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letters from the dorm

Embracing your cultural identity

Your ties to home are precious. This does not mean staying in an 'Asian bubble'; as you can actually understand others better



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As we were walking from one side of the campus to another, my friend said: "Literally every Asian here knows each other." This seemingly careless remark stayed with me, and led me to a very unscientific experiment: make up a Western first name, and then pair it with an Asian last name.

When talking to someone from my own culture, this made-up name often rings a bell in their head as they start suggesting all these other Asian names you might have been thinking of. On the other hand, asking my friends from other cultures often only yielded blank stares. It is true - minorities here form their own communities, and almost everyone knows everyone.

Perhaps this phenomenon is caused by Penn's support for diversity, and the many ways you can get to know other members of your cultural community - there are so many opportunities for students here to embrace their identity, ranging from clubs and organisations, to cultural spaces

classes. Personally, what has tied me to home the most has been Hong Kong Student Association, which I am very much involved in. Weekly meetings, membership events, executive board socials ... all these have constantly reminded myself of my identity: a Hongkonger.

It is the kind of relief of someone understanding you, when you revert to your mother tongue under extreme stress; the kind of Chinatown trips where you stock up on anything that feels like home; and the kind of warmth you get for finally making a dish the traditional way, the way your parents make it.

As we all leave our parents and go to school with a bunch of new people we do not know, we need something to hold us to who we were before this whirlwind. This does not mean staying in an "Asian bubble", or not exploring things in the name of staying true to yourself. In fact, it means the opposite - it takes a certain level of security in yourself to try new things and to meet different people, which can be achieved by

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At university, it's great to be with others who grew up in similar environments and cultures

staying in touch with your cultural identity. As an international student, the ties to home are particularly precious, and learning about others' identity as Asian Americans also helped me gain a different perspective.

With the Facebook group "Subtle Asian Traits" taking the internet by storm, there has been no better time for cultures to come together and celebrate their identity, including the little things that make each culture unique. By staying in touch with my cultural identity, I have realised that I am never truly alone, as I share space with so many others who grew up in similar environments and cultures.

More students seek higher degrees for better jobs



As Duan Xia stepped out of the examination room, she smiled nervously. "Finally, I don't have to get up at seven every day!"

There is a reason why Duan, an English student from Sun Yat-sen University, in Guangdong province, was both happy and relieved - she had just finished her national entrance exam for postgraduate studies.

A total of 2.9 million mainlanders took the exam from December 22 to 24 last year. In 2017, there were around 2.4 million candidates, according to the Ministry of Education. A national survey has shown that growing job market pressure was the main factor behind the increase. Duan said she decided to take the exam so she

could get a good job, possibly with a multinational corporation.

"I don't find English competitive [enough] in the job market, so I hope to do

a Masters in International Business, which would be useful."

Her roommate, Xu Xueying, has chosen a Master of Communication programme to help land her dream job - visual design.

Both Duan and Xu said they had been preparing for the exam for the past nine months. They said they were "exhausted" after studying in the library from 8am to 10pm almost every day. Xu said: "I was happy during the preparation, not only with the knowledge I gained, but also with the good habits I cultivated, like planning ahead. This may benefit my lifelong studies."

Li Ruozhu, who studies Chinese at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, in Hubei province (湖北), hopes to pursue a

postgraduate degree in journalism. Li said her dream career is to become a news commentator.

"I know my ideals may fade away one day, but we have to know what we really want," she said. "I think the first step of news commentary is to persuade yourself, and then you can lead others with your confidence and thoughts."

Exam candidates had the full support of their fellow students. Du Hansan, from the University of Heilongjiang, in Heilongjiang province (黑龙江), along with dozens of other students, wrote 300 wish cards and sent them to the candidates. He said: "We want these fighters to know that whatever the result, once they've tried their best, the efforts are worthwhile."

Liang Xinlu, Sun Yat-sen University

