

Tale of two cultures for many youth

But this weekend, they are all proud of their roots

Clara Ho, The Edmonton Journal

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With a gentle flick of her wrist, Kallista Tran gracefully swung a ribbon as she danced to soothing Chinese classical music at the Heritage Festival's Hong Kong pavilion Sunday afternoon.

"We're showing people our culture," said the 15-year-old, performing with the Caernarvon Chinese dance group, adding that it's a thrill to be able to share her heritage with so many people.

But as a Canadian growing up with immigrant parents, Tran said she sometimes feels a tension between the Canadian values she grew up with and the values her Chinese mother and Vietnamese father try to instil in her.

It's a common situation faced by many children of immigrant parents.

Born with two or more cultures, these first-generation Canadians often feel conflicted as they try to retain their national heritage and fit into the Canadian culture.

"My parents' values are so different. Canadian parents seem more laid back," Tran said.

"I had to take piano, (the academic program) IB. And they told me I can't date until after university."

Tran's mother, Judy, said it's equally challenging being an immigrant parent to a Canadian child.

"They always say Asian parents give them a lot of pressure and that we expect too much," she said.

"I guess it's tough for them because they always compare themselves to Canadian kids."

Erika Jimenez finds herself in a similar situation. There are days when the 31-year-old dancer can't decide if she's more Canadian or Mexican.

"When the Mexican team comes to play soccer, I'm Mexican. But when the Oilers play, I'm totally Canadian," she said, laughing.

Jimenez was born in Mexico. But at the age of 15, she and her three siblings moved to Edmonton, where her Scandinavian mother was born, and quickly adopted Canadian

traditions and values. Jimenez said her mother enrolled her in dancing to retain her Mexican culture and meet other children of Mexican descent.

On Sunday, dancing at the Mexican pavilion with the group Ballet Folklorico Mexico of Edmonton, Jimenez said she was a proud Mexican, twirling across the stage with ribbons in the colours of the Mexican flag adorning her hair.

"Sometimes I'm Canadian, sometimes I'm Mexican. It depends. But today, I'm totally Mexican, speaking Spanish and everything."

Ian Ndungu moved to Canada from Nairobi, Kenya, at the mere age of five when his father got a teaching job in Edmonton. But the 15-year-old said he still strongly identifies with his African background, despite having spent most of his childhood in Canada.

"I still know my language and I take classes. I also wear traditional clothing sometimes," he said, while selling soapstone carvings and ebony face masks at the Africa pavilion.

Ndungu said people often lump all African cultures into one, and even seem surprised when he reminds them that Africa is a continent made up of many countries.

It's one of the reasons he is helping out at the Heritage Festival -- to share his Kenyan culture and educate the crowds.

While he still holds strong to his heritage, he said there are some aspects of his culture that baffle him.

"Sometimes, I don't understand what my parents are talking about. Like, they make me call older people by different names. I have to call a woman my 'aunt' and a man my 'uncle' even if we're not related," he said.

But at the end of the day, Ndungu said he's proud to be both Canadian and Kenyan.

"I really like my culture."

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