

## ACCENT

In my home country I get told  
to go back to my country.

In Zhōngguó, I'm not Zhōngguó rén.  
Even I don't get along with my Chinese friends.

The mountains remain the only place  
where no one asks, "What are you doing here?"

And everywhere else,  
I keep my head down, try to pass with the crowd.

Why am I doing all this?

Government exploits the land.  
My kind get blamed for stealing.

## AFTER WRITING ABOUT THE MASSACRE

of my people, my friend asks, *Why do you  
cling to the past?* And I don't blame him.

History is only history if  
children sing the melody of it

pass the lyrics along to their future  
children like secondhand grief. I pour

a glass of whisky and I don't drink it  
let my nose do the tasting. I don't

smoke in the United States. That's a lie.  
I save my cigarettes for longing.

And tonight is one of those nights. I walk  
outside to greet this foreign country—

hints of smoke and fire dance in the skin-  
biting air. In the morning, the fumes

scatter into calm dreams. When everyone  
is awake, it is my turn to sleep.

## IMMIGRATION/INTERROGATION

is an immigrant still an immigrant  
without citizenship? is an immigrant

still an immigrant without speaking more  
than one language? is an immigrant still

an immigrant without an origin  
country to call home? is an immigrant

still an immigrant without recalling  
the border crossing? is an immigrant

still an immigrant without ever looking  
out from a plane's window, a boat's hull, or  
a truck's bed floor? is an immigrant still  
an immigrant without the foreign gods?

is an immigrant still an immigrant  
without the invisible burden? is

an immigrant still an immigrant without  
the silent bowings? is an immigrant

still an immigrant without living to  
survive? is an immigrant still an

immigrant without the blurred memories?  
is an immigrant still an immigrant

without the burying? is an immigrant  
still an immigrant without the nightmare

of drowning in an ocean during a  
thunderstorm? is an immigrant still an

immigrant without the unnamed loneliness?  
is an immigrant still an immigrant

without the desire for a brighter  
future? is an immigrant still an  
  
immigrant without the constant hunger?  
is an immigrant still an immigrant  
  
without the quietness hidden beneath  
a smile? is an immigrant still an  
  
immigrant without dreaming of home,  
even when not knowing where it is?

## WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS?

Not dead. Not running. My mother  
walking again. No more floods. Not  
worrying whether the ceilings will hold.

A library somewhere in the neighborhood.  
Dry books, all of them. Shih tzus barking  
in the front yard. Tulips, green grass jelly

plants, the pond repopulated with gold  
and red koi. A child (is that too much?)  
smiling at the crimson sunset. Perhaps

I will start painting again. Paintings.  
A carved, welcome sign on the front door.  
The doors rehinged, repainted. The warmth

of sweet tea next to a plate of biscuits served  
on the porch. The porch refloored. Meatballs  
and noodles in a bowl of savory broth.

Coffee and philosophy. My father reading  
the news. Ancestors watching over us. Heaven  
on earth: no more suffering. Not asking

for scraps. I apologize, I didn't prepare  
for this question.

## IN-BETWEEN

I don't suppose I will be remembered.  
People fail to catch my two-syllable  
name, mistake me, sadly, for the closest  
Asian guy they know. The history of

our families and countries, forcibly  
squeezed into one container, as they say,  
*Sorry, sorry. I'm terrible with names.*  
Friends, colleagues, and teachers alike also

fail to recognize my face when they pass  
by me on the streets, my face remains sunk  
-en under all the white faces, unseen.  
I don't blame anyone. When I returned

my uncle too, before his death, coughed,  
confessed, "I didn't know you're still alive."

## ACCENT

My Chinese is as good as dead: lost both  
in my tongue and memory, like the names

of my ancestors, whose syllables were  
erased from the pages of history

by dancing flames or the mouth of the sea.  
In my dreams, I understood what you meant

when you whispered in your language on that  
rainy, sleepless night. Perhaps I have been

away for too long. When I wake, I kiss  
your bare belly as you toss from one side

of the bed to the next, your eyes remain  
closed. There are words for what I am doing—

but I've yet to learn them. I say, *I don't  
know—I want you.*

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