

## Where Are You From?

同志社国際高等学校 3年 川端詩織

“Where are you from?” It’s a question that seems so simple. But for me, and for many others like me, it’s like a riddle wrapped and hidden in a map of countries, languages, and cultures.

I do not remember much from my childhood, but one memory stays vivid to this day. One afternoon in my kindergarten class. On the table was a paper fully printed with flags from all over the world. The teacher had asked us to pick a flag that resonated with us the most, or simply one that was of our hometown. My fingers busily pointed over the three flags; ‘Japan’, ‘Hong Kong’ and ‘Canada’. I am half-Japanese, half-Chinese, or rather say Hong Kongese and have some roots in Vancouver as well. That tug of war of identities began when my teacher came over to my table and said, “Hey, Shiori. Remember, you can only choose one.” At such a young age, I found myself at a crossroad, trying to decide which part of me to offer up. Is it where I was born? Where I grew up? Or could it be the languages I speak, or the traditions I practice? So, let me ask you this: *What if the answer isn't just one place? What if “where you are from” is more of a journey than a destination?*

Growing up mixed, I quickly realized that the world wants simple answers. But I don’t fit into those neat little boxes. I am not just one thing or another. I carry pieces of multiple cultures within me, and they’re often pulling me in many, different directions. When I was with my Chinese relatives, I felt like I wasn’t enough of that culture. When I was with my Japanese family, I often felt like I didn’t belong there either. Neither side fully accepted me, because they couldn’t see me as a whole person. I didn’t check all the boxes, and that’s what made me feel like an outsider in both worlds. But, over time, I came to realize that this sense of being “in between” isn’t something to be ashamed of. It’s really a source of strength. You see, being multinational

means I get to see the world through multiple lenses and connect with a broader range of people. My identity isn't about fitting into one, single category. It's about weaving together different strands of experience into something uniquely mine.

Here's the thing: identity is fluid. It evolves over time. We change, we grow, and we adapt. Whether you are a local Japanese or a mixed kid like me, we should be aware of how our identities are shaped by the various cultures and experiences that influence us.

Think about it this way. Our identities are built on layers like family, culture, language, history, the places we've been and the people we've met. These layers don't erase each other; they add on to the complexity of who we are. And each time we encounter a new piece of the world, we are allowed to integrate it into our understanding of ourselves.

So, the next time someone asks you, "Where are you from?" think about it for a moment. Maybe the answer isn't just one place. Maybe it's not one thing at all. Maybe it's the story of the places you've been, the languages you speak, the cultures that have shaped you, and the journey you're still on.

To everyone out there who feels like they don't fit into one box, whether you're mixed, multilingual, or simply navigating the complexities of your own identity. Remember this: You are allowed to be a work in progress. You are allowed to redefine yourself over time.

Embrace the fluidity of your identity. Don't let anyone tell you that you have to choose one part of yourself over another. Your story is yours to tell, and it doesn't need to fit into anyone else's expectations.

You are not confined by labels. You are the sum of your experiences, your growth, your choices. You are the story you choose to create.

So, when someone asks, “Where are you from?” you can take a moment to smile and say, “I’m from everywhere that’s made me who I am. And I’m still figuring it out.”

Thank you.