

Intersectional (re)developments and (new?) navigations: a post-orientalist autoethnographic exploration of “Asian” Australian identities, histories and representations

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Abstract

Purpose – Written from a migrant “Asian” ex-schoolteacher scholar’s standpoint, this paper explores how “Asian” Australian identity is developed and navigated within the intersectional racialised and gendered landscape of contemporary “Australia”. It focuses on the enduring legacy of white supremacist and patriarchal structures – rooted in the White Australia Policy – and how they shape the intersectional experiences of racialised subjects perceived as perpetually foreign. The aim is to understand how “Asian” Australian identity is formed in relation to ongoing Orientalist discourses and exclusionary national narratives, with attendant implications for more concerted race-conscious approaches in school curriculum and pedagogy.

Design/methodology/approach – Employing a critical autoethnographic approach, the paper engages with personal narrative as a method for unpacking the intersection of race, gender, migration and national identity. Drawing on Dabashi’s post-Orientalist framework and the author’s conceptual tool, Gold Noise, the analysis examines how mobility and belonging are experienced through overlapping structures of power, and how these structures inform identity formation for “Asian” Australians.

Findings – The study highlights the ways in which “Asian” Australian identities are constructed through tension, negotiation and resistance within a social context that continues to centre whiteness and masculinity. It demonstrates that identity is not static but actively shaped by intersecting forces of racialisation, patriarchy and migration, producing both constraints and possibilities for self-definition.

Originality/value – By integrating intersectional analysis with postcolonial theory and autoethnographic reflection, this paper offers a unique perspective on how identity is developed and navigated under systemic and historical marginalisation in Australia. It contributes to the broader discourse on identity politics by foregrounding lived experience as a critical site of knowledge production and resistance.

Keywords Identity, Intersectionality, Asian Australian, (Post-)orientalism, Critical autoethnography, Race and racialisation

Paper type Conceptual paper



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A (new) history part 1: Identifying with chinese restaurants and recipes

Food, for me, is a constant pleasure: I like to think greedily about it. Reflect deeply on it, learn from it. (Lawson, 2020, p. vii).

I've always been a fervent fan of all things food – for some reason, some of my fondest childhood memories revolve around the round, wooden, white-clothed tables of Chinese restaurants in Singapore. In these memories, I inhale the surprising and seductive caress of complex aromas gently luring me in from the entrance. I feel my body jolt as I recall the game of informal hopscotch that ensues as I try to dodge and skip past the oncoming trolleys of food *en route* to my family's assigned table in the already packed restaurant. I hear the waitress' impatient recapitulation of our order in Chinese or Cantonese and the yelling of various other instructions across the restaurant. I feel my stomach rumble and mouth water as I deliberately tune out of the Singlish – a portmanteau of "Singapore" and "English" referring to the informal, colloquial form of English used in Singapore that incorporates elements of other languages, including Chinese and Cantonese, and has its own unique pronunciation and grammar rules (Alsagoff, 2010) – conversations at the family table and impatiently wait for the food to arrive. I remember the scenes of ordered pandemonium and smile to myself.

Beyond the flurry of activity and flavours that float freely in my mind, an integral part of these fond memories is infused with a theoretically grounded *wa/ondering*. Here, I use this portmanteau of "wander" and "wonder" with the forward slash to embody the slow, careful and curious way of attending to the everyday nitty-gritty – not in the sense of a day-to-day banality that leads to political closure and philosophical ennui (MacLure, 2010), but rather, of "public, social and intimate worlds that have capacity to affect and be affected" (Mackinlay, 2019, p. 6). In other words, as we consider new histories, and the past-present-future tensions of identity and representation, *wa/onder* here is a "state of being wide open" (Stewart, 2007, p. 120) to unexpected connections that allows theory to proliferate from the minutiae of the everyday to contest static arenas of habit and to "open new possibilities for thinking and doing" (MacLure, 2010, p. 277). My *wa/ondering* here also embodies Denzin's (1997) notion of "reflexive critique", where the "text is reflexive, not only in its use of language but also how it positions the writer in the text and uses the writer's experiences as both the topic of inquiry and a resource for uncovering [and reimagining] problematic [intercultural] experience[s] (p.216). For instance, I *wa/onder* about what comprised the respective recipes, and whether, and how closely, the recipes in question were followed. I *wa/onder* as well if my extended family's penchant for good food and expensive restaurants like the one in my memory – part of the Singaporean mantra, "die die must try" (Tarulevicz, 2013) [1] – is one of the core ingredients in the recipe for my sustained love of food. I *wa/onder* if perhaps, it is a slice of the memories of my mother's hearty home-cooked meals growing up mixed with a sprinkle of all the cooking I did in my undergraduate years as an international student in Australia that preheated my passion for food and food recipes. I *wa/onder* if, and how, these different ingredients might have dissolved into each other, and *wa/onder* if it is the combination of them that has comprised, in some part, the recipe for my identity.

A (new) history part 2a: Identifying with maternal cooking and recipe

I remember the stuffy Singaporean humidity and kneeling on the chair as a primary school child, legs dangling precariously off the edge, with elbows firmly planted on the dining table in front of me to allow both hands to prop my head up. I recall the aggressive whirring of the rangehood that plays basso continuo to the ostinato of the swishing and sizzling of the food –

at times western, at times Chinese, at times Southeast Asian – in the pan. I recollect my mother’s waltz-like movement as she whirls and twirls between the stove and chopping board, and the rumbling of my stomach as this happens, especially after a long day of school:

Do you mind writing out the recipe for me once you’re done, please, Mum?

As I reflect on this other fond childhood memory, I am compelled to wonder what exactly one would find in an identity recipe for me, and the ways in which its constituent ingredients might have dissolved into each other over time and space. I am half Foochow, quarter Cantonese, an eighth Hokkien and an eighth Peranakan, but I am one whole Singaporean Chinese – or at least, this is what seems to be fixed in my mind despite having resided in Australia for nearly half my existence from my undergraduate years onwards. I am also a middle-class, straight, able-bodied male – the firstborn grandchild of both my maternal and paternal extended families. Growing up, I attended two of Singapore’s most elite private schools that upheld the State’s narrative of race-based harmonious multiculturalism based on inherited colonial racialised categories ([Abu Bakar *et al.*, 2021](#)), while surrounded by largely safe and secure relationships with racial-cultural majority Singaporean Chinese friends and family. As a result, I did reasonably well academically, was never in want of opportunities, and never felt excluded.

It was during my time in school that I was furnished with the “banana” label. The metaphor is derived from the banana fruit and is often used in Singapore as a pejorative term for individuals who are physically “yellow” – i.e. “Asian” – on the outside, but white on the inside; a term used to refer to an English-educated ethnically Chinese person who has adopted “Western” attitudes and who is unable to, or uncomfortable with, speaking Mandarin or any Chinese dialect ([Lee, 2015](#)). In short, it is a label which connotes an ethnic traitor of sorts ([Lee, 2015](#)). It is also a label that is frowned upon given that ethnic “mother tongues” like Chinese are positioned as “repositories and mediums of ethnic[...]identity” ([Alsagoff, 2010](#), p. 342) in Singapore as a means of keeping the State anchored with a sense of notional racialised Chineseness ([Ang and Colic-Peisker, 2021](#)).

Prejudice notwithstanding, this identity label was something I fixed on and wore with pride. At that point, it did not really matter that I held my mother tongue in low regard, or that I cared more about the money I would receive in little red packets rather than the cultural significance of Chinese New Year. I had unknowingly harboured internalised deficit perspectives about my cultural and linguistic background ([Cabiles, 2025](#)) and as such, it was with great excitement and anticipation that, upon completion of high school and national service, I moved from Singapore to Brisbane, Australia, to pursue further education at a Group of Eight university [2]. Having led a life of relative body, class, sexuality, gender and race privilege up to this point, nothing could really have prepared me for the predominantly raced and gendered rollercoaster ride into, and within, the overwhelmingly white Australian context – a case of a missing recipe, perhaps. But what *comprises* a recipe?

A (new) history part 2 b: Identifying with grandmaternal cooking and recipe

Recipe (n.):

1580s, “medical prescription, a formula for the composing of a remedy written by a physician”, from French *récipé* (15c.), from Latin *recipere* “take!” (this or that ingredient), second person imperative singular of *recipere* “to hold, contain” (see receive). It was the word written by physicians at the head of prescriptions. Figurative meaning “a prescribed formula” is from 1640s. Meaning “instructions for preparing a particular food” is recorded by 1716 ([Online Etymology Dictionary, 2026a, 2026b](#)).

To this day, having long moved on from Singaporean formal schooling to Australian undergraduate and postgraduate study as an international student to school as well as university teaching as an Australian Permanent Resident, I still use the recipes passed down from my mother. During our weekly video calls, as we update each other on our respective weeks, we often talk in detail about what we consumed or cooked, lamenting aspects of the dish we disliked, critiquing possible future recipe changes, as well as fondly sharing what we enjoyed most – whether smell, flavour, texture, longevity or convenience – about the dish. Recently, we have even started talking about my fraternal grandmother’s hybrid Peranakan cooking, happily recalling our favourites, revelling in the memory of being constantly overfed, but also rueing our sluggishness in asking for her recipes to be passed down. In this sense, the recipes that underpin cooking are “woven through our lives, encompassing memory, desire and sustenance, both physical and emotional[...].never[...].an end in [themselves]” (Lawson, 2020, p.vi). Indeed, a recipe can mean many things and “be many things: a practical document; a piece of social history; an anthropological record; a family legacy; an autobiographical statement; even a literary exercise” (Lawson, 2020, p. 3).

I am thus compelled to wonder how the obvious historical-anthropological-autobiographical potential of recipe works in tandem with my “Asian” identity which has shifted across time and space (in education contexts and beyond) as well as broader concoctions of “Asianness” in Australia(n education). For instance, I know that ingredient lists in recipes can be helpful, but what happens if you’re unable to access the exact type of ingredients I’ve used, or the dish needs to be altered to suit the varying dietary requirements of whomever you’re cooking for? Similarly, what happens when considering how to best teach “Asian” students from entirely different social-historical-cultural contexts? Recipe cooking instructions can prevent complete destruction, but what happens if the flavour profile needs to be altered for specific palates and tastebuds? Correspondingly, how do we best engage the diverse yet specific flux of “Asian” identity as educators? When using a recipe, there is always bound to be slight variation in cooking process, outcome, required serving sizes and so on (Lawson, 2020), meaning that, much like teaching, we can never truly replicate approaches or results with exact precision. Recipes (like our identities and teaching) can, and should, grow and change as we grow and change (Lawson, 2020) and so, in this regard, assuming the fixity of recipes – and specific pedagogical approaches based on fixed assumptions of who our students are – can be problematic.

Indeed, working off the basis of some sort of fixed identity recipe is deeply problematic. This line of thinking is grounded in Dabashi’s (2009) post-Orientalist call to re(de)fine and (dis)locate contemporary sites of Orientalism, which continues to configure myriad educational experiences in Australia and other white settler colonial contexts (Teo, 2026). As a theoretical field, post-Orientalism foregrounds the role of postcolonial agency and minoritized knowledge systems in disrupting dominant western ways of thinking (Dabashi, 2009). In line with this post-Orientalist sensibility, my autoethnographic exploration as an Occidental ex-schoolteacher scholar in this paper thus interrogates ‘traditional’ Orientalism, which has previously claimed authority in explaining and positioning the Other as simultaneously deficient and static. I further frame this ongoing exploration of “Asian” Australian recipes/representations/histories/identities through my post-Oriental conceptual tool of *Gold Noise* (Teo, 2023), which extends on the notion of racialised “white noise” in the Australian education context. Specifically, *Gold Noise* is unique to “Australian racism through its focus on the ways in which ‘Asian’ Australians internalise and negotiate racism and/or the discourse of Australian multiculturalism with/in the white noise that masks and sustains the possessive logics of patriarchal white [Australian] sovereignty” (Teo, 2023, p. 459). Conceptually, *Gold Noise* (Teo, 2023) acknowledges that, beyond (internalized)

racialised multiculturalist discourses – seen in the shift in my own deficit perspectives about culture and language that were formed in Singapore and carried to Australia, to the current change of heart as I write this paper – “Asian” Australians are not deficient, static or homogeneous, and certainly not without ongoing agency. *Gold Noise* thus accounts for difference and different identity constructions, which allow “Asian” Australians to strategically express how they choose to be, or choose to be seen (Ngan and Kwok-bun, 2012). Within intercultural education, this counteracts the ever-present dangers of “cultural racism”, i.e. the use of “culture” or “cultural difference” to flatten and elide minoritized identities shaped by racism (Bekerman, 2020). In this sense, *Gold Noise* is a mutually constituted and contested space that accounts for social-cultural-historical-political exigencies and subjective tensions at the nexus of migration, racism, sexism and multiculturalism in Australia. It is thus useful in interrogating the paradoxical opportunities and obstacles of “Asian” Australian identity and representation that is always already entangled with white patriarchal colonial Australia and its education systems.

To further articulate *Gold Noise*’s utility in better understanding “Asian” identity in (intercultural) education, I note that were I to lean solely on, and assume the staticity of, the Singaporean Chinese identity I articulated previously, I run the risk of not remembering how this Singaporean Chineseness was itself shaped by fluxes in history, geopolitics and ideals of nation-building (Ang and Colic-Peisker, 2021). A Chineseness that is a locally produced hybrid shaped by Southeast Asian histories, multilingual everyday life and state multiculturalism, different from mainland Chinese Chineseness, which tends to be anchored in China and tied more directly to the State’s national, cultural and civilizational narratives (Ang, 2017). I risk not remembering that the very notion of my own Singaporean Chineseness has been formed in an ethnically Chinese dominated Singaporean society (Lowe, 2019) where the “state-sanctioned image of the nation is one defined by a skewed version of multiculturalism with the racial coding of CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian or Other)” (Pugsley, 2010, p. 182), each inscribed with essentialised, institutionalised understandings that aim to establish predetermined and predictable national(istic)ly-grounded ethnic/racial characteristics (Marotta and Muraca, 2017). I thus wonder if this is why my childhood memories involve partial engagement and enjoyment of, but not affiliation with, Chinese Chinese culture/food/language/nationhood.

In addition, I risk not remembering that Singaporean society upholds a particular version of Chineseness that is such an integral part of the nation’s cultural mindset that it is pushed “officially as a desirable and preferred Identity (with a capital I)” (Ang, 2001, p. 92), forming an ethnoracial hierarchy based on the special position of superiority of a Singaporean Chinese majority (Lim, 2021) in society and schooling (Abu Bakar et al., 2021). I further risk not remembering that the ideal Singaporean male is constructed along racial lines, where macro structures and micro everyday norms promote Chinese patriarchy (Pugsley, 2010), which articulates at the family level via a transnationally similar “Chineseness” involving an age and gender-based power structure premised on an institutionalised yet fluid subordination and exploitation of females (Lim, 2021). Of course, beyond the family unit, this patriarchal authority is also vested at a governmental level in Singapore, which benefits the collective public patriarchy in society (see Lim, 2021) and where ethnic Chinese are privileged through a “sinicization of Singaporean masculinity” (Pugsley, 2010, p. 173).

As I continue wondering about *Gold Noise* and the ways it captures the dynamism of identity, I remember the “banana” label growing up and how it further problematises any sort of fixed identity recipe (Singaporean Chinese or otherwise) as well as how such assumed fixities are further confounded by my move to Australia for university and subsequent settling as a skilled migrant. Here, I wonder about broader historical-anthropological

discourses where Orientalists invented alternative civilizational categories – Islamic, Chinese, Indian etc. and altogether “Oriental” – to support the anxious construction of an abstract concept known as “the west” (Dabashi, 2009). I also remember the ways in which “civilizations were invented contrapuntally by Orientalism[...]to match, balance, and authenticate” a “Western Civilization” unified against coloniality’s damaging consequences (Dabashi, 2001, p. 364). I then wonder about how these broader discourses structure the “infinite differences and diversities of human beings through a rigid [racialised] binary coding” (Hall, 1998, p. 290) and the commensurate problem of “reaching for an essentialised racial identity of which we think we can be certain” (Hall, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, p. 474).

Indeed, moving into the Australian (education) context shifted my position in the racial hierarchy, and forced me to question the fixity of my supposed (Singaporean) Chineseness. Within this context where a pervasive white national imaginary endures (Ang and Colic-Peisker, 2021), I was forced to come to terms with how integral the Orientalist idea of the “Yellow Peril” was to Australian nation-building such that the “ideological links between racism, populism and nationalism were sanctioned by the state, for whom racialist nationalism became a central ideological project” (Ang, 2001, p. 102). I had to become quickly acquainted with how this transnational transitioning of “Asianness” intersects with my lived “realities [that continue to be] mediated by enduring histories of whiteness and colonial race matrices” (Marotta and Muraca, 2017, p. 242) in both schools (Teo, 2023) and higher education (Teo and Yip, 2025), and which speak to the insidious, ever-changing nature of racialisation and racism. Moving to Australia, I was no longer just “Singaporean” or for that matter, “Singaporean Chinese”, tethered as it were to certain supposedly essentialist notions of Chineseness (Ang, 2001). Like many other international students who look like me (Teo and Yip, 2025), I became racialised as “Asian” in line with the Australian popular imagination that “Asians” with their “black hair, yellow skin and slanty eyes” (Ang, 2004,

p. 148) – as a stereotypical and homogenised group – hail from East, Southeast and to a smaller extent, South Asia (Ang, 2001).

Living in Australia for nearly two decades, my experience as an ex-schoolteacher and current researcher has allowed/allows me to bear firsthand witness to the ways that such essentialisations play out for both “Asian” students and teachers in harmful ways (Teo and Yip, 2025). Further, as part of this ongoing racialisation that shapes my identity, I continue to become “Asian” [3] through enmeshment in the “inevitable situatedness of discursive knowledge” (Ang, 2001, p. 167) grounded in a history of white racialised violence as seen in colonisation, the Gold Rush, the White Australia Policy and the Cronulla Riots (Hage, 2014), and a “national order based on a clearly positioned otherness” (Hage, 1998, p. 95). In other words, my “Asianness” “has never just been there[...]It has always been an unstable identity, physically, culturally, and politically[...]a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found” (Hall, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, p. 116) – a point which Carrington (2008) argues rightly accounts for broader frameworks that chart relevant historical forces and sociocultural influences that make (racial) identity possible in the first place.

In Australia, this “Asianness” is a marker of minority status, “torn from its historical, cultural and political embedding and lodged in a biologically constituted racial category” (Hall, 1993, p. 472). It signifies a state of being marked by “the ‘trace of race’ [that] continues to lead a subterranean life which remains effective in [...] [everyone else’s] everyday understandings” (Ang, 2001, p. 107) of “Asians” simultaneously inhabiting “inside” and “outside” positions in the national imaginary (Hage, 1998), and in intercultural classrooms which rely on uncritical notions of culture, instead of race, to flatten educational

disparities (Bekerman, 2020; Teo and Yip, 2025). In a similar vein, as I reflect on various circumstances that have unfolded since moving to Australia within/beyond education contexts, I am reminded that “there is no homogeneous Asianness which can comprise the experiences of all who might fit in that category” (Ang, 2001, p. 15), and that, despite its increased use as a self-conscious identity marker, being “Asian” is not something that can be unambiguously defined or clearly described (Ang, 2001; [Teo, 2023]). Indeed, my “Asianness” is not something that is self-evident (Ang, 2004), but rather, “constructed within, not outside, discourse[...]and indicative of a corollary] need to understand [it] as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices” (Hall, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, p. 4).

Of course, I continue to emphasise all this to problematise static understandings of fixed “Asian” identity as some sort of viable, all-encompassing recipe that is uncritically mobilised in a cookie cutter-esque fashion to address (racial) diversity in intercultural education spaces (Bekerman, 2020). I remember that such understandings do not capture the contingent nature of who we as “Asian” Australians (in all our diversity) are, nor does it acknowledge that who we believe we are and how we perform who we are shifts between different social and cultural contexts (Hall, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c). Personally, being labelled as a banana in the Singaporean context meant that I missed out on the ethnicised “Chinese” subject’s stamp of authenticity (Ang, 2001), and thus was not “Chinese” enough, whereas in the Australian context, I am an “Asian” who is *too* “Chinese” (Ang, 2001). Of course, I acknowledge here that racialisation, whether at school or societal level, is a dynamic process wherein “racial and ethnic identity is externally given in the sense that it is ascribed and naturalized[...]bestowed on the subject from the outside[...] But, on the other hand, the ‘authentic’, non-ascribed racial and ethnic identities adopted or reclaimed in opposition are also often given, albeit internally this time” (St Louis, 2009, p. 562), ergo my uptake of the banana label in high school.

Similarly, as a Singaporean male, I bore the weight of the persistent importance of patriarchal ideals around lineage and familial accountability (Lim, 2021), although this process of masculinity continues to shift with/in the hyper-masculinist Australian national imaginary (Gray and Nicholas, 2019) in ways that affirm “Asian masculinities in Australia are realised relationally, embodied and come to be in reference to predominantly [w]hite places” (Stahl and Zhao, 2022, p. 15). I thus wa/onder about Orientalist discourses which position “Asian” males as ‘passive’ and aligned with a ‘subordinate’ form of masculinity (Barber, 2015), far removed from typical “Asian” familial expectations concerning power and leadership. I also wa/onder about the Australian social construction of the ‘passive Asian male’ (Caluya, 2006) and consider how pivotal place and context are in lived realities of gendered relationships and identities (Hopkins and Noble, 2009). As a skilled migrant in Australia, I am deeply aware that race is an organising principle of settler colonialism (Day, 2016) since on one hand, I am a “colonized subject [who is] always ‘somewhere else’: doubly marginalised, displaced, always other than where he or she is, or is able to speak from” (Hall, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, pp.114–115). On the other, I am a settler [4] on stolen Indigenous lands, part of a “pyramidal view of the world that help[s] diverse non-[w]hite settlers to see their interests as aligned with the formation of a liberal settler state[...]a] developmental discourse[...]framed around an alterity that disqualifies Indigenous sovereignty and histories” (Saranillio, 2013, p. 280). Of course, “while migration in and of itself does not equate to colonialism, migration to a settler colonial space, where Native lands and resources are under political, ecological and spiritual contestation, means the political agency of immigrant communities can bolster a colonial system initiated by [w]hite settlers” (Saranillio, 2013, p. 280). And even though such a system lacks legitimacy due to the “lack

of historical density of[...]settler subjectivity” (Ang, 2001, p. 190), it is one that is nonetheless premised on violent dispossession (Saranillio, 2013) that I – and other settlers – can easily be complicit in.

A (new) history part 3: Identifying (new?) recipes for “Asian” Australian community

I’ve always been a fervent fan of all things food – for this reason, another fond series of childhood memories involves all the potluck gatherings I used to attend with friends and family in Singapore, as well as more recent memories of similar gathering with other “Asian” international students in Australia. I remember the excitement of inhaling an often-unpredictable variety of complex intercultural aromas dialoguing with the white noise from the cacophony of conversations. I recall the bursts of food colour either peeking out from under the aluminium foil or on full display behind the food plastic wrap, and the resultant urge to prod, poke and uncover the homecooked dishes that the gathering’s community had brought along. As these sensations settle in, I smile to myself as I wa/onder about the sheer time, effort and care that has gone into each potluck dish, especially since food preparation can be a process of emotional performance, and perhaps even an expression of love and care for the community/individual for whom the food is prepared for (Wessell, 2017). I wa/onder back to my time as a schoolteacher, too, drawing similarities between food preparation and lesson planning as an expression of love and care for my students. I also wa/onder about the multitude of recipes that are encountered at potluck gatherings, and how the same dish might have a different recipe even at the same potluck. I think about how this is akin to the flexibility required for teaching (for) diversity in intercultural classrooms, and am compelled to wa/onder about how the word *potluck* itself conveys a sense of openness, fluidity and multiplicity based on the very notion of taking a “chance as to what may be in the pot” (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2026a, 2026b).

As I continue to wa/onder about restaurants, classrooms, home cooking, teaching and potlucks, I reminded of the ethical imperative to re(de)fine and (dis)locate dominant and binarizing Eurocentric logics (Dabashi, 2009). I am reminded specifically of the need to avoid Orientalising “politics of binary oppositions” (Hall, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, p. 244) that sit within fixed identity recipes or static notions of, and ways of engaging pedagogically with, “Asianness”. To that end, embodying a post-Oriental sensibility and using *Gold Noise* as a conceptual tool embodying ‘new organicity’ (Dabashi, 2015), I want to suggest a more productive approach for intercultural classrooms and beyond that considers “what we [‘Asian’ Australian students and teachers] might become as opposed to who we are or where we come from” (Hall, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, p. 4). Under this approach, I return to the label “banana – ‘yellow outside, white inside’;(re)originated in Singapore and (re)negotiated in Australia – to stress the porousness of identities and, more importantly, the fact that they evolve and take shape through multiple partnerships with myriad, differently positioned others” (Ang, 2001, p. 200), particularly in the interstices of broad-ranging racial-cultural-linguistic-gender diversity in (Australian) classrooms. Simultaneously, I remember that I cannot shelve the identity recipe entirely, since it is both a need as well as a straitjacket, a double-edged sword of sorts (Ang, 2001) – or as Hall, (1996a, 1996b, 1996c) clarifies, the concept of identity is “an idea which cannot be thought of in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all” (p.2). While this risks a “dangerous tautology” (St Louis, 2009), I remember that all this talk about identity, recipes and identity recipes – talk that “emerge[s] within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus is more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than [it is] the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity” (Hall, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, p. 4) – is strategically necessary (St Louis, 2009) since it serves a “practical and analytical as well as political and ethical

endeavour” (St Louis, 2009, p. 561). As a migrant settler educator, I am heartened by hooks’ (1994, as cited in Alexander, 2004, p. 391) encouragement that we begin the important process of decolonisation “whenever those of us who are members of exploited and oppressed groups dare to critically interrogate our locations, the identities and allegiances that inform how we live our lives”. I am further heartened by Bekerman’s (2020) reminder that such interrogations of identity allow an “urgent revision of the concepts of culture [instead of race] and identity [as static instead of dynamic] as acknowledged in the [w]est at present” (p.6), anchored as they are in educational structures [5].

Recalling my fixed sense of Singaporean Chineseness steeped in nation-specific CMIO racial coding before moving to Australia, I must highlight here how crucial it is that we shift away from supposedly cohesive identities in a way that “recognise[s] the problematic nature of the generic terms Asian and Asia but [also] use[s] them to highlight how they operate in the white Australia[n] imaginary” (Flowers and Swan, 2012, p. 4). After all, as Ang (2001) reminds me, understanding “Asianness” or “Chineseness” as discursively constructed entails a “disruption of the ontological stability and certainty of [“Asian” and] Chinese identity[...][but] does not[...].negate its operative power as a cultural principle in the social constitution of identities as [“Asian” or] Chinese” (p.40). Alexander (2004) likewise tells me that such categories are always only ever social constructions, but that their persuasiveness is reified in a “seeming factuality” stemming from societies’ and individuals’ deep-seated and unquestioning commitment to distinguishing oneself from the Other – a point pertinent to intercultural education and one I believe ought to spark questions in educators such as, “which categories are being used, who uses them, who defines them and how and when are they applied?” (Bekerman, 2020, p. 8).

Recalling my journey from Singaporean school student to Australian international student, schoolteacher and now researcher, what I am suggesting here is the urgent reconceptualization of “Asianness” within the Australian context *vis-à-vis* the undeniably multifarious, flexible, accommodating and open nature of recipe (Lawson, 2020). It is perhaps through such openness to myriad interpretations (Lawson, 2020) and redefinitions (Dabashi, 2019) – in the classroom and beyond – that the possibilities of post-Orientalist understandings arise, moving us away from “punishingly boring” Eurocentrism (Dabashi, 2015) and an Orientalism of domination (Dabashi, 2009). It is a move that shifts the frame from static categorisations of European versus non-European, as well as definitions of peoples purely by virtue of their *not being* European (Dabashi, 2015). Instead, it accounts for a “hybrid point of view – the ambiguous position of neither/nor, or both/and” (Ang, 2001, p.viii) – within the “constitutive mutuality” (St Louis, 2009) of individual players and structural forces underpinning intercultural education “focused on the reification of identity[...].so as to preserve the powers of a white national hegemony” (Bekerman, 2020, p. 6). It is a move which allows us to become “native[s] to a new organicity[...].” within context-specific battlefields of ideas (Dabashi, 2015, p. 59) to “transform ways of knowing [and teaching] with implications for ways of observing the material force of [white patriarchal] settler colonialism, particularly injustices that are often obfuscated or ideologically invisible” (Saranillio, 2013, p. 282). In so doing, we unravel and defy the discourse of white patriarchal coloniality masked by uncritical ‘cultural’ logics (Bekerman, 2020) while simultaneously resisting a racialised “politics of despair” that has “degenerated into mere Tourette’s syndrome” (Dabashi, 2015, p. 202).

Recalling the contradictory roots/routes of my conferred and contested Chinese/Asianness both in Singapore and Australia alongside similar complexities and harms from “Asian” racialisation in Australia (Teo and Yip, 2025), this is a necessary move towards an existence with no centre and no periphery (Dabashi, 2015), where our “Asianness” can be

constantly (re)negotiated and (re)invented for strategic ends (Ang, 2001). In other words, it is where, as “Asian” Australians, we strategically express how we choose to be, or choose to be seen (Ngan and Kwok-bun, 2012), and where we inhabit a space where we have the freedom to articulate identities that are part of who we are and/or how we have been socially constructed (Alexander, 2004). It is an openness to being “Asian” within “the play of history, culture and power where [‘Asian’ Australian] migrant[...]students and teachers like me] derive their understanding of ‘who they are’ and ‘what is possible’” (Davidson, 2008, p. 16). In other words, it is a wonderful (see MacLure, 2010) openness that allows for a continuous movement away from pre-given and immutable (Tsolidis, 2017) as well as static and homogenous (Ngan and Kwok-bun, 2012) interpretations of collective identity categories, to an understanding of already entangled, strategically developed identities that shift in tandem with complex locational imperatives, as well as contextual and circumstantial specificities (Tsolidis, 2017). After all, given the vast and diverse socioeconomic and cultural terrain just within Australia, there is no singular “Asian” identity (Ngan and Kwok-bun, 2012), and as Stuart Hall (1995, p. 14) reminds us:

Those historical experiences, those cultural traditions, those lost and marginal languages, those marginalized experiences, those peoples and histories which remain unwritten. Those are the specific roots of identity. On the other hand, identity itself is not the rediscovery of them, but what they as cultural resources allow a people to produce. Identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed.

In this sense, *Gold Noise* with its post-Oriental framing recognises that “Asian” Australians can effectively manipulate their cross-cultural experiences and skills to respond in race-conscious ways to the everyday racial tensions in intercultural (classroom) spaces (Ngan and Kwok-bun, 2012; [Teo, 2023]). Indeed, “Asian” Australian identity understood this way works “against the systematic exclusivism of many hegemonic Western practices [...] [encapsulating] a struggle for access to representation while at the same time contesting the conventional simplification and stereotyping of ethnic subjects as such” (Ngan and Kwok-bun, 2012, p. 30). This agentic approach to identity thus embodies a ‘situated politics of recognition’ (Noble, 2009) – that both “Asian” students and teachers can leverage – within the mutually constituted relationality of “Asian” Australians and the white Australian majority (Davidson, 2008) to interrogate “where and why identities are disabling and where and why they are enabling” (Ngan and Kwok-bun, 2012, p. 23). In other words, this approach is cognisant that a generic “Asian” identity inevitably converges at a discursive, representational and everyday level (Ang, 2004) while simultaneously carving out room to question the politics of recognition shaped by the actions of “Asians” themselves (Ngan and Kwok-bun, 2012). Here, Spivak (1993) explains that such strategic identities are not engrained, but rather, political in nature, and are only useful insofar as they are constituted and dismantled reflexively. In other words, these “forms of identity that are necessary can only be established in relation to the political conditions within a given moment that make it necessary” (St Louis, 2009, p. 571), and are interpreted, deconstructed and reconstructed with/in the culture in which they are entangled (Ngan and Kwok-bun, 2012).

Using *Gold Noise*, identity is understood as the ontological conditions of being rather than a narrow, essentialised identity (Noble, 2009), which consequently appreciates that “identities can be real and constructed[...]politically and epistemically significant” while also “variable, nonessential, and radically historical” (Moya, 2000, p. 12). Through this approach, processes of cultural collision pry open new possibilities around identities and belongings (Ngan and Kwok-bun, 2012) and counteract generalising, abstracting, or reducing complexity into simple labels or motifs (MacLure, 2010). Through this approach, “concepts of self and identity, culture, interculturalism, multiculturalism, and the political

organisation of the nation-state and its monologism[...] intimately connected [as they are, are] [...] taken into consideration when analysing the possible outcomes of intergroup education and the strategies that may improve it" (Bekerman, 2020, p. 7). Concretely, this involves educators moving beyond seeing "Asian" students as monoliths, and understanding their complex, transnational identities, designing curricula that challenges essentialising Orientalist stereotypes, and creating pedagogical spaces that acknowledge the fluidity of identity in various classroom settings. In short, I suggest that understanding this approach to identity ought to be intercultural education's recipe of choice in the "making of our ongoing histories" (Ang, 2001, p. 150) as "Asian" Australians.

Notes

- [1.] Tarulevicz (2013) explains that for many Singaporeans, the act of eating carries strong national connotations and that consequently, this mantra reflects the lengths to which Singaporeans will go to find good food. I am reminded here as well of how deeply this national fascination with food goes, particularly in terms of how it is the norm in Singapore to demonstrate neighbourly care with the greeting, "吃饭了吗", or "have you eaten yet", in place of the more conventional, "how are you".
- [2.] The Go8 is comprised of Australia's leading research-intensive universities, often compared with the North American Ivy League or the United Kingdom's Russell Group.
- [3.] As Ang (2004) points out, it is primarily within the "west" that being and becoming "Asian" becomes a self-conscious, and oftentimes necessary (and shocking) option for individuals from "Asia", broadly conceived.
- [4.] Settlers need not only be of white European heritage but can include people of colour from other colonial contexts (Tuck & Yang, 2012) like Singapore. After all, the very nature of settler identity is premised on the intention to migrate, regardless of race (Day, 2016).
- [5.] In addition, methodologically speaking, in writing this exploration of "Asian" Australian identity, I fulfill a critical autoethnographic imperative around ethical praxis, where theoretical insights become useful when presented in context and contribute positively to the world (Lapadat, 2017). At the same time, I am cognisant that "narrativizing, like all intentional behaviour [...] is a site of moral responsibility" (Richardson, 1990, p. 131) and therefore acknowledge that this exploration is seen through my "own point of view at a particular place and point in time" (Lapadat, 2017, p. 592) and as such, is always partial.

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