese, but I was born in New Zealand'.

The Chinese dialect we speak at home is **Teochew**, as my grandparents wanted us to stay connected with our roots, but growing up in an English society has turned this into a blend of both languages as my parents assimilated into a new culture here in New Zealand.

It's always tricky being brought up in a multicultural society where your culture and language don't fit "the norm". You never really feel like you fit in anywhere, but this dialog is slowly changing with younger generations being more globally connected and open-minded than ever.

With time, education, and the enablement of technology, we are moving into a more inclusive and diverse society, which is a great step in the right direction for the future of New Zealand and around the world.



My mother was born in Burma during the Second World War. She grew up speaking and writing **Mandarin, Hakka**, and **Burmese** interchangeably. My father was born in China before the Japanese invasion of China, near Shanghai, and he spoke Mandarin, Shanghainese, and Cantonese; reading and writing Chinese. My younger brother and I were born in Taiwan, and we grew up surrounded by multiple languages and dialects. However I was only fluent in Mandarin before my family moved to New Zealand when I was 16.

Although I learnt English at high school in Taiwan, it took me a couple of years to become fluent in English after our migration. The New Zealand accent was quite different from what I was used to, so that was an added element to my initial struggle. After completing university degrees, working, and living here as a New Zealander for over 30 years, I now have to make a conscious effort to maintain my Chinese. I have been thinking and dreaming in both languages, depending on who I have been interacting with.

My children are of mixed heritage of European, Eastern, and South East Asian. My husband and I made the decision to bring them up bilingually, speaking English and Mandarin. We hope by speaking both languages we are able to better preserve our cultural heritage for the generations onwards.



Wilson Chau 周璿熙 & Elio Yan Lok Chau 周欣樂

As a first-generation immigrant from Hong Kong who arrived in Aotearoa at the age of two, I never received any formal Cantonese schooling. So keeping alive my **Cantonese** speaking ability has been a challenge. The limited Cantonese I've retained is what I regard as taonga that my parents have bestowed on me. It is my Cantonese foundation that has empowered me to study Mandarin, reconnect with my cultural heritage, better understand our migrant journey, and build a career in the Chinese speaking world.

During my upbringing in New Zealand, I was particularly fortunate that my parents did a couple of things that enabled me to retain my Cantonese: insisting we speak Cantonese at home throughout my upbringing, and sending me to some after-school Cantonese tutorial class. As a child, I didn't necessarily appreciate the importance of my parents' efforts to instil Cantonese in me. I remember questioning why we needed Cantonese at all when most of our interactions with the community were in English. I felt there was pressure on first-generation immigrants to prove ourselves by mastering English at any cost in order to succeed in New Zealand, at the expense of my Cantonese roots.

As a new parent, I now have the special opportunity to do my part in passing on Cantonese onto the next

generation of New Zealanders. I will do everything I can as a father to empower my son, who is of mixed Chinese and Pākehā background, to inherit Cantonese. It is my hope that Cantonese, both the language and the rich cultural heritage that comes with it, will be part of his and his children's identity and DNA.



Jack Yan 甄爵恩

We were the only Chinese family in the neighbourhood. We exclusively spoke **Cantonese** at home. We had relatives who were born here, they spoke English with their parents. I asked my mum if I could also speak English at home. She said no. 'Your grandmother wouldn't be able to understand you, so we need to speak Cantonese at home.'

When I speak in Cantonese it feels like I'm speaking from the heart, it feels more genuine compared to

when I speak in English as things need to get translated in my head for it to come out in English. Even to this day, simple things like receiving a phone number, it still gets translated back to Cantonese for me to register. I am aware that as a result of growing up here, there are more complex words that I don't understand. Sometimes my friends would make fun of my altered accent. I tell them it's not changed, it's authentic Cantonese from 1976!



Watch an interview with Jack at tepapa.nz/CLIA-Cantonese

Photo by Tim Hamilton

Angela Hann

I am Angela Hann, of Teochew and Hainanese heritage. My mum, who is of Teochew heritage, and her siblings, were born in Cambodia after my maternal grandparents migrated from China. My dad, who is of Hainanese heritage, says that his side of the family had been in Cambodia for many generations.

I was born in New Zealand and my parents taught me **Teochew** at home. Over the years, my fluency in Teochew has reduced but I still try to maintain it by speaking to my parents in the language. However, this is difficult as I mostly use English in my day-to-day life even when conversing with my siblings, who can also speak Teochew. I hope that I can pass on this language (or at least parts) to my future children to help them identify with their heritage.

Besides my cousins, I have not met other Hainanese speaking folk in New Zealand yet. If I did though, I,

unfortunately, would not be able to converse with them in the Hainanese language.

Every now and then I do meet other Teochew speaking people in New Zealand though, from Cambodia or other South-East Asian countries. It is always a special interaction as it is so rare to meet other Teochew people.

There is also a community group I am part of on Facebook called "Gagingang" which is actually where I saw the video posted by Te Papa. This group consists of Teochew people all over the world sharing their stories and experiences. It has really inspired me to preserve our language and culture.



from the illustrator, **Ronia Ibrahim:** →

"We bonded over our connection with Hakka/Mandarin, racism in schooling systems, diasporic guilt, and our fading mother tongues. As much as I helped bring Wanwan's story to life in pictures, her passion, commitment, and vision was also a source of inner healing for me."

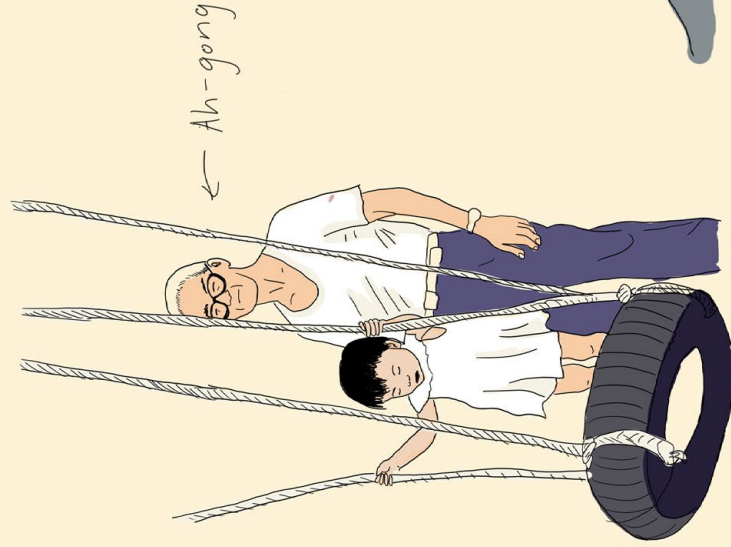
TAOYUAN 桃園

TAIWAN



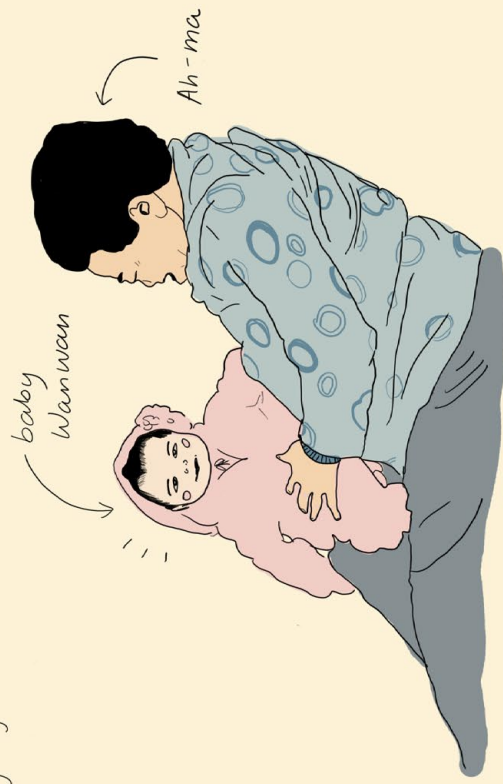
Kia ora, my name is Wanwan Liao! My connection to Chinese languages (Hakka) starts where I grew up: Taoyuan City in Taiwan.

大家好，我是廖老師。我自台灣桃園，那就是為什麼我會說客家話的原因。



I grew up with my Ah-ma and Ah-gong (paternal grandma and grandpa) and my brother in the countryside while my parents worked in the city. Ah-ma and Ah-gong spoke Hakka with me. My parents speak Mandarin and Taiwanese Hokkien to each other and us (my mother grew up speaking Taiwanese Hokkien). Since marrying my father, my mother also learnt Hakka. Hakka is my mother tongue.

小時候，我的父母在台北奔波工作，所以我和哥哥是由阿公和阿嬤在鄉下拉拔長大的。阿公和阿嬤說的是客家話，爸爸媽說中文，也說台語（媽媽的母語是台語），媽媽「嫁雞雞飛，嫁狗狗走」也學了客家話。客家話是我的母語。



When I went to primary school, most kids spoke Mandarin. I felt like I had a superpower with my Hakka, it meant that I had a special language that others couldn't understand.

上小學的時候大家都說中文，聽得懂又會說客家話的小朋友並不多。於是客家話便成了我的秘密超能力。

你好嗎

“NI HAO MA?”

how are you?

“ngi ho mo”



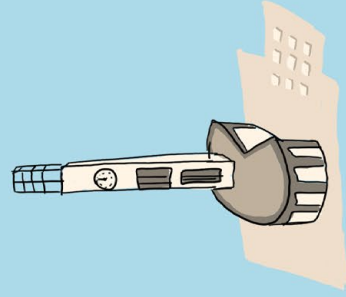
“XIE XIE”

thank you

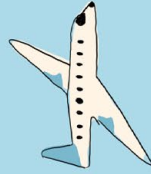
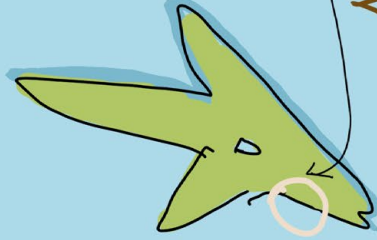
“an zii se”

“hog gau”

學校
“XUE XIAO”
school

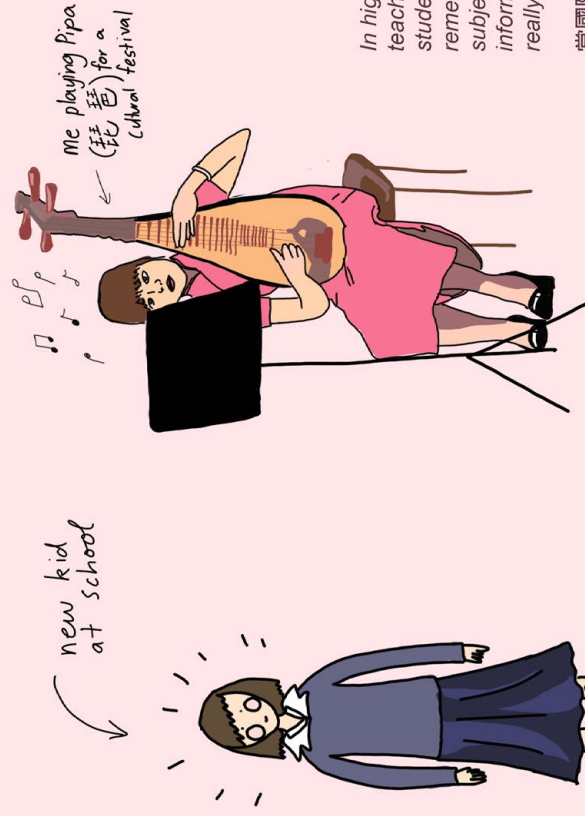


PALMERSTON NORTH,
NEW ZEALAND



My father believed that learning English would give my brother and I more opportunities in the future. This led us both to move to Palmerston North, New Zealand for study. I was an international student in Palmerston North for two years.

我爸爸的觀念是：一定要學好英文。很幸運地，我和哥哥都來紐西蘭讀書，我們因此來到了北帕。我在北帕的一所高中當了兩年的國際學生。

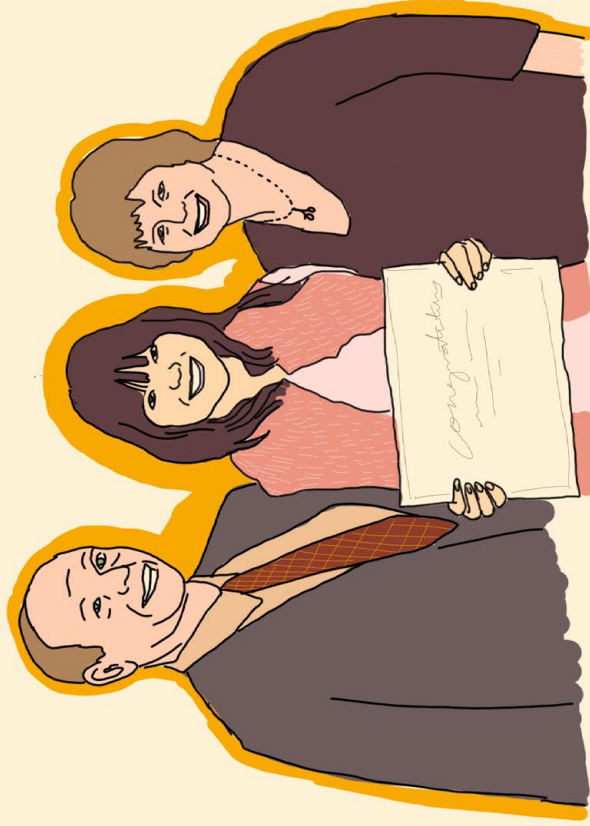


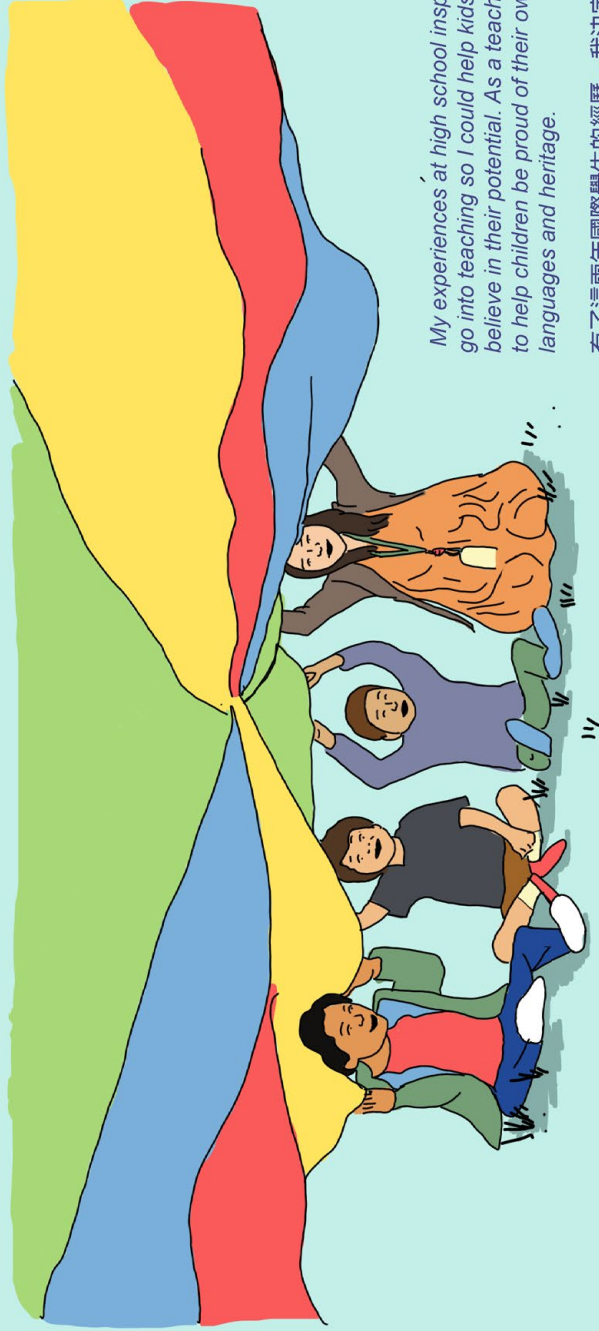
In high school, some people (especially teachers) assumed that international students wouldn't be good at English. I remember a dean advising us to take subjects like statistics, tourism and information management even though I really wanted to take media studies.

當國際學生的那兩年，有一部分的人總認為國際學生英文差，連老師主任們都只讓國際學生選一些「安全」科目，像是統計學、旅遊和資訊管理。我最想學的是媒體學。

But I proved them wrong. I ended up getting good grades in media studies and, with the support of my host parents, made the most of my time in school.

向老師主任們央求了大半天才能選的媒體學，果然是我喜歡的科目，我向他們證明了我的能力。當然，我的寄宿家庭爸媽也不斷地鼓勵我，幫助我，是他們讓我的高中生活變得有意義。





My experiences at high school inspired me to go into teaching so I could help kids like me believe in their potential. As a teacher I wanted to help children be proud of their own languages and heritage.

有了這兩年國際學生的經歷，我決定在紐西蘭當老師，想努力讓我的經歷成為其他老師的借鏡，希望從四面八方來的學生不用受到差別待遇，要相信自己的多元是一種優勢。在這樣的環境裡當小學老師，我深信多元文化不僅是優勢，學生們的母語更是他們的超能力。

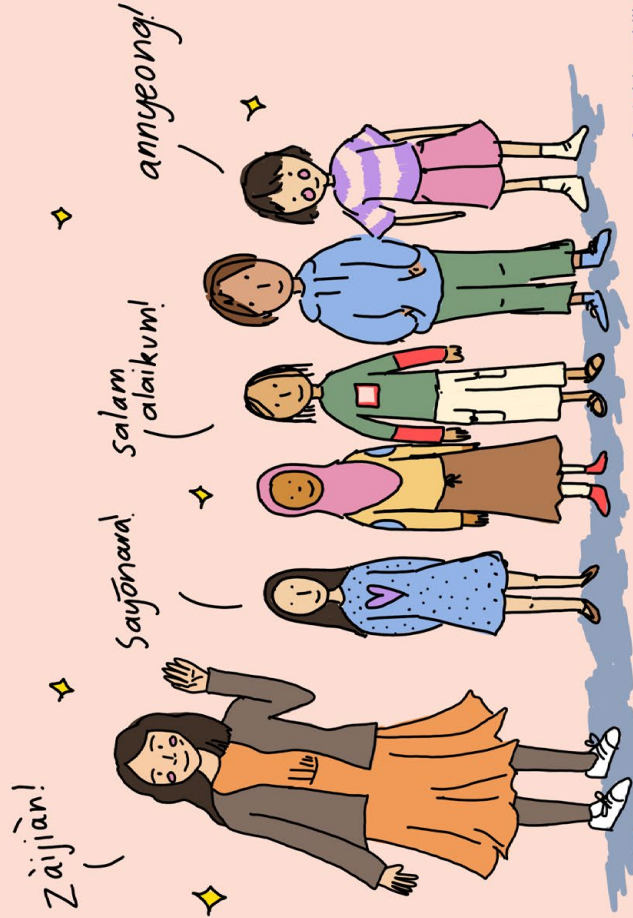
When teaching in a classroom, I make an effort to promote the use of their home languages. One way I do this is by greeting my students in their own languages. I also want other teachers to look beyond a student's ability to speak English.

教學的時候，我們常常透過討論、提問和體驗等方式，來增加學生對多元文化的認識和包容度。我最喜歡在早上的時候用學生的母語向他們問候。另外，我也想讓其他老師不僅僅只用學生的英文程度來判斷學生的素質。



Although my Hakka proficiency is declining, it's a language that connects me to my grandparents. Growing up, I slowly learned Mandarin and English, which now connect me to other parts of my identity. As a full-time teacher working closely with bi/multilingual children (ESOL), my goal is to help them embrace their "superpowers!"

我對客家話雖然日漸陌生，每每聽見客家話仍然倍感親切，畢竟那是我和童年、和外公阿麟的連結。成長過程中，我慢慢學會說中文和英文，這些語言使我能不同身分、角色中切換。如今我不在教室裡當班導師了，我是一位專任雙語教師（英語為第二外語教師），我的期望是：看見並聽見多元文化的孩子使用他們的超能力！



As told and illustrated by Ronia Ibrahim

Koreen Liew-Young 杨凯贤

My earliest relative to arrive in New Zealand was my great, great grandfather who came from Canton, China to Wellington in 1896, so that makes me a fifth-generation Chinese-New Zealander.

Growing up, I had this complex about not being a “true” Chinese person because I didn’t speak a Chinese language. My mother lacked confidence to speak **Cantonese** and her generation spoke English as their primary language. Most of my cousins couldn’t really speak Cantonese at all. The only ones who mainly spoke Cantonese were my grandparents, who lived in another city. When they passed away, so in a sense did my connection to the language.

I had also resented my ethnicity because of all the racism and stereotyping I’d experienced. I looked different to other New Zealanders and I felt many new migrant Chinese didn’t consider me “Chinese” enough. I didn’t know where my place was; I was in this weird void in the middle. I joked about being a “banana” (yellow on the outside and white on the inside) to deflect any insecurity I had. But this perception of myself, was soon challenged.

At university, I started to explore my cultural identity and the history of Chinese people in New Zealand. I travelled to China in my 20s to see our ancestral villages and explore my heritage on a New Zealand Chinese

Association organised tour. Here, I was able to see a glimpse into the simple and busy life which my ancestors would have had to live through. I started to find an anchor for my life going forward, even if I didn’t fully identify with it.

And then in my early 30s, I married my husband (Julian) who is of Malaysian-Chinese descent. He was passionate to study Mandarin and wanted to immerse himself in China to learn... and he wanted me to go with him! I felt nervous to go, wondering if I would be pointed out to be the fraud I’d always feared to be. But I went anyway.

It was hard and I often felt out of my comfort zone. Not being able to converse in **Mandarin** to do the simplest of things, like buy fruit, was initially stupidly difficult. I felt like I had made a mistake in coming. But I was determined to make the most of the time that we had in Beijing. I diligently studied Mandarin and took every opportunity I could to talk to people. I went every day to buy fruit to practice my text book phrases. Funnily enough, these phrases were about buying bananas! I talked to random people everywhere and found so many strangers willing to engage with my pidgin Mandarin. Some even took us on guided tours and out to restaurants.

I loved my time in Beijing.

Mengzhu's illustration came from a day when I found a balloon vendor while biking to class. I fell in love with a giant oversized rabbit balloon he had for sale and now had enough Mandarin to communicate with the vendor to buy it. It was such a simple and playful act, but it reminds me of the wholesome joys that connecting with your culture can bring.

Putting all those eye-opening experiences under my belt, I returned to New Zealand with a greater acceptance of myself and a link to my heritage.

Now, even though I can only speak Mandarin like a pre-schooler, I can teach my son some basics and give him a foundation. I hope my little sixth-generation Chinese-New Zealander will be more confident in who he is and appreciate his connection to the previous five.



**from the illustrator,
Mengzhu Fu:**

"I think the experience of liminality, inbetweenness is so common and relatable among diasporic Chinese folks and multi/bilingualism is also part of that. I decided to turn to our characters/ words for thinking on that experience.

"The character is a 篆书 (seal script) version of both 间 and 门, which I thought was perfect in representing this experience. 间 means between, like 中间 or 之间, but it's also used to indicate time, 时间. The "日" is subtle and hidden in the bike. Getting to know this character's etymology helped me to understand something quite profound – that is, this character represents a door, 门, and it is that space in between that allows for light to enter, symbolised by 日 and at times in the past, 月 – the sun and the moon. Liminality, or that space in the middle, is then a space of possibility."

Illustration by Mengzhu Fu



Jeffrey Wang

My name is Jeffrey, and this is my story with the **Shanghainese** dialect.

My parents immigrated to New Zealand in 1996 from Shanghai, China and brought along my grandparents, my ye ye and nai nai (paternal side of grandparents), to Tāmaki Makaurau. I was born in 1998 and from the get-go I was raised by my grandparents speaking Shanghainese, the dialect of Shanghai.

Speaking Shanghainese is something I have kept throughout my 22 years of life. It is the language I use primarily to communicate with all of my family in New Zealand.

One of the most interesting aspects of Shanghainese is that the grammar is very similar to Mandarin Chinese. This created one of the most interesting challenges when faced with taking Mandarin in high school.

In these classes they were using English to teach Mandarin, but in my world, I had never learnt Mandarin in that way. I'd put this in writing, but Shanghainese has no formal part of writing.

I would consider myself fluent in Shanghainese and Mandarin – we'll see how good we can get over the next year (on my bucket list to improve!).

In 2004 when I was six years old my parents decided to take us to China to go visit our family, this is where I first met all my uncles and aunties (too many Chinese sayings, so I've just kept it in English) and my waipo and wai gong (maternal side grandparents).

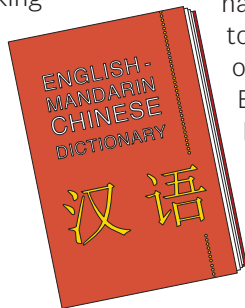
Shanghainese was the language they all spoke, so I fit right in, it was such a surreal experience to hear it being spoken by people other than my parents, little brother, and grandparents. Until then I had never heard anyone use Shanghainese.

In Shanghai back then, it was common to use dialect instead of Mandarin, however, I've heard through the grapevine that much has changed; in an effort to get everyone speaking Mandarin, dialects have been banned in schools.

This went on for some time but it's really heartening to hear there has been a change of attitude towards this policy and now on buses they name stops in English, Shanghainese, and Mandarin.

I really want Shanghainese to stick with both my whānau in New Zealand and my extended whānau in China. To me I see it

as my first language as neither of my grandparents speak English, so speaking my family's language has always helped me to stay connected to them.



Growing up in New Zealand, the opportunity is not always there to practice your language, especially Shanghainese.

The way I keep my language up is through regular kōrero with my whānau, although I must admit I do incorporate English as some of the translations aren't quite accurate.

So where to from now? The spaces I was introduced to at university have most definitely shaped my approach to my language, my heritage, and what I would like to do with this. At university I was so lucky to have been able to work with various student societies and clubs – they taught me to be proud of who I am and what it means to be a Chinese New Zealander and how important it is to create your own path through life.

Recently I've spent a lot of time pondering how I can make my mark on our beautiful nation Aotearoa. How I can inspire future tamariki to take pride in their diverse backgrounds and heritage as well as encourage them to be courageous enough to share it with all of us.

I want for my future children to be brought up speaking both English and Shanghainese, in the hopes that they can also share the same pride in my family's heritage as I do.



Samantha Fei

I was born in Aotearoa but my mum is from Hong Kong and my dad is from South Africa. Both are ethnically Chinese. Our family history is complicated, but unique in the way we have retained close ties to our culture despite generations of migration and having to navigate the challenges of being a racial minority, especially during apartheid.

My dad grew up in the 70s–90s in apartheid South Africa. Most of the Asian people in his area were fellow Cantonese people and the restrictions of apartheid brought their community closer.

He went to Chinese school with his friends and family, and although he wasn't that successful with learning **Cantonese** there, he and his friends still connected with their Cantonese roots through TVB and Hong Kong entertainment.

They also loved the idea of Chinese food. On the weekend, they often drove from Pretoria (where they lived) to Johannesburg (a completely different city) just to eat some 'unauthentic but good enough' char-siu bao because it was the only place you could eat Chinese food. (Crazy how now in New Zealand, at least in Auckland, it's so easy for us to order it!)

My dad and his friends dreamt of going to Hong Kong to retrace their roots and many years later, they all succeeded, some of them relocating there for life, and that is where my dad met my mum. Most of my family has now emigrated from South Africa and everyone is dispersed, yet again, to numerous places such as Canada, Australia, Mauritius, and here, Aotearoa.

I think telling diasporic stories, like mine, bring alternative and often undocumented/heavily underrepresented experiences to light.

For me personally, what has shaped my identity the most are these stories and I would like to open up a new perspective to those who persistently ask me where I am from (you know, that question 'where are you *really* from?').

So here's my answer: This is where I am from, and this is a part of my story.

from the illustrator, David Jiang:

"The hands on, collage-style composition, coupled with contrasting digital and analogue photography, highlights the symbiotic relationship between old and new, tradition and innovation — how the only thing permanent is change and that society must adapt to become more informed and aware, just as minorities with diasporic stories have had to adapt to their situations."

Illustration by David Jiang



Bier Liao

I am currently a student at the University of Auckland and my family immigrated to New Zealand when I was nine years old.

My mum came from a small town called Taishan 台山 and my dad from a small town called Shuibu 水步, both in the Guangdong Province. These two towns are situated very close to each other (literally a 20-minute drive) and they speak a dialect called **Taishanese** 台山话.

Taishanese is a dialect categorised under Cantonese but it is spoken very differently, and a person fluent in Cantonese will probably struggle to understand Taishanese. It is spoken in multiple cities and towns, known as 五邑, including 新会, 台山, 开平, 恩平, 鹤山.

A lot of Taishanese people immigrated to foreign countries and although the dialect was taken with them, it is slowly being lost throughout the generations. I want to share this because I know there is a tight community of people who speak Taishanese in New Zealand.

It is also sad to see the dialect slowly disappearing, because when I visited home in 2019, most of the younger children I spoke to were speaking Mandarin. They spoke Mandarin at school, with their friends and even their family, but when it came to speaking Taishanese they looked uncomfortable because they weren't fluent.

Although I don't have any interesting personal stories about Taishanese, I still want to shed some light on this dialect as it deserves to be known by more people.



Newman

I am from Beijing, China where the locals talk in a more implicit and humorous way.

I speak fairly fluent English since I have used it as my work language for more than 20 years in multinational firms.

I am old-fashioned folk but I enjoy culture exchange, thus I am sort of a cultural mixed type. How I communicate depends on who I am talking to: Kiwi, Māori, or Indian. No matter whether on a fishing and hunting trip, or at a local store in some remote areas, I usually will chat with the locals.

Culture loss is not only happening in New Zealand but also in China.

In recent years I found out it has become more and more difficult to talk with some of our countryman since they seemed to not understand you, and very confused about what is right and wrong.

In New Zealand, I have seen lots of Chinese children in Auckland, they are not as polite as Kiwis nor as Chinese. Even some adults do not really know how to behave right at a Chinese dinner table. Some immigrants say they are patriots to China, but they can't even tell how great China was before Qing dynasty, what is our true Chinese legacy, and the importance

of preserving our culture rather than destroying them by going on with your own lifestyle.

Our language is full of colours, and a variety of forms came from different parts of China. I like **Cantonese**, I want to learn it. Because Cantonese is one of the ancient tones remaining in China, because of this reason, you can see Canton Province has some particular traditions. But eating cats, I draw a line.



Stephen Wang 王莘

Food and language are two cultural connections hard for a migrant to give up. While food is tangible and is natural to be retained, language is intangible and needs to be consciously retained. If migration is a cultural journey of leaving one's birthplace, poetry is the journal which I wrote to record the scenes.

Writing is my important hobby. Although I studied engineering in China, I was always interested in literature – the art of language.

I moved to Wellington and began my Honors Degree in 2003, majoring in Information Systems. After graduation in 2005 I was working in a new environment of a local culture that was foreign to me. Chinese (**Mandarin**) became a secondary language that I only spoke outside of 9 to 5. This didn't make me feel isolated from it – on the contrary, it gave me more inspiration to do creative writing in Chinese.

I ran a personal poetry column in *Home Voice* (a Wellington Chinese newspaper) from 2015 to 2018, and published about 200 poems in the column.

I consider writing poems in Chinese as a way of appreciating the change of country and culture, homesickness, and link to the mother language. The collection of my poems, *The Terminal Harbour* (最后的港湾), was published in China in 2017 by Social Science Academic Press, Beijing.

I was invited to take part in the Oceania *Three Chinese Poets'* poetry recitation show in Sydney (大洋洲三人行中文诗会) in November 2016.

I founded a performing art group named Dream Stage in Beijing in 2017, and wrote the play script and lyrics. Dream Stage cooperated in the 2017 Edinburgh Chinese New Year Concert and held an opera concert, *In A Place Afar*, in the 2017 Edinburgh Festival Fringe. I was involved in another project, Opera Shun (歌剧《舜》). I wrote the script and the lyrics. Our team were trying to get the well-known Canadian composer Howard Shore to compose for the opera, but the project was temporarily stopped due to some local issues and Covid-19. I also wrote a novel, *Blossoming Sunflowers* (《葵花朵朵》). I have recorded and edited the recitation of about 50 poems, and received more than 1 million hits.

The content of my poetry is not only about my homeland and relevant past, but also about New Zealand, the present and the future.



Excerpt from
The Terminal Harbour
by Stephen Wang

*This beautiful harbour,
My terminal refuge
Have the arms of a mother.
Every roll of the wave
Is a gentle touch.
your lighthouse illuminating the route
are the eyes I attached to.
Every breeze under the moonlight
Is your hypnotic lullaby.
Oh, My terminal harbour,
With the unspeakable joy and gratitude,
I fall into your embrace.
Please allow me, a rusty anchor from a foreign land,
To sink in the surging water of yours,
Till the heaving and silent seabed,
To feel your body temperature,
Feel your forgiving heart.*

Ming Lee

I don't particularly have a very unique and inspiring story to tell – but I suppose that makes it more likely that I'll be able to connect with some.

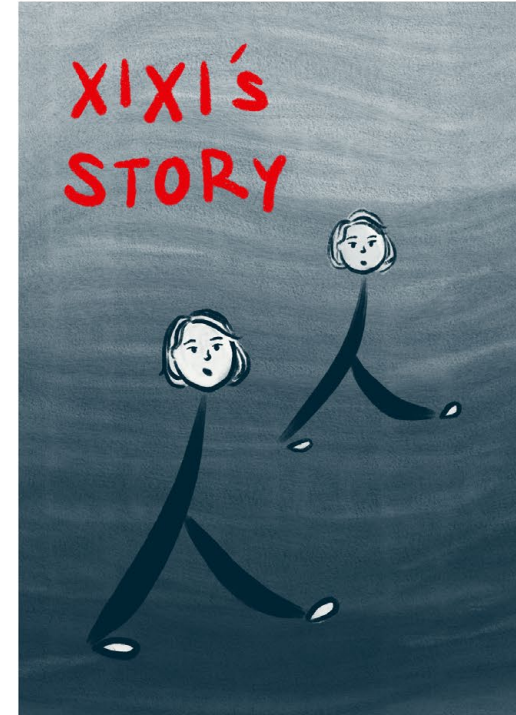
My parents immigrated to New Zealand to have a better life for the kids from Malaysia – four kids, very limited salary. Compared to my elder siblings, I have retained our languages (**Mandarin** and **Teowchew**) much less. This has posed its advantages and disadvantages when integrating into a new culture. There was a third **Hakka** language from my father's side that wasn't largely spoken except for within my dad's family. The reasons behind this aren't crystal clear but from a general feeling, my dad may have viewed his lineage as inferior due to coming from a more impoverished background. For now, this means that my cousins will have to carry the torch to ensure that this language lives on within my wider family.

I have previously struggled with my own cultural identity – White or Chinese? Look one way but behave another. I'm sure this is something that my future children will have to navigate themselves and I look forward to exposing them with as much of my own cultural heritage as much as possible.



from the illustrator, **K Emma Ng**: →

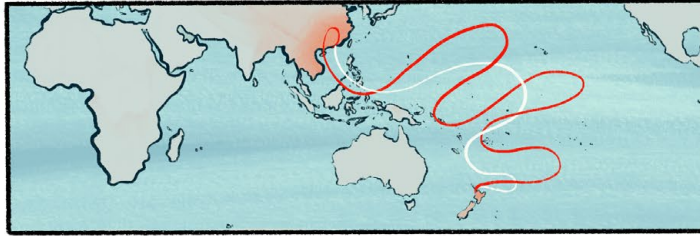
"Xixi's story is one of strength and grace. I was drawn to the way that relearning her mother tongues is playing a part in a larger process of reconnection and healing. With this comic, I tried to strike a balance – while many of Xixi's experiences have been difficult (reflecting challenges that migrant communities and children sometimes face), I wanted to make sure I also included some of the positive relationships and moments that have shaped Xixi's life."



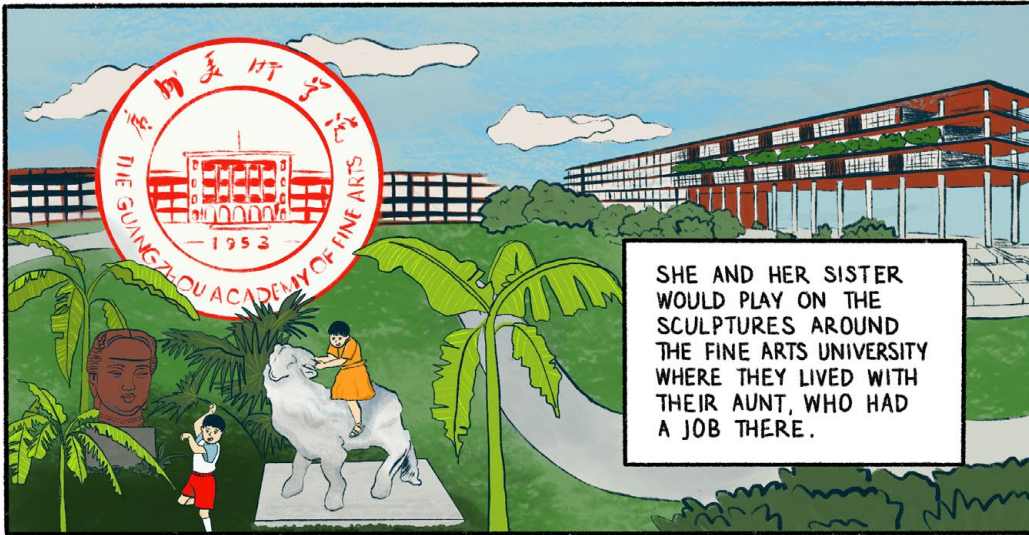
AS TOLD TO K. EMMA NG FOR THE
CHINESE LANGUAGES IN AOTEAROA
PROJECT , 2022

THIS IS XIXI'S STORY.

HERE IT'S TOLD IN ENGLISH, THE LANGUAGE XIXI AND I SPEAK WITH EACH OTHER EVEN THOUGH BOTH OF OUR FAMILIES HAIL FROM GUANGDONG, WHERE OUR WHANAUNGA SPEAK CANTONESE.



XIXI GREW UP IN GUANGZHOU. IT WAS A GREAT CHILDHOOD.



SHE AND HER SISTER WOULD PLAY ON THE SCULPTURES AROUND THE FINE ARTS UNIVERSITY WHERE THEY LIVED WITH THEIR AUNT, WHO HAD A JOB THERE.

THEY SPOKE CANTONESE AT HOME, AND LEARNED MANDARIN AT SCHOOL.

THEY LIVED WITH RELATIVES BECAUSE THEIR PARENTS WERE IN AOTEAROA.



WHEN XIXI WAS 10, FAMILY FRIENDS BROUGHT HER AND HER SISTER TO AOTEAROA TO LIVE WITH THEIR PARENTS.



XIXI DIDN'T REALLY KNOW WHERE NZ WAS...

WHAT IT WAS LIKE ...

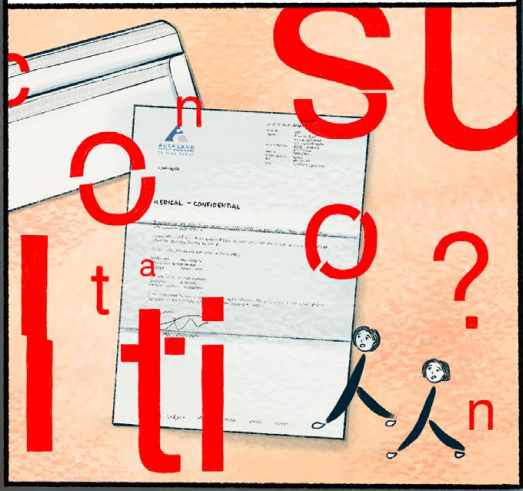
OR WHY THEY HAD TO GO...

THE CULTURE SHOCK WAS HUGE.



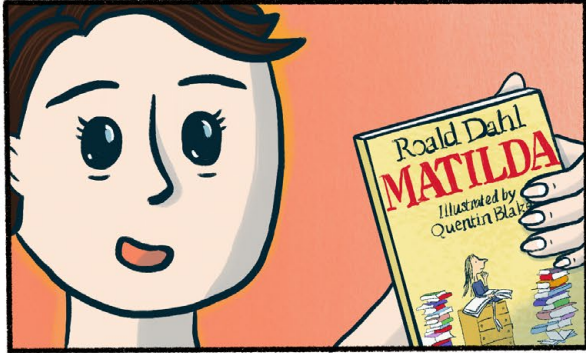
EVEN SAYING 'MUM' AND 'DAD' FELT STRANGE.

XIXI AND HER SISTER HAD ONLY JUST ARRIVED, BUT THEIR PARENTS ALREADY NEEDED THEIR HELP NAVIGATING THIS PLACE.



AT INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL XIXI LIKED HER ESOL (ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE) TEACHER.

WHEN XIXI WAS 12, THE TEACHER NOTICED THAT SHE AND HER SISTER NEEDED SOME HELP.



THE TWO GIRLS STAYED WITH TEACHERS, AND THEN WITH FOSTER FAMILIES.



LIVING WITH FOSTER FAMILIES IT WAS HARD TO HOLD ONTO THEIR MOTHER TONGUES.

XIXI HAS VISITED GUANGZHOU 3 TIMES SINCE MOVING TO AOTEAROA - EACH TIME IT WAS LIKE A LITTLE REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK.

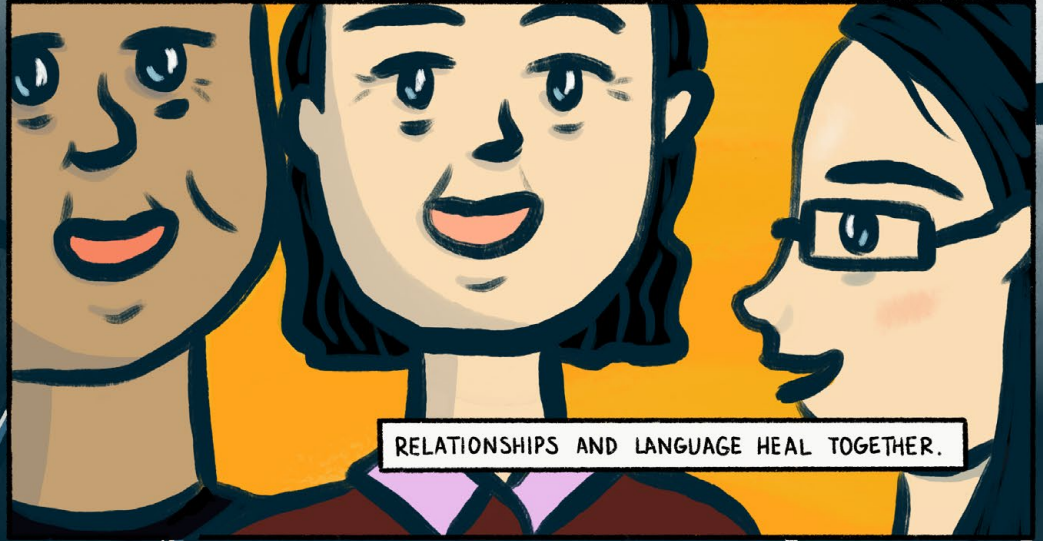


LANGUAGES HAVE TO BE BUILT BACK UP, BIT BY BIT.

AT HIGH SCHOOL XIXI STUDIED MANDARIN BY CORRESPONDENCE.

AS AN ADULT, DIFFERENT FLATMATES HAVE ENCOURAGED XIXI'S MANDARIN AND CANTONESE.

NOW WHEN XIXI VISITS HER PARENTS, SHE SPEAKS WITH THEM IN MANDARIN.



RELATIONSHIPS AND LANGUAGE HEAL TOGETHER.

Chinese language resources

For a full selection of resources – and links to those mentioned below – head to tepapa.nz/ChineseLanguages.

Cantonese

Cantonese Alliance, particularly the Language Resources section.

Chinese University of Hong Kong self-learning resources (Jyutping romanisation).

Foreign Services Institute course (Yale romanisation), hosted by LiveLingua. A rather old-fashioned course, but one of the few freely accessible full courses in Cantonese available on the web which can take a learner through from beginner to advanced level.

Hakka

Glossika Hakka Hailu and Sixian courses.

National Taiwan Normal University Resource List.

Hakka e-Learning Centre, developed by the Taiwanese Ministry of Education .

hi\Ermitage language project, Association for the Conservation of Hong Kong Indigenous Languages.

Hokkien

Speak Hokkien Campaign (from Malaysia, focus is on Penang Hokkien).

Chiah pá ·bē! Getting Started and Resource Guide (Taiwanese Hokkien).

Catherine Chou, Resources for Learning Taiwanese as an English speaker.

Mandarin

Szeto Pui Yiu, ‘Mandarin dialects: Unity in diversity’, *Unravel Magazine*.

Teochew

Learn Teochew with Ah Boon, a website originally designed to assist the author with his self-study goals, which has since evolved into an information resource for others. Aimed primarily at heritage language speakers

Josiah Goddard, *A Chinese and English Vocabulary in the Tie-Chu dialect* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press 1883).

WhatTCSays3: a Teochew language dictionary and phrasebook Android App for English and French speakers.

Wenzhounese

Glossika Wenzhounese course.

多謝閱覽

A big thanks to everyone who helped make this project a success:

Video interviewees

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Catherine Churchman – Penang Hokkien and Cantonese subtitler

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