

Do not discard your children's futures merely for the sake of realizing your dreams. Those parents who are about to nonchalantly immigrate to the United States should consider with caution the particular advantages and disadvantages which immigration will bear upon their children.

Hello everyone. I am happy to have the chance to participate in the forums of Wenxuecheng. As a Chinese male who grew up in America, I wanted to share with everyone (in particular, parents) information concerning the negative effects of having immigrated to America at a young age. In doing so, I hope to encourage those parents who are considering immigration to contemplate before they act. In particular, they ought to reflect upon the long-term problems manufactured by making their children abandon their Chinese backgrounds.

Do not discard your children's futures merely for the sake of realizing your dreams. Those parents who are about to nonchalantly immigrate to the United States should consider with caution the particular advantages and disadvantages which immigration will bear upon their children.

It has been the dream of Chinese parents for many years to immigrate to America. These parents believe that the air is good in America, that the standard of living is high, that the incomes are high, and most importantly, that the futures of their children would be better. To that effect, they have resolved to spare no expense for the sake of bringing their children to America at the earliest possible time. Many even wish to travel to America prior to giving birth, which would allow their child to automatically obtain an American passport, as if this would confer upon them "true Americanhood," and make them the pride and envy of the world. Countless Chinese parents have believed that children, being young, possess a high degree of adaptability, and that by growing up in America, a child is guaranteed to receive numerous benefits and opportunities toward his or her development. The phrase "for our children's futures" has been cited by Chinese parents as one of their most important motivations.

However, with the passage of many years involving deep reflection, trial-and-error, and assimilation, I have discovered that the majority of Chinese parents, at that moment when they decided to travel to America with their infant children in tow, in reality did not possess, even in the least, a clear idea of how negative the effects would be, toward their children, of growing up under American culture, or even Western culture in general: specifically, the assaults which they suffer with respect to their sense of belonging, their self-esteem, their ability to maintain networks of relationships, and the development of their upcoming careers.

The author himself, who was a seven-year-old when he departed with his parents from his hometown of Shanxi to the eastern coast of America, who grew up in America, who has gotten to deeply understand American culture, and who upon reaching maturity struggled desperately to recover his Chinese language — a young man of approximately thirty who possesses career-aspirations and who is ready to face challenges — wishes to share with everyone his way of viewing things: namely, that his parents, prior to immigrating to America in a hurry, should have gained a more complete understanding of the objective consequences upon him which their choices would incur, including consequences subsequent to childhood. Too many Chinese parents, upon witnessing the variegated decadences of Chinese society in isolation, have consequently believed that going to America could resolve the totality of their problems all-at-once and by means of magic. However, the reality begs to differ, and turns out to be crueler and more complicated than what was conceived.

In too many instances, those parents who are in a rush to immigrate to America do not understand in the least the attitudes and behaviors which American society fosters towards Chinese descendants. They stubbornly maintain that the pollutions of China, the stress induced by the education system, the condescension of people between provinces, the various unhealthy aspects of Chinese customs, the ill manners of people, and so forth, serve to justify their desire to travel headlong into that foreign country. In reality, their understanding is quite narrow, being limited to what they heard from their Chinese friends, from the internet, and from television — yet, all of these are rather superficial. What they cannot hear are the tribulations and injustices which Chinese descendants encounter, including the numerous traces of discrimination plaguing their everyday lives. That is to say, they have no means of communicating with those ABCs [*] who themselves grew up in America. Thus, what basis do they have, such as to blindly and stubbornly transform their children into "Americans," as if it were a gain more than a loss?

The truth is that I have virtually never seen an ABC, one who grew up in America, express to an audience of Chinese parents his true feelings. This is because the majority of ABCs do not know too much of the Chinese language, on account of having spent their lives with American children across elementary, middle, and high school. Thus, they were deprived of an environment consisting of Chinese sights and sounds, an environment which cannot be supplemented merely by studying the Chinese language at one of those "weekend schools." As a result, they gradually forgot their preexisting knowledge of Chinese, and were rendered incapable of speaking a sentence, despite still being Chinese based on physical appearance. These children now struggle with ordinary communication with their own parents, to speak nothing of explaining in detail to their parents, and to their peers back home, their feelings concerning their ABC situation. In any case, the parents, not hearing their children's feelings, mistake them as having quite glamorous lives, as if they have entirely melded into the mainstream circles of America which are composed of white people.

However, the life of the ABC is nearly universally bereft of the glamor which was supposed. That ABCs are unheard by their parents does not signify that their lives are better than Chinese children. It may be true that ABCs do not need to breathe the polluted air, nor grind their mental powers for the sake of memorizing "ars poetica," but they nearly universally fall prey to damages more invisible and heartfelt: 1) perpetual cultural segregation, 2) a lifetime status which they cannot shed as second-class citizens (especially males), and 3) inextinguishable obstacles in the way of their careers. According to my view, these invisible damages have led to long-term stress and ruin, and the parents at least should be taking pains to understand the truths of the matter, and engaging in more frequent communication, and listening more frequently to the children's feelings. They should not, in any case, blindly deny the existence of adverse elements and selfishly guard their own dignities, by which actions they have forfeited their claim to assisting their children and caring for them.

1) Chinese descendants who grow up in America encountered perpetual cultural segregation. As their parents did not have similar experiences, they were unable to understand: though America, indeed, possesses many benefits, it does not possess the justice imagined by parents, in that ABCs, being as fluent in English as white people (or better), are still incapable of gaining entry into the mainstream culture owing to their Chinese faces. Most ABCs continue to play with other ABCs. They are capable while young of making friends with various races (when I was young, I had friends who were white, black, and so forth), but — once

I became an adult — I very rarely saw ABCs who could nonchalantly fit into a social circle of white people. Despite their English not being worse than any white person, their parents, all the same, ought to realize: Western culture is acutely conscious of the differences of Chinese people's physical appearances. Americans do not think of Chinese descendants as having equal superiority, and have erected numerous stereotypes against Chinese descendants which are difficult to surmount. They think that Chinese descendants are a bunch of single-minded laborers who are absent of leadership talent, who are not effective communicators, and who are devoid of charm. Many white people including media personages are in the habit of publicly deriding Chinese descendants for being physically weaker than whites, for having small eyes, for being less beautiful, and so forth, all of these being ill-hearted ridicules. It is also easy for middle and high school students to be bullied by children of other races. Once they step into society, they are still met with covert instances of discrimination. As such, these adverse elements build up over time leading to rather significant emotional disturbances, such as to cause ABCs to lose their self-esteem, with unfavorable consequences following them for the rest of their lives.

Owing to these reasons, ABCs have lived their lives in a cultural crevice, whereby they grew up in America learning English along the way, but were perpetually denied the recognition of Americans as being "Americans." At the same time, they have been unable to fit into Chinese social circles. When I was in college, for example, I saw disgraceful instances where ABCs were ridiculed by Chinese foreign students. In reality, it is quite common among Chinese foreign students to ridicule ABCs because they do not know a sentence of Chinese, despite sharing an appearance with Chinese people. ABCs, as such, are shunned by both the American and the Chinese. They have become caught between a rock and a hard place. There is, in fact, not one crowd which welcomes them. Their parents are incapable of comprehending this sort of cultural segregation and self-despair, but nonetheless, I do insist that the parents must at least admit of the problem's existence, and not blindly deny the phenomenon. Many Chinese parents have continually coerced their children into fitting into the American mainstream, but I want them to know: it doesn't succeed in the end no matter how assiduously you try, because the Americans view us as foreigners based on the instantaneous notice of our Chinese faces. A man bearing a Chinese face, a yellow face, regardless of his English talent, will not be made a member of any inner circle. They do not view us as fellow citizens. Parents coming from China should not facetiously suppose that, if their children were only to strive somewhat harder, they could be mixed in with the white curriculum — this is a fantasy, and unrealizable. Thus, without fitting in, and being denied the spiritual support of the Chinese society, ABCs are exceedingly in an awkward position. Incidentally, the problem bears no easy solution — all those years in America having been spent to the exclusion of a Chinese language education, during what was a child's most sensitive period for language learning. Given the seriousness of this problem, parents ought to be well-versed as to the trauma toward their children which ensues. As they say, "no man is an island" — meaning that emotional health is, in fact, dependent on one's social circle. People need a "sense of belonging" and a place where they feel safe from being marked as foreigners, but these parents have discarded their children's "sense of belonging" and "social memberships." Without the circle, without acknowledgement, many people's emotions will sustain long-term damage, even to the point of complete animistic repression.

2) A status as a second-class citizen which cannot be shed: bringing children to America at an early age severs their connection with the homeland. The parents may not realize it, but they have dissected their child's choice of coming home to China at a later date. The actions of these parents are quite serious. Why?

All people ought to have a hometown. These parents do not realize the choice which they possessed themselves: they came to America thinking it was more opportunistic and beneficial for living than China. While this was not wrong in itself, they annihilated their children's right to choose between America and China, as they once did. They consigned their children to living in the West, meaning that their children will live under a society directed by white men, while yet possessing a Chinese visage. Chinese descendants are nearly universally viewed as second-class citizens, lower in grade than whites (and even blacks). The parents can fairly easily accept this reality, because it so happens, most of them have the option of withdrawing back to China (*since they were born and raised there*) ^[**], giving them a sense of stability. If America became unbearable, they indeed could return. However, ABCs have no such choice. Indeed, they have nothing. Their parents have fixed them upon the path of remaining perpetually under the white people as second-class citizens. They are not given the option of running from the white people back to China. Having a choice and not exercising it is totally different from not having a choice at all. Chinese descendants will become increasingly wistful of having a hometown, but at the last reckoning, they possess no hometown — neither the Chinese nor Americans will give them permission. They have no means of retreating to the familiar. They can only endure second-class status and have their spirits continually stifled. It is a plaintive situation in the utmost.

The author must also add: discrimination toward Chinese descendants is more obvious in the case of males. Most parents don't realize that American society especially disdains the men. White men have rather enjoyed making jokes of Chinese male descendants, portraying them as less attractive, less wrong, having small eyes and small sexual organs, and so forth. Starting from a young age, the males are bullied by their classmates and insulted. As this happens in a crucial period of development, it causes a large degree of invisible harm to their self-esteem. Male ABCs are nearly universally denied any standing within American society. They have difficulty finding romantic partners and experience bullying from many others within the job market and the wider society. Additionally, since Chinese descendants hardly hold any major government posts, and hardly possess delegates, the males are expected to suffer with no avenues of protestation. The males suffer losses in numerous fields of work, with hardly a single place where they are accorded an advantageous role. While the female ABCs receive a warm welcome from white males, the male ABCs are liked by neither white males nor females (an investigation has shown that compared with white, black, and Latino males, Chinese males are the least desired in terms of romance, and experience far greater difficulties). Those parents with sons need to know that their children will imminently lose their dignity and placement as men, and that their self-esteem will be shattered.

3) By losing their Chinese culture and backgrounds, children of immigrants face an assault to their future careers. ABCs, with their pariah identities, regularly meet with huge disadvantages in the fields of commerce, government, law, entrepreneurship, and even science and technology. The main reason is that these fields of work are inextricable from dealing with other human beings. It is not as if the highest test-takers are considered the best employees. But it so happens, ABCs are at a huge loss with respect to any sort of human interaction, on account of their denial of entry into both the American and Chinese social circles. In these fields of work, the development of one's career is highly dependent upon building rapport with customers, delegates, and investors. In the cold arena of relationship competition, having good grades alone does not yield a hair's width of benefit. Since having an ABC background does not match up with either the whites or the Chinese, they reach a bottleneck in advancement, since they are given no means of understanding the

close needs of their customers, or of connecting with them on intimate terms. Thus, parents must be careful, in that by bringing their children to America, they are clipping the wings off their children's future careers.

The author himself attended the Ivy League as an undergraduate, and afterward worked in New York and Hong Kong in investment firms. He has witnessed the reality himself of both white and Chinese youngsters rising in their careers and being accepted, and going on to form their own social circles, and heading toward a promising future. ABCs, on the other hand, are in awkward straits: namely, white American customers refuse to see them as fellow Americans, and Chinese customers refuse to consider them Chinese. To ABCs with aspirations this is a gigantic problem! Virtually no ABCs have overcome this barrier which arches over them, blocking out the sky. No hard work can avail them when the mainstreams of either side deny them permission. The ABCs around me have been some of the hardest working and talented people, but on account of their identities, and across a range of different fields, they have all been readily boxed in. If your child wants to go into commerce or government, you should consider the difficulties arising from this unconquerable chasm. Parents need to realize that they are asking their children to sacrifice their cultural membership, and that doing so merely to enjoy cleaner air is a gaping form of selfishness. Parents need consider what societal position their children will be accorded upon growing up and leaving the house. From the children's point of view, by having their cultural lifeline slashed apart so early on, it seems like a direly selfish and child-harming action. The bitter alienations suffered by the child later on are unspeakable, unenunciabile, unexpoundable.

Do not carelessly toss out the lifelong dignity and "sense of belonging" of your children purely on account of your immediate desire to abscond from China. Do not bear the misconception that once you arrive in America, education is still all-important. I know of numerous ABCs of superior education who have been at a loss for self-development, after which the parents fail to understand, or else, refuse to listen to their opinions and feelings, thereby relegating their children's lives to a lonely and perpetual dead-end.

In summary, my goal was to share with everyone the underlying truth about growing up in America, told from the point of view of an ABC. As the world provides no "free lunch," likewise, you should not believe that by growing up in America a child can somehow nonchalantly blend in with the social establishment of America. Do not believe that given the various disadvantages of Chinese society, by arriving in America, there will be a magical means leading to the extinction of your troubles. For your children, growing up in America will be a constant skirmish resulting in deep wounds toward his emotional wellbeing. In my view, it is not as good as letting a child blithely grow up as a Chinese citizen. Once the child grows up, he may all the same travel to America if he so chooses. Why be in such a hurry to convey him into such a Western nation where the people, to begin with, are condescending — all this, so that he may grow up in discrimination's shade? When we have a Chinese face, our exertions toward blending into America are a lost cause. Our children, on account of their Chinese faces, will not mix with the American establishment even if they exerted themselves to a greater degree and their English were still more optimal than already. It should also be noted by parents, that while they are busy enjoining their children to assimilate, their children are equally sustaining the loss of their identities as Chinese, and their backgrounds. By this facetious choice, their children's avenues for returning to China are being closed off. The final result is none other, than that the child is a stranger in both lands, and though China may continually progress, no method of returning discloses itself that their children might claim a share of China's successes and dignities. I think that all parents wishing to immigrate, or to

travel to America for the sake of giving birth, must be clear on the facts before making their choice. Do not leave for dead the developmental prospects of your latter generations owing to your shallow interests. There is no glamour as some suppose in being an ABC, only a large degree of anxiety and disquiet, which is not a fair trade at all. Since God created us as Chinese people, we should be proud of our station, and not pursue the corporately and innately impossible aim of shoving our child into the existence of the Western man.

[] Translator's Note: The term "ABC," which originates from the phrase "American-born Chinese," refers to an American citizen 1) of Chinese descent, 2) who spent his (or her) childhood in America. The term excludes Chinese people who immigrated to America as adults. However, according to common usage, of which the translator himself does not necessarily approve, it includes people who were born in China, but were taken to America as children. The essay is written in conformance with common usage.*

*[**] Translator's Note: The parenthetical clarification was added by the translator.*