

## Sam Hoher

Katy Chen made me feel seen. In *Shang Chi and the Legend of The Ten Rings*, Katy (played by Nora “Awkwafina” Lum) stole the show. Don’t get me wrong, the action scenes were off the charts, but she nailed my Asian-American experience.

I felt like I was transported to Macau, standing next to her in the Golden Daggers club, when Jon Jon started speaking to her in mandarin and her face contorted in confusion, she glanced at Shang Chi for translation, and then she quickly stopped Jon Jon and said “I’m sorry, my Chinese isn’t very good.”

I felt this scene deep in my bones because I’ve been there. When I ask for a fork at Dim Sum, need a cheat sheet for the Chinese characters in Mahjong, stare blankly at someone trying to speak with me in Chinese, I’m reminded that I’m not quite Asian enough.

I’m an adopted CBA (I was born in China and came to America as a baby) with an ABC mother and German-American father. Call me Chef Boyardee because I’m alphabet soup. An important note - You’ll never hear me call my “adoptive” mom as such because she has always been and will always be mom to me.

So, what does ABC mean? CBA? Let’s go back to Shang-Chi. If you saw the movie, you might have remembered Jon Jon’s response. If not, I’ll do a quick recap.

Jon Jon said, “No worries, I speak ABC.”

If you aren’t familiar with the acronym, you might think it was a cheeky way of saying I speak English. But for the director (Destin Daniel Cretton), that line was an intentional way to continue to infuse Chinese culture into the movie.

ABC stands for American Born Chinese. ABC’s are second generation, born of immigrant parents who came to America. Like most ABC’s, my mom can understand and speak a little Mandarin but she doesn’t know how to read or write it.

CBA stands for Chinese Born Americans. People who were born in China and came to America. They’re first generation, and their primary language is mandarin or Cantonese. My grandmother and late grandfather fall into that category.

My mom doesn’t speak Chinese, she can only understand it so she didn’t pass on Chinese to me. We tried Chinese classes, but it never stuck. I’ve never felt particularly connected to the AAPI community - preferring chicken noodle soup over zongzi and Christmas over Lunar

New Year, but (in primarily white spaces) I acutely feel my Asian-ness. My hair is too black, my eyes are too squinty, and my skin color is too yellow to ever forget that I am not American enough.

Growing up I barely saw myself represented in American media. It wasn't until my early twenties, I started to see people like me on the screen.

*Crazy Rich Asians* and *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* came out 1 year post-graduation from Vassar (2018). For the first time, I was seeing Asian-American women on screen in leading roles. But Constance Wu and Lana Condor weren't super heroes. They were love interests.

I wanted to see Asian American women kicking ass and taking names. Captain Marvel came out a year later (2019). Where was my Asian Carol Danvers?

You should know something about me. I'm a Marvel nerd. I'm not Comic-Con level obsessed but I cried during *Avengers: End Game* and had a mini-Hulk keychain.

Watching the first Marvel movie with an Asian cast AND crew made me feel part of the AAPI community. Seeing Asian superheroes filled me with JOY. Gabby Rivera calls joy a revolutionary and radical act.

After a spring and summer full of anti-Asian violence, it was nice to feel celebrated instead of scapegoated. To have my Instagram feed full of clips of Xu Xialing (played by Meng'er Zhang) saving the day on the back of a dragon, instead of videos of elderly asian women getting beaten up in broad daylight. To hear Simu Liu (who plays Shang-Chi) on multiple news outlets, talk about the joy of introducing an Asian superhero into the Marvel universe that doesn't wear a mask.

Before he made it big, Liu would dress up as a superhero and perform at birthday parties. There were no Asian superheroes, so he could only perform as superheroes that wore masks. When he shared this story, you could see the heartbreak on his face.

During Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Liu posted a photo of himself wearing a t-shirt that says "PHENOMENALLY ASIAN" on Twitter with the caption: "Proud. Unapologetic. Outspoken. PHENOMENAL." I felt PHENOMENAL, phenomenally me, because seeing me on screen helped empower me to take up space, unapologetically as an Asian-American woman.

Because there is joy in being seen, taking up space, and showing up as your true authentic self.

