

## Values of a Banana

(Original)

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Banana. Yellow on the outside and white on the inside, the term banana is used to describe Asians or Asian Americans who are perceived to have assimilated into Western society and do not conform to “Oriental culture”. A representation of stereotypes, psychological segregation, racial bias and Asian hate, banana is a nickname that followed me through childhood and has continuously played a large role in my personal, social and cultural values.

I immigrated from the Republic of Korea to Canada at a young age and assimilated quickly into North American culture. Consequently, while my early adolescence and family upbringing was mainly influenced by Asian culture, a large portion of my youth was shaped by Western values. This often resulted in contradictory principles. For instance, the increasing individualism in mainstream Western society as opposed to the collectivism in its Eastern counterpart, confused my perception of relationships. Everything from my mannerisms, my view on social issues, my opinions, my lunch and my fashion, my values were always multifarious.

However, growing up as part of a Diaspora, I was always striving to completely assimilate into Western society. Assimilation represented acceptance and belonging while resistance resulted in exotification, ridicule and racism. Occidental media’s positive portrayal of white characters alongside racist Asian tropes like Yellow Peril in Iron Man’s Mandarin or Long Duk Dong in Sixteen Candles, only further damaged my view of my culture, as did backhanded compliments like “You’re cool for an Asian!”. Even my Korean heritage, being heavily influenced by Western imperialism and cultural colonialism, subtly fuelled the pressure to assimilate.

In various methods, I have always been told: *the whiter you are, inside and out, the better*

*you are*. This internalised principle that anything stereotypically Asian about myself was negative resulted in an attempt to eradicate my Korean philosophies. I remember deliberately distancing myself from my family to reinforce my individualism or performing worse academically to reject the Confucian tradition of learning.

As a “banana”, I was always too Asian or too white, never Asian enough or white enough. An excluded berry amidst perfectly divided fruit groups. I did not accept my homeland as my home but America did not accept me as its own.

However, when my geography class watched a video interviewing diverse groups of generational youth and their experience with cultural conflict, my perspective completely changed. I learned that this complicated societal disconnection was a shared experience; I was not alone. When the youth shared their struggles about accepting their multiculturalism, it also made me question, *who am I? What are my values?*

Before, I had always thought that being Asian or white were mutually exclusive. If I wanted to be white, if I wanted to fit in and call America my home, I had to throw out my Asian values. But now, I am learning that it is okay to be a melange of cultures. I am in the process of reformulating my values to accurately articulate who I am, to encompass everything about myself including my relationships, experiences, heritage and identity.

My heart lies in equality, empathy, courage, humility and love. I believe in Asian American justice, Indigenous reconciliation, anti-racism, cultural diversity, arts, education and interpersonal relationships. My values are a unique mosaic constructed with colourful pieces from my experience as an Asian immigrant, a 2SLGBTQ+ woman, a friend, a daughter, a student, a person, an identity and a banana.

These values define myself and the world around me. Currently, I’m working on recognising my own microaggressions, educating myself and others and advocating for Asian American rights in my community and around the world through various organisations and movements.

I’m in the process of defining what Asian American means *to me* because being Asian is not a monolithic experience and it certainly does not define a biological or geographical state. Rather, it is a broad idea that each of us must shape into our own. So, I will not be reduced

to simple colours such as yellow and white because I have a much more complicated story to tell made up of rainbows.

### **Works Cited**

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