

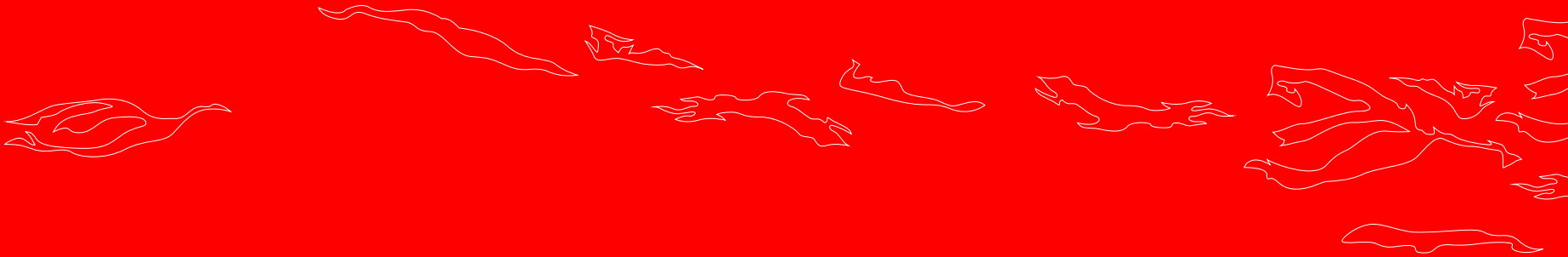


Autonomy

“Your parents moved here so you they too could have a better life. It’s okay, just move on with your life and be okay with you doing you. They’re probably far away from the rest of their own family and it’s okay if you do the same. You don’t owe them anything. You didn’t choose to be born.

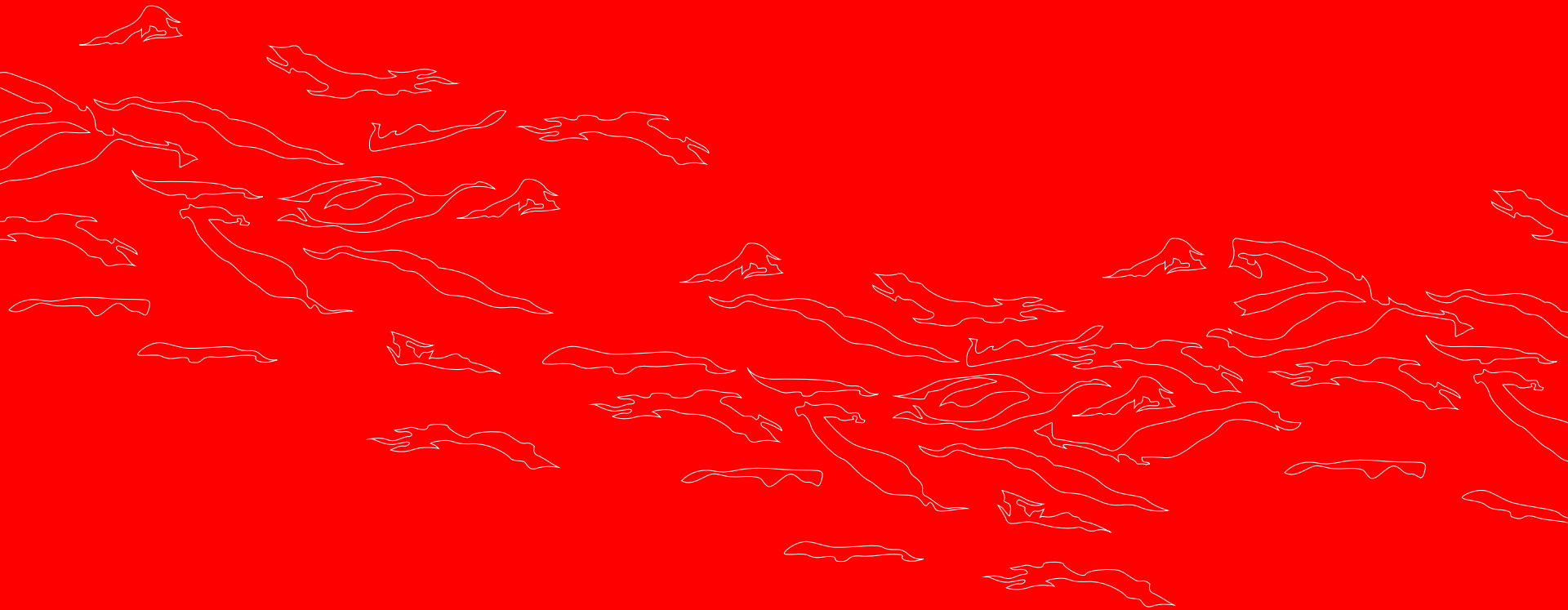
Try to obtain that peaceful ground of being grateful for them without feeling like you owe them everything. Intergenerational trauma starts with intergenerational shame, so just live your life!!!!”

— Eric Hu



Eric Hu is a famous Asian-American designer and when I read his perspective on autonomy within the Asian community, I was curious as to how my friends would react and respond.

All recorded responses are written answers to the same prompt.



*Anonymous
Vietnamese*

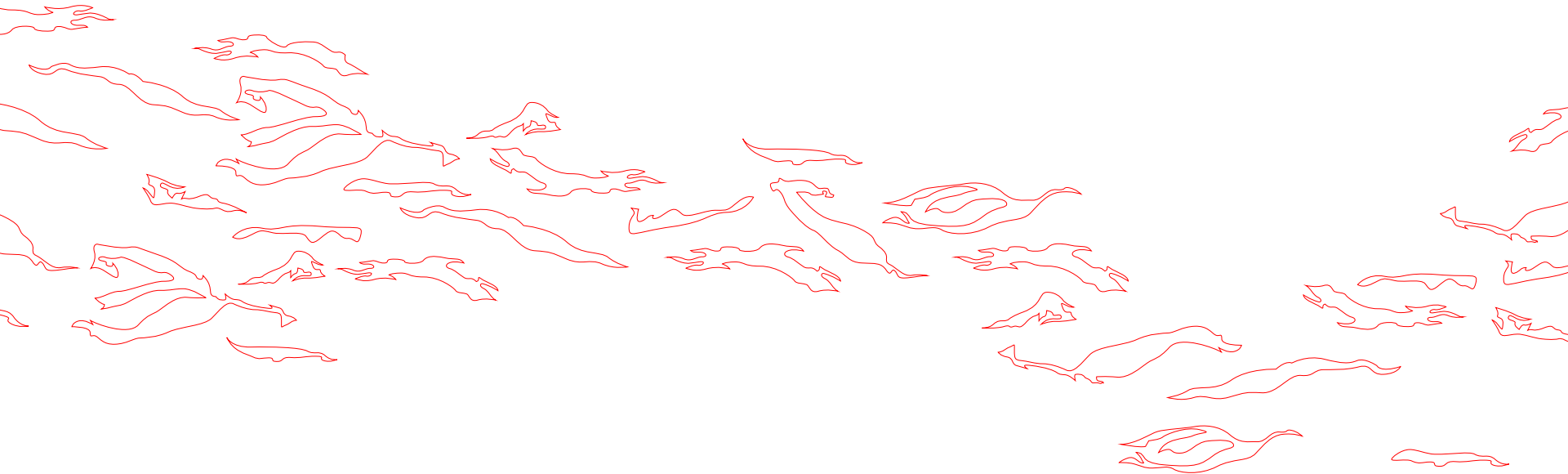
"They brought
me here to
give me a better
life (even if it

was better for them too) and they just want to see
me live better than they had back in Vietnam.
To them, anybody could be an artist and it's hard
to live well with that career path. They didn't have
to emigrate for me to do what I want to do now.

They simply felt like their efforts in giving
me a better life here in the US was all for naught.
And I understood. I've seen life back at home.
People are clawing for their lives — struggling
to keep their bellies filled.

I know they didn't have to do that. However,
I made a point to them that I am going to do
what I want to do. I am forever grateful for their
actions, but to be shackled to a predetermined
path in life would be the same as not having the
opportunity to do what I want in the first place.

In short, I think that forcing one to do some-
thing in the "land of opportunity" would be
the same as doing whatever the hell I wanted
in a land of zero opportunities."



Anonymous
Filipino-American

"I believe living with this sentiment is wrong and disrespectful to those who, in my case have not only raised me but helped me to love and embrace my culture. I want to give back to my parents not because I believe I owe them something, but because I want to return the unwavering support they provided me with. Without my culture I would feel a piece missing from myself. I even wanted to go so far as to study in my native country to further understand and respect its culture."



Anonymous Vietnamese

“While I do
not feel like I
owe my par-
ents, I want

to be there for them when they get older out of respect. I was previously a pre-med student, and I changed my career path to become a teacher. I still intend to be there for my parents, but I changed because I was not sure if I wanted to be a doctor because my parents were pushing me and expected me to be one or because I wanted to. I personally want to have a job that I enjoy 40 years from now. My parents sacrificed so much to be here, from escaping their home land and leaving their families behind to escaping pirates and surviving at sea for days on end with no food and water. I am acting in how I would honestly expect my own kids to act. I am not expected to completely provide for them, but I do want to play a hand at making their lives better after everything they have done for me.”



Anonymous *Filipino*

“The sole
purpose of my
parents emi-
grating to the

United States is for my siblings and me to have more opportunities for the future (education and career-wise) and they believed that moving to the US would guarantee our success. My parents also believed that they could live a better life here (i.e, have better jobs), but in my eyes, they seemed happier back in our home country. Now that we're in the United States, my parents aren't as affectionate with one another. They're constantly arguing with one another. They're constantly stressed about everything. Every minuscule issue becomes an overarching issue that builds tension and forces my parents further apart from each other. My parents were happier with the life they used to live in their home country, but they willingly sacrificed everything for my siblings and I. I know that I don't owe my parents anything, but I can't help but believe that the way I've structured my life, thus far, is for them. Maybe the only reason I want to become a doctor is that they've manipulated me into thinking that the only way I can lead a successful life is by having a high-paying profession. Either way, my parents have consistently provided my siblings and me with endless love and support and I believe that the least that I owe them is to fulfill their only wish — for me to become a doctor.”



James Ho *Vietnamese*

"I agree with
the last sen-
tence of the
prompt about

being grateful for them without feeling like I owe them everything. Although I do agree with this sentiment, in practice, I am unable to do it. Yes, it is true that they did move here to have a better life, but it is not without any difficulties or risks. I do feel that I should repay them in a way that would make them proud. They have made many sacrifices to allow me to be in the position I am now. I may have not come from the same culture as them and heed their traditions, but I feel like I must least recognize the many sacrifices they've made for me."

Anonymous Vietnamese

"I cannot, with
a good con-
science, leave
my parents

behind. It'd be like I'm abandoning them. Sounds a tad extreme perhaps, but that's how I'd feel. Trust me, I have had low moments where I begged, with tears streaming down my face, to any higher being out there willing to listen, *"Why am I here? Why did you bring me here just to feel this way — just to suffer?"* However, my overall life isn't bad by any means. My parents raised me to be grateful for my life. I should be thankful for a roof above my head, not having to worry about going to bed hungry, and getting a free public school education (elementary school to high school). They didn't have that luxury to take those things for granted growing up in Vietnam. Even now, I feel extremely indebted to my parents for enabling me to get higher education at VCU. Once I turned 18 and was legally an official adult, they could've stopped paying for me. On the contrary, my parents are paying for my college education, my rent, and giving me spending money because while they want me to focus on my studies, they also want me to enjoy my college experience. They just want me to do well in my studies to secure a good future for myself. They don't expect me to care for them when I'm older, but it's a part of the culture I was raised in. They have always done everything in their power to provide me with opportunities for success and happiness. I certainly won't attribute all my successes to them, but they absolutely paved the way. I want to give back to them. I'm not a perfect daughter, and I know I let them down more times than I can keep track of. But every day, I try my hardest to find reasons to be happy and accept that I'm only human. Even if I don't owe them everything, I owe it to myself to stay true to my values and do what makes me happy. My family makes me happy. They mean the world to me, and that means that I find ways to make my parents proud."

