

A photograph of two young women with long dark hair, smiling and embracing each other. They are standing in front of a dense bamboo forest. The woman in the foreground is wearing a white long-sleeved blouse and a dark blue skirt. The woman behind her is wearing a white long-sleeved blouse and a maroon skirt. The background is filled with green bamboo leaves and thin, vertical stalks.

Same Same but Different

See beyond the similarities of twins and celebrate the differences

by Jody Yu & Jasper Cao



Carol Yeung Wai-han and Ruby Yeung Wai-san (from left to right)



Gary Chan Ka-shun and Ki Chan Ka-ki (from left to right)



Florence Li Kwai-yuk and Freda Li Kwai-wah (from left to right)

As the music starts, three pairs of dancers, each of them wearing matching outfits, start moving to the beat. On closer inspection, the similarity goes beyond their clothing; each looks identical to their partner.

The pairs, aged seven, 25 and 30, are members of the Twins Dance Association, which was founded in 2008 and comprises 20 pairs of twins who are avid dancers. Intuition suggests twins should have the upper hand when it comes to anticipating each other's moves and dancing in perfect synchronisation.

The remarkable resemblance in the appearance of identical twins has led to the commonly held perception that they share a kind of "telepathy" where each knows what the other thinks without the need for words.

"This is not 'telepathy'. It is tacit understanding," says 30-year-old Gary Chan Ka-shun. Gary and Ki Chan Ka-ki, his older brother by 10 minutes, have been dancing with the group since it was founded. "We've been living together for so many years, we have almost the same tastes."

Gary and Ki have not always shared the same temperament, interests and hobbies. In fact, they did not start dancing at the same time – it was Ki who started first and Gary picked it up around two years later. Gary also used to be the more reserved character of the two but others in the group have noticed he is becoming more sociable and that the brothers have grown more similar in both appearance and personality since they started dancing together.

Gary and Ki's experience might seem to



While Florence (right) enjoys calligraphy, Freda (left) enjoys sketching.

suggest the "telepathy" between twins is the result of nurture. But the story of Florence Li Kwai-yuk and her sister Freda Li Kwai-wah suggests the opposite.

Unlike Gary and Ki, Florence and Freda were not brought up together. The youngest of a family with 10 children, the twins were separated when they were one-month-old because their parents were unable to support so many children financially. Florence stayed with the family, and Freda, who is 10 minutes younger, was sent to live with another family.

Over the years, the sisters would discover that they had sim-

ilar experiences and formed similar interests despite being raised apart.

"We got sick one after the other or even at the same time," says Freda, recalling their mother's memories. She says she suspected there was some kind of ethereal connection between them at the time, suspicions which were later strengthened when they discovered they had independently bought the same handbag when they were adults.

Although each sister knew about the other's existence from a very young age, they rarely got to meet. They had been forced apart

by unfortunate family circumstances but they cherished every rare meeting they had on special occasions such as the Lunar New Year festival.

"Being apart during our childhood, we didn't have time to compare this or that with each other, like we do nowadays," says Florence. "We would stay up late until 2am and play. This may not seem like a big deal to you guys today, but it was very serious at that time. [We] risked getting a real scolding from our elder brothers and sisters."

"Sometimes, I would worry if [Freda] would get upset that she





had to be sent away,” says Florence. But there was nothing any of them could do at the time and she is glad that Freda got along with their relatives and siblings whenever they met.

Despite their years of separation Florence and Freda are each other’s best friends, proving the bonding between twins goes beyond the superficial level of their identical appearance, and includes their emotional and spiritual support for one another.

Joey Chan Wing-yee, 22, and her sister Mandy Chan Wing-wai who is younger by two minutes, went to the same kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and university.

“As twins, we always have each other for company,” Joey says. Even when they were apart for a year during their exchange programmes, they still kept in close contact with each other.

But the flipside of being a twin is the relentless comparisons made by others, and sometimes even between

themselves. From appearances to personal abilities, comparisons are made so often that it sometimes upsets the twins.

“People would say, ‘I think you are prettier and your younger sister is not as pretty as you.’ It is such a subjective judgment,” Joey says. “Actually I’m afraid [Mandy] will hear these comments that will make her upset.”

“I don’t think I’m her replica,” says Joey. “We are two independent identities.” Although Joey says twins should not be the target of comparison, such comparisons can also have a positive effect. They can sometimes spur their mutual development.

Fong Fu-pong, the father of seven-year-olds Eason Fong Yik-sum and Ian Fong Yik-yu, the youngest members of the Twins Dance Association, says: “They can learn through comparison. For instance, when one of them learnt to hold a milk bottle, the other would learn by imitating.” Still, Fong says parents of twins should treat them as two unique children.

1. (Left) Ian Fong Yik-yu, (Right) Eason Fong Yik-sum
2. (Left) Mandy Chan Wing-wai, (Right) Joey Chan Wing-yi
3. (Left) Freda, (Right) Florence



Jaden Li (Left) and Karin Li (Right) have very different personalities.

Karin Li and Jaden Li are a pair of six-year-old fraternal twins. Although they are not identical, they look very similar. But their personalities are very different and they reached their milestones, such as losing their milk teeth, at different times too.

Karin and Jaden's mum Lai Chihong says there is a tangible difference in the relationship between twins and that found among other siblings.

"I hope they'll always, always remember, they were born together," says Lai, and makes a hopeful remark that her twins may survive the inevitable comparisons that might affect their bonding.

If the bonds between Freda and Florence Li are anything to go by, they should stand a good chance.

"[Twins are] amazing!" says Florence, when asked about how she feels to be a twin growing up under the tough conditions of her

family. No matter how far apart they have been, and how different they are as people, their bonding has withstood their destinies and brought them together once more.



Edited by Maggie Suen

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