

**MOVING BEYOND TWO HOMES:
COUNTER-STORIES OF CANADIAN YOUTH OF KOREAN AND JAPANESE
DESCENT SURROUNDING IDENTITY AND SENSE OF BELONGING**

by

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Abstract

This study explores the identity and sense of belonging of Korean and Japanese immigrant youth in Canada across culture, nation, and race. The first research question examines how they construct and negotiate a cultural identity and sense of belonging that shift between Canada and their homeland, in which transnationalism and multiculturalism are explored as critical mediators. The second research question concerns how they perceive their racial identity in a time of spiking racism against the Asian community triggered by COVID-19 and how it affects their identity and sense of belonging. The study illuminates the complex nature of the cultural and racial identity of Asian youth by exploring two ethnic groups who share a racial identity yet are from nations with distinct cultures, histories, and a relationship of conflict. Critical race theory is adopted as the central theoretical framework, offering a valuable lens to center persisting issues of race and racism in educational settings in Canada and to challenge master narratives of essentialist perspectives against Asian youth that dismiss diversity and individuality. Based on a counter-storytelling method informed by critical race theory, qualitative interviews and focus groups are employed as research methods. Six Korean and six Japanese youths living in Metro Vancouver participated in the study to share their voices and lived experiences. The findings are based on the participants' counter-stories, which reveal how they construct and negotiate their cultural identities with agency and how their perceptions of Asianness shaped in the midst of complex relations in their lived experiences as individuals as well as members of collective communities.

Lay Summary

Asian youth are often considered homogenous people with similar patterns of behaviour and characteristics, without much attention to the diversity and differences within the category of Asians. This study aims to challenge this perspective by examining the lived experiences of Korean and Japanese immigrant youth in Canada who are categorized as Asian youth but come from two nations with different cultures and histories. It shows differences in how they adapt to Canadian society, find places to belong, and stay connected with their homelands. It also shows the diverse ways in which they come to terms with their Asian identity, which is often associated with discrimination and racism, particularly in the pandemic era, and how they confront narratives that portray them in limited ways. The aim of this study is to help the public understand the reality Asian youth face in Canadian society.

Preface

This thesis is an original, unpublished, and independent work of the author, Jiin Yoo. I was primarily responsible for the identification and design of the research, the performance of the various parts of the research, and the analysis of the research data. The UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) granted ethical approval for this research on March 23rd, 2021, and the certificate number is H21-00510. As of the date of submission, the results in this thesis have not led to any publications.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Lay Summary.....	iv
Preface	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Tables.....	x
Acknowledgements	xi
Dedication.....	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Personal Account: Why Korean and Japanese Youth?	1
1.2 Research Context.....	6
1.2.1 Increasing Asian Immigration and What the Literature Says.....	6
1.2.2 Who Are Korean and Japanese Immigrants?	11
1.2.2.1 Korean Immigrants	12
1.2.2.2 Japanese Immigrants.....	15
1.3 Assumptions of This Study.....	18
1.4 Theoretical Framework and Methodology	21
1.5 Chapter Breakdowns.....	22
Chapter 2: Literature Review	23
2.1 Immigrant Youth and Transnational Identity	23
2.2 Sense of Belonging.....	26
2.2.1 Ethnic Identity Versus National Identity	27

2.2.2	Belonging to Multicultural Canada	30
2.2.3	Racial Belonging: Together but Different	33
2.3	Race, Racialization, and Racism	37
2.3.1	From Yellow Peril to Model Minority, and Back to Yellow Peril	37
2.3.2	Asian Youths' Racialized Experiences in Canada	39
2.4	Summary of Literature Review	41
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework.....		43
3.1	Key Terms and Conceptualizations	43
3.2	Transnationalism	46
3.3	Critical Race Theory (CRT)	48
3.3.1	What Is Critical Race Theory and How Did it Begin?	48
3.3.2	Situating Critical Race Theory for This Research.....	54
3.4	Summary of the Theoretical Framework.....	57
Chapter 4: Methodology		58
4.1	Research Paradigm: Critical Theory.....	58
4.2	Research Tradition: Counter-Storytelling of Critical Race Theory.....	59
4.3	Research Participants.....	61
4.4	Methods	64
4.4.1	Qualitative Interviews.....	65
4.4.2	Focus Groups.....	68
4.4.3	Positionality: Insider/Outsider.....	70
4.5	Data Analysis.....	71
4.6	Summary of the Methodology.....	73

Chapter 5: Negotiating Identity and Sense of Belonging Between Two Homes	74
5.1 Canadian Identity and Ethnic Identity	75
5.1.1 Becoming Canadian.....	75
5.1.2 Maintaining Ethnic Identity.....	78
5.2 Theme 1: Deconstructing Essentialism	83
5.2.1 Diversity of Negotiation	84
5.2.2 Variety in Challenges	87
5.2.3 Different Coping Strategies	91
5.3 Theme 2: Challenging Normative Frameworks	94
5.3.1 Ethnic Identity and Canadian Identity: Not a Zero-Sum Game	95
5.3.2 Confronting the Western-Oriented Perspective.....	98
5.3.3 Resisting the Ideology of English as the Only Valuable Language	101
5.4 Theme 3: Examining Multiculturalism.....	103
5.5 Coming Together.....	106
Chapter 6: Racial Identity and Perception of One Another.....	108
6.1 Theme 1: The Permanence of Race and Racism	109
6.1.1 Feeling Out of Place	109
6.2 Theme 2: Intersection of Race and Ethnicity	117
6.2.1 Forming Asianness in Canada	118
6.2.2 Pan-Asian Identity	120
6.2.3 Different and Competitive Histories.....	123
6.2.4 Perception of One Another	125
6.3 Theme 3: Deconstructing Essentialism	129

6.3.1	The Model Minority	129
6.3.2	Media Representation	133
6.4	Coming Together	134
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....		136
7.1	Research Implications: Counter-Stories of Korean and Japanese Immigrant Youth ..	136
7.2	Theoretical and Methodological Implications	142
7.3	Critical Reflexivity	144
7.4	Contributions and Limitations	145
7.5	Implications for Educators and Suggestions for Future Research.....	149
7.6	Concluding Thoughts	151
Bibliography.....		153
Appendices		176
	Appendix A.....	176
	Appendix B.....	177
	Appendix C.....	181
	Appendix D.....	182
	Appendix E.....	185

List of Tables

Table 4. 1 Recruiting Sites, Methods, and Result	62
Table 4. 2 Demographic Information of Participants	64
Table 4. 3 Interview Questions and Focus Group Questions	68
Table 5. 1 Themes and CRT Themes for Research Question 1	74
Table 6. 1 Themes and CRT Themes for Research Question 2	108

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For all the immigrant youth who seek healing and belonging

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study investigates issues of identity and sense of belonging of contemporary immigrant youth in Canada surrounding culture, nation, and race. More specifically, it examines the lived experiences of immigrant youth of Korean¹ and Japanese descent who moved to Canada with their families and currently live in Metro Vancouver. It inquires how these young people construct and negotiate their cultural identities and sense of belonging between Canada and their homeland and how their racial identity informed by racialized experiences affect their sense of belonging to Canada. In exploring this topic, critical race theory serves as the central theoretical framework for interpreting the participants' lived experiences, whereas theories of cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and transnationalism make up the conceptual foundation. Data were generated through qualitative interviews and focus groups, informed by counter-storytelling, a common methodology in research based on critical race theory.

In this chapter, I will first present the rationale for studying this topic by interweaving it with my life trajectory, which will lead to the research questions. I will then provide the context for the study, drawing on literature from Canada and other countries. Finally, after briefly introducing the theoretical framework and methodology, I will present the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Personal Account: Why Korean and Japanese Youth?

The research topic I present here originates from my lived experiences. I want to utilize this autobiographical account to concretize and demarcate my research topic. I am a Korean woman who was born and raised in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea. Growing up in Korea in the 1980s and 1990s meant witnessing Korea's unprecedented structural changes as a youth.

¹ In this study, *Korean* participants refer to participants from South Korea.

Those changes started with massive public demands for democracy that brought an end to the political turmoil and long-lasting dictatorship, which still brings me a sensory memory of tear gas scattered among the demonstrators on the streets. The achievement of democracy was accompanied by eye-opening economic development symbolized by the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988, and a great technological expansion. This series of changes only occurred several decades after Korea's liberation from the colonization of Imperial Japan, followed by the Korean civil war, which left the country divided with shattered economies and infrastructure.

I was shaken by learning about the brutal history of Japanese colonization while in middle school. Meanwhile, my personal experience of travelling to Japan to visit my brother, who was studying there, triggered complicated feelings toward my neighbouring country that would continue ever to grow—a feeling of antipathy on the one hand and a feeling of aspiration for the abundant goods that Korea could not offer back then on the other hand. My identity as a Korean seemed to be constructed surrounding this contradictory sense of *difference* toward the neighbouring fearsome but alluring country, which was necessarily grounded in a sense of *us and them* (Fuss, 1989; Hall, 1988). Ironically, however, these irreconcilable feelings fostered my curiosity and desire to delve into Japan throughout my life journey. My experiences of learning about Japanese culture and society in college and graduate school brought me onto a career path that led toward Japan, and soon I found myself working in an IT company in Tokyo. Eventually, I moved to Japan with my whole family and lived there for more than a decade, residing in several different cities. With these multiple experiences of *displacement* (Hall, 1987) and this diasporic life journey (Hall, 1988), my personal and familial cultural identity evolved and shifted. Because of the stable status and privilege that my husband and I possessed as highly skilled foreigners, our living experiences in Japan were mostly positive. Working-class

foreigners with less privilege might have had a different experience. The sense of belonging that we gained through active engagement in our community was further amplified by experiencing the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami that devastated East Japan, which brought us strong feelings of loss, grief, and a sense of togetherness with those suffering.

Simultaneously, however, I felt my expanded sense of belonging complicated and challenged by deep-seated ethnocentrism in Korea and Japan, where nationalistic discourses were commonly observed with a range of hateful and hurtful words against one another. The recent diplomatic conflict surrounding the legal compensation for *comfort women*² and forced labour during the colonization era exacerbated the two countries' relationship (see BBC News, 2019, for more detail) and further complicated my sense of belonging while living in Japan as a Korean. I became conscious of my Koreanness and afraid of encountering prejudicial comments or hate speech on the street. The unresolved colonial past surrounding national identities was undermining the sense of peoplehood that I had developed and cherished in my new home. This was one of the reasons my family made the hard decision to leave Japan.

The feelings of ambivalence that shaped my adolescence continued to bring me questions about nationalism, ethnicity, and identity. Upon my recent experience of displacement, as I moved to Canada and left those conflicting spaces, I found myself pondering similar issues but with elevated complications. I realized that my senses of *difference* and *similarity* were operating differently in Canada than in Korea or Japan. Similar to how Wright (2012) succinctly put it, when I arrived in Canada, I became *Asian*. Among other reasons, it was the concept of

² The term *comfort women*, a euphemism, refers to women who were forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army from the occupied countries and territories, including Korea, China, Taiwan, and the Philippines, before and during the Second World War (Frost & Vickers, 2021).

multiculturalism—the idea of respecting different cultures equally, as I understood it—that brought my family to Canada. I thought this fascinating concept should be applied to Korea and Japan, where cultural diversity is often disregarded. Soon, the excitement of finding cultural diversity and respect for difference was replaced by the disappointment of witnessing *race* as a more salient marker than culture or any other identifiers. Feeling a cosmopolitan yearning for the future of my two adolescent children, who were born in Korea and raised in Japan, I was disheartened by the newly imposed identity signifier *Asian*, which seemed to draw invisible boundaries around their life experience.

I was soon drawn to immigrant youth of Korean and Japanese descent who immigrated with their parents at a young age. As an immigrant myself, who had lived across multiple countries and was mother of two Asian immigrant adolescents, I became interested in how these young people from two competing nations—who both seemed to have solid links to their heritage culture—would find their places to belong in Canada. More specifically, I wondered how they would negotiate their cultural identity across Canada and their home countries, where identity and identifications entail dissimilar definitions. Simultaneously, I became curious about how they would come to terms with an Asian³ identity, being labelled as part of a homogenous group of people despite their distinct cultural backgrounds and regardless of the conflicting relationships between their nations of origin. These initial interests developed into two research questions:

³ In this paper, the term *Asians* mostly refers to East Asians who share a similar phenotype.

1. How do 1.5-generation ⁴immigrant youth of Korean and Japanese descent in Canada construct and negotiate their cultural identity and sense of belonging between Canada and their homelands?
2. How do 1.5-generation immigrant youth of Korean and Japanese descent in Canada perceive their racial identity as Asian and identify one another when they share a racial identity but have different cultures, histories, and conflicting relationships between their homelands?

Vancouver is the place my family has chosen as our new home. It's beautiful surroundings, progressive academic atmosphere, and ethnic and cultural diversity were the reasons we favoured this place over others. I was excited for myself and more for my children to mingle with people of diverse backgrounds, learning how to respect and embrace the difference of others. I hoped to move beyond my conflicting cultural identity and troubled sense of belonging that continued to be affected by excessive discourses of colonial pasts, cultural hierarchies, and nation-states as normalized practices where I was from. Perhaps I was envisioning myself pursuing a cosmopolitan and multicultural identity that would flourish in the company of like-minded folks in "the truly multicultural place" (Pearson, 2021).

However, upon the arrival of COVID-19, I was struck by a spike of hate crimes against the Asian community, particularly by news articles revealing that Vancouver had reported more anti-Asian hate crimes than in the top 10 biggest U.S. cities combined, and that half of residents of Asian descent in British Columbia had experienced a hate incident (see Hernandez, 2021).

⁴ In this study, the term, *1.5-generation immigrant youth*, refers to first-generation immigrant youth who immigrated to a host country (Canada) before or during their early teens. The term, *second-generation immigrant youth*, indicates Canadian-born youth of foreign-born parents.

The landmark place of multiculturalism in Canada was dramatically revealing the hollowness of the myth of multiculturalism that officially claimed that “racial equity and harmony exist in Canada, and that Canada consistently supports a high quality of life for everyone” (Simpson et al., 2011, p. 287). The resurgence of racism in Canada, especially in Vancouver, the place I chose for my multicultural vision, muddled my identity and sense of belonging all over again in a totally different way from what I had experienced in Japan. I was conscious of my Koreanness in Japan, but now I became conscious of my Asianness more with the fear of encountering racial slurs or assaults. In the meantime, I came to wonder how Asian youth come to terms with this phenomenon. Put differently, how would an adolescent who has been raised and educated mostly in Canada, and thinks of themselves as a Canadian citizen, react to the revealed perceptions of other fellow Canadians and media looking at them merely as Asian, not Canadian, or as *threat* (Ward, 1990) or even *virus* (Liu, 2021)? What implications does this have for their identification and sense of belonging? What does the identity *Asian* mean to youth of Asian descent now?

1.2 Research Context

This section discusses context of this study, which unfolds around three dimensions—demographic trends and key concepts from the literature, historical contexts, and assumptions for research.

1.2.1 Increasing Asian Immigration and What the Literature Says

First, it is essential to understand why this topic needs attention in the contemporary Canadian context. I first discuss the current demographic trends of Asian immigrant populations. It should be noted that Korean and Japanese youth are officially categorized as *visible*

minorities,⁵ or more commonly, they are identified as Asians in demographic surveys. According to the most recent census in 2016,⁶ the percentage of the immigrant⁷ population of Canada—21.9% (7.5 million) in 2016—will rise to between 31.2% and 35.9% by 2036 (Statistics Canada, 2017a). In British Columbia, where immigrants represented 28% of the total population in 2016, people from the Asian continent account for most recent immigrants.⁸ Especially in the Metro Vancouver area where I live, immigrants and second-generation individuals made up 66% of the population in 2016, which could rise to between 69% and 74% by 2036. Canada witnessed a substantial increase in Asian migration following the implementation of two significant policies: the removal of national origin as a criterion for admissibility in 1967, and the enactment of multiculturalism as national policy in 1971 (Boyd & Tian, 2016). The 2016 national data demonstrated that almost half (49.1%) of the foreign-born population was from Asia and that close to 70% of those who reported Asian origins were foreign-born, all of which highlight the recent influx of Asian immigrants. If this trend continues, Asian-born immigrants will make up between 55.7% and 57.9% of Canada’s total immigrant population in 2036. The census also identified 27% of Canada’s youth aged 15 to 30 as members of visible minority groups, compared with 13% in 1996. Asian youth constitute a dominant majority of this group.

⁵ *Visible minorities* are defined by the Government of Canada for demographic purposes as “persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-White in colour” (Statistics Canada, 2017).

⁶ From the 2016 Census of Population. The updated data based on the 2021 Census will become available in mid-2022 via the Statistics Canada’s website.

⁷ In this paper, *immigrants* indicate people who are or have ever been landed immigrants, whereas *immigrant youth* indicate children of immigrants who were born in foreign countries (1.5 generation) and born in Canada (second generation; Statistics Canada, 2017).

⁸ According to the 2016 Census, out of a population of six million visible minorities of Asian descent, those of Chinese, East Indian, and Filipino descent were the majority group, representing 29%, 23%, and 14%, respectively, while the Korean and Japanese populations stood at 3% and 2%, respectively.

This trend gives rise to several questions: How well do these young people identified as Asian adapt to Canadian society, and what are the challenges they face? What do we know about the differences and similarities between people who are homogeneously categorized as Asian yet possess diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds? Do contemporary Canadian society, policymakers, and educators have a good understanding of these young people of Asian descent?

To search for the answers to these questions, I investigated the literature in Canada and discovered a plethora of studies delving into issues of identity and sense of belonging among Asian immigrant youth. Details are elaborated in the next chapter (Chapter 2), but essential concepts are introduced here to provide the critical context of this study. To begin with, it is important to highlight the outcome of the Ethnic Diversity Survey in 2002 (Statistics Canada, 2003), which marked a turning point in research on the identity and sense of belonging of immigrant populations in Canada. The survey revealed that second-generation immigrants of Asian descent—the generation with no apparent cultural or linguistic barriers—showed slower integration, a weaker sense of belonging, and lower life satisfaction than second-generation immigrants of European origin or even, in some respects, first-generation immigrants classified as visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2003). These findings were striking to policymakers, scholars, and educators because second-generation immigrants are generally referred to as harbingers of the future, whose lived experiences will indicate the success or failure of immigration policy, the integration of immigrants, and the harmony of the society (Reitz & Banerjee, 2007). These survey findings and follow-up discussions fueled questions regarding Canada's approach to the immigrant population and to cultural diversity (Jedwab, 2008).

The first concept from the literature to note is *transnationalism*, which has gained currency for understanding the lived experiences of Asian immigrant youth. Transnationalism is

a recently amplified phenomenon of movement across traditional borders, which has been facilitated by globalization and technological innovation (Vertovec, 1999, 2009). A critical interest to me is the dynamic between the transnational activities of immigrant youth and their cultural identity and sense of belonging across their homelands and the countries that receive them (Levitt & Waters, 2002). Contrary to the dominant narrative that transnationalism undermines loyalty and a sense of belonging to Canada (Satzewich & Wong, 2011), some empirical studies have demonstrated that transnational activities can actually promote the successful adaptation of immigrants by providing opportunities for economic, political, and cultural mobility as well as a stronger sense of self and community (Portes, 1999). Importantly, Hiebert and Ley (2006) discovered that East Asian groups (e.g., Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese) were the most transnational populations of all ethnic groups, a distinction likely to be reinforced by growing numbers of transnational families among these communities (Jeong & Bélanger, 2012).

On the other hand, as the second concept from the literature, the relationship of ethnic identity versus Canadian identity has been at the center of scholarship on the cultural identity of immigrant youth, producing broad discussions yet with complicated findings. In this study, I concur with studies that have invalidated the old assumption that one has to shed one's old culture and language to become a full member of a new society (Berry, 2014; Guo & Wong, 2015; Jedwab, 2014). Numerous scholars have argued in their empirical studies that recognition and encouragement of immigrants' culture of origin does not necessarily lead to less allegiance to Canada; rather, it produces a co-existing and co-developing relationship, which is beneficial both for immigrants and for Canadian society (Berry, 2014; Hou et al., 2018; Kymlicka, 2015). Other scholars have argued that narratives of Canadian multiculturalism that emphasize diversity

and official recognition of cultures of origin foster immigrants' sense of belonging, both to their ethnic communities and their national identity (Hébert et al., 2008; Wu & So, 2020).

The third concept from the literature on Asian immigrant youth involves race-related factors. Scholars have demonstrated racialized practices or racism to be an intervening factor in the slow integration and low sense of belonging of Asian immigrant youth (Jedwab, 2008; Reitz & Banerjee, 2007). For example, Reitz and Banerjee (2007), based on the aforementioned survey finding, highlighted that second-generation immigrants of colour reported more perceived discrimination and vulnerability than their White counterparts despite their successful educational attainment. Some scholars have suggested that racial discrimination is an underlying factor that motivates contemporary immigrants of colour to maintain active involvement in their sending societies (Cui, 2017b; Levitt & Waters, 2002).

Closely related to race-related factors and given the intensified racism and racial awareness during the pandemic, this study engages the racial identity of Asianness as a critical inquiry of the research. Precisely, the study attempts to unravel the process of how Asian youth come to terms with their racial identity and how it is interwoven with their perceived position as members or aliens in Canadian society. Research on Asian identity was rare in Canada, but studies from the United States suggest that a pan-Asian identity that originated from a political reason generally remains a topic of ambivalence among Asian (Kibria, 1998; Park, 2008). For example, some Korean American participants in an empirical study resisted identifying themselves as Asian because they value their ethnonational identity as Korean rather than Asian (Kibria, 1998). Similarly, Tsuda (2021) discovered that Japanese Americans were reluctant to identify pan-ethnically with other Asians of different ethnic backgrounds due to differences in culture and history and the conflicting relationships they perceived. In sum, race-related factors

and Asian racial identity complicate the process of identity construction and negotiation that Asian immigrant youth undertake, which served as another focus of this study.

So far, I have presented contextual information about previous research, drawing on demographic trends and the literature surrounding four key concepts—transnationalism, cultural identity, race and racism, and racial identity. I hope this process has provided a holistic picture of the identity and sense of belonging of Asian immigrant youth. Next, I narrow my focus to the specific research subjects—Korean and Japanese youth populations.

1.2.2 Who Are Korean and Japanese Immigrants?

I contend that the fact that immigrants of Korean and Japanese descent are lumped together under the racial category of Asians does not mean that their immigration-related experiences are similar per se. The distinct cultural and historical backgrounds surrounding these groups' migration and settlement may affect their experiences differently in varying aspects. Yet, nuances and variations in subpopulations of the Asian community have been largely unattended to in academia; their experiences are considered homogenous (Cui, 2015a). Therefore, this study sheds light on varieties and within-group specifics rather than common features of Korean and Japanese immigrant youth.

Let me highlight the demographic statistics first. People of Korean origin are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups; 198,210 live in Canada, representing 0.58% of the total population according to the 2016 census (Statistics Canada, 2017b). As immigrants predominantly of recent decades, most reside in big cities like Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal (Kim et al., 2012). There were 9,390 people of Korean descent in the city of Vancouver and 52,975 in Metro Vancouver as of 2016. On the other hand, the 2016 census reported 121,485 people of Japanese origin in total or 0.35% of the Canadian population. They have a longer history of immigration

than people of Korean descent, and British Columbia and Ontario were the two provinces where the majority lived in 2016. According to the same source, 10,315 people of Japanese descent live in Vancouver and 30,105 in Metro Vancouver. Although people of Korean and Japanese descent make up less than 1% of the total population of Canada, they are considered significant subgroups of the Asian community who have contributed to Canadian society in different ways (Fujiwara, 2012; Kim et al., 2012).

In what follows, I briefly explore the history of Korean and Japanese immigration in Canada. This process is important because immigrants' identity and sense of belonging shift between the home country and the receiving country, and because they often form within the boundary of collective experiences of the ethnic group in historical context (Hall, 1988).

1.2.2.1 Korean Immigrants

Korean migration has generally occurred in small fluctuations, depending on the social, economic, and political conditions in South Korea and Canada (Kim et al., 2012). According to Kim et al. (2012), Korean immigration went through four historical periods with distinct change patterns: (a) the pre-migration period: prior to 1963; (b) permanent pioneers: 1963-1985; (c) the period of business-class dominance: 1986-2003; and (d) regionalization and transnational migrants: 2004-present (p. 4). During the first period, only minimal contacts occurred, mainly for religious reasons, as missionaries were sent from Canada to Korea or missionary students were sent from Korea to Canada on a temporary basis. Korean immigration started to increase from the second period, facilitated by the initiation of diplomatic relations between Canada and Korea. This increase was coupled with a change in Canada's immigration policy that abolished national origin as a criterion for immigration, yet the number remained insignificant (Kim et al., 2012). Korean migrants started to come to Canada as massive flows only after 1973, when a Canadian

embassy was opened in South Korea (Kim et al., 2012). The first arrivals, comprising around 26,000 Korean immigrants who were mostly sponsored family members⁹ and an independent class with educational and occupational qualifications, formed the basis of today's Korean community (Kim et al., 2012).

It was the third period that marked the most significant increase in Korean immigrants as well as a surge of tourists and visiting students. Korean society was going through a dramatic structural change during this period, including but not limited to democratization after two decades of military dictatorship, the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, and remarkable economic growth (Kim et al., 2012). The shifted context in Korea and enhanced international relations between Canada and Korea led to a significant distinction between previous Korean immigrants and newcomers. The new immigrants were younger, wealthier, more professional, and more highly educated than their predecessors. During this period, a large number of educational migrants started to come to Canada partly due to the visa exemption granted in 1994. The greatest proportion of this new wave chose Toronto as their place of settlement, then increasingly Montreal. In the early 1990s, those cities were consistently replaced by destinations in the western provinces, specifically Vancouver (Kim et al., 2012).

The last period is characterized by a continued influx of Korean immigrants into Canada as permanent residents. Immigration ranged from about 4,000 to 7,000 annually (Statistics Canada, 2017d) and recorded a sharp peak following the International Monetary Fund (IMF) crisis that swept Asian nations in 1997 (Kim et al., 2012). It is anticipated that higher educational

⁹ In Canada, immigrants are selected based on three main objectives: to enhance and promote economic development, to reunite families, and to fulfill the country's international obligations and uphold its humanitarian tradition (Statistics Canada, 2017d).

and economic assets and increasing regional dispersion as a result of shifts in immigration policy will continue to be essential features of Korean immigrants (Kim et al., 2012).

One critical aspect to note is the rise of a unique form of transnational families (Kim et al., 2012), often metaphorically represented as *kirogi gajok* (Korean, meaning “goose family”), a term coined by Korean media in the 1990s (Jeong & Bélanger, 2012). It refers to split-household transnational families (Yeoh et al., 2005), meaning family dispersed across the ocean with the father remaining in South Korea raising money mostly to fund his children’s education and seasonally visiting them where they live with their mother in an anglophone country for educational reasons. Strengthened globalization has facilitated this new trend of transnational families in Korean society, where the capability to speak English has become a critical advantage in one’s education and career (Jeong & Bélanger, 2012). But more significantly, this arrangement allows families to avoid *exam-hell*¹⁰ in the highly competitive Korean educational system. Although similar migration patterns have been observed in other Asian countries such as China and Japan (Jeong & Bélanger, 2012; Waters, 2002), Korean *kirogi gajok* seems to be idiosyncratic to Korean immigrants, as they are willing to maintain a fractured family for many years for their children’s education, even at the risk of actual family dissolution (Jeong & Bélanger, 2012).

Another form of transnational family occurs when “parachute” children migrate alone without their parents, enrol as international students, and reside with legal guardians (Kim et al., 2012, p. 13), who constitute part of the current flow of Korean youth. This new trend among

¹⁰ Korean people often use this term to refer to the severe competition and hardship that Korean students have to go through for the college entrance examination.

transnational families is assumed to promote transnational activities among Korean immigrant youth, which is examined in this study. In addition, some scholars have highlighted the role of the Korean church in Canada as an essential community and space for these transnational Korean families and individuals to maintain their Korean heritage, language, and relationships (Noh et al., 2012). Korean immigrants who arrived in the 1990s and onward who are highly educated, occupationally qualified, and relatively young, including *kirogi gajok*, make up the parent generation of the contemporary youth of Korean descent who serve as participants in this study.

1.2.2.2 Japanese Immigrants

By contrast, the history of Japanese immigration to Canada is much longer and more complicated than that of Korean immigration. Japanese people arrived in Canada in two major waves: (a) between 1877 and 1928 (when the number was strictly limited) and (b) after 1967 (Miki, 2004). Although this study focuses on the second wave of Japanese immigrant families, particularly those who arrived around the beginning of the 21st century, it is still important to have an essential understanding of the history of Japanese immigrants of the first wave, given their potential impact on recent immigrants in their expanded community as well as their contribution to shaping Canadian national identity.

Japanese people first arrived in Canada as seasonal sojourners in the late 19th century and started to settle as permanent residents at the beginning of the 20th century, mainly in British Columbia. Vancouver urban areas, the fishing town of Steveston along the Fraser River, and farmland in the Fraser and Okanagan valleys soon became prominent settlement places for approximately 23,000 settlers, 95% of Japanese immigrants to Canada (Fujiwara, 2012). It was when the Japanese army bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii in 1941, a defining moment of the Second World War, that engendered a detrimental, long-lasting impact on the lives of these first-

wave immigrants and their descendants for decades to come. In 1942, the Canadian government ordered the “mass uprooting” (Claxton et al., 2021, p. 58) of all people of Japanese origin living in the “protected zone,” an area covering the west coast of British Columbia (Miki, 2004, p. 2). Twenty-three thousand people, including children, who had been categorized as “enemy aliens” (Miki, 2004, p. 2), were forcibly displaced from their homes, dispossessed of their land and properties, and dispersed and incarcerated in remote camps. More than 75% of them were either Canadian-born or naturalized Canadian citizens (Miki, 2004). Even when they were finally freed from internment camps, they were forced to either resettle east of the Rockies or go back to Japan, to which most had never been (Miki, 2004). The forced resettlement destroyed Japanese Canadians’ social and political base in British Columbia. Eventually, they ended up being scattered all over Canada, leaving only 15% of the Japanese Canadian population in the province in 1951 (Fujiwara, 2012).

It is not difficult to imagine the impact of this historical event on these early arrivals’ lives, particularly on their collective identity and sense of belonging to Canada. Scholars have argued that the memory of this massive and structural discrimination led to Japanese Canadians’ perception of themselves as second-class citizens and consequently contributed to their strategies of remaining an assimilated and low-profile community (Fujiwara, 2012; Matsumoto, 2010; Miki, 2004). The relatively high intermarriage rate of descendants of first-wave immigrants implied their intent of erasing the stigmatized label of *enemy aliens* associated with their ethnic identity to avoid further oppression and discrimination (Makabe, 2019).

The untold stories of systemic racism and the wartime experience of the Japanese community were gradually brought to light between the 1970s and 80s and more collectively when the redress movement started in 1983 (Miki, 2004). This period of redress overlapped with

the time of enactment of multiculturalism policies and with heightened awareness of cultural difference and human rights (Fujiwara, 2012; Miki, 2004). As a result, the Japanese community's struggle constituted a Canadian movement for justice, inviting coalition from diverse sectors, including Indigenous, ethnic, religious, and human rights groups (Miki, 2004). It was considered a critical site for formulating the collective identity of Asian Canadians (Claxton et al., 2021). The redress was finally settled in 1988 with official acknowledgement by the Canadian government and issuance of varying degrees of compensation, and the Japanese community gradually recovered their ethnic and cultural heritage and pride (Miki, 2004). Nevertheless, the history of systemic racism entailed deep-seated spatial and affective consequences over the generations and led Japanese Canadians' relationship with Canada to remain ambivalent, particularly surrounding multiculturalism and policies of immigration that resulted in a rise of immigrants from Asia (Miki, 2004).

In the second wave of immigration after 1967, about 60,000 Japanese immigrants, including 15,000 young children (under 15 years old), came to live in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017b). They possessed a relatively high level of technical skills and professional qualifications, and most came to Canada through either business-class or family-sponsored programs, similar to Korean immigrants in the same period. Noteworthy is that 53% of the population who identify themselves as Japanese in ethnicity have multiple ethnic origins. This indicates a prevalence of inter-ethnic marriages among their ancestors, at a more significant level than among average Canadians or other Asian Canadian groups (Statistics Canada, 2016). Another remarkable fact about the recent Japanese immigrants is the dominant number of female immigrants, who represented 74% of those arriving between 1980 and 2016. These women were predominantly sponsored by family members, likely their Canadian partners/husbands. This new trend has

created a distinct population of second-generation immigrants of half-Japanese origin (Fujiwara, 2012). In addition, Fujiwara (2012) emphasized that Japanese newcomers are neither ideologically oriented nor closely united, unlike previous arrivals.

As illustrated here, the history of Japanese immigration entails systemic racism inflicted by the Canadian government and the Japanese community's long-standing struggles for justice and their resilience as a racialized minority in Canada. It should be noted that this historical experience makes Japanese immigrants distinguishable from Korean immigrants, who did not face such an atrocity in their immigration history in Canada. Nevertheless, the target population of this study, recent arrivals, are presumed to share the essential features—being occupationally qualified, having economic assets, and being highly educated.

1.3 Assumptions of This Study

In the previous section, I presented the contextual background of my research topic. In this section, I postulate three assumptions for this study that draw on the literature and the theoretical underpinnings discussed in detail in separate chapters. The first assumption to note is an acknowledgement of the complex nature of identity and sense of belonging, particularly of youth populations, that frequently encompasses national and cultural boundaries. Numerous studies have demonstrated the difficulty of defining the relationship between ethnic and Canadian identity and identified various mediating variables in the identification process, such as multiculturalism, transnationalism, and racialization. As has been seen in the research context, transnational activities seem to add complications, especially for East Asian immigrants who actively practice multiple cultural identities in their daily lives (Hiebert & Ley, 2003). It should be noted that the single-dimensional claim that attachment to one's culture of origin undermines integration into the receiving society has been challenged by numerous empirical studies (e.g.,

Berry, 2014). Nonetheless, popular media and public discourses in Canada signify the deep-rooted existence of a binary paradigm that views immigrants based on a competitive relationship between their country of origin and their receiving country. Therefore, in order to confront this conventional binary view, this study aims to expose the complexity of identity and sense of belonging of participants as they shift across tensions between being and becoming, past and present, and roots and routes (Hall, 1988; Wright, 2012, 2016b).

The second assumption is a resistance to essentialism and overgeneralization of racial identity. The tendency to categorize individuals and understand their experiences within racial categories originates from a belief in racial differences and racial hierarchy that finds its roots in colonial history (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1979). Despite abundant scientific evidence denying racial differences, race-based notions and narratives have survived as normalized practices not only in our daily lives but in institutions, often in a way that reinforces racial biases and stereotypes (Fuss, 1989). This study stands with scholars who have critiqued race-based interpretations of social phenomena and warned against generalization and essentialization of race (Fuss, 1989; Hall, 1993; Wright, 2012, 2016b). Likewise, despite distinctions between their ethnic and cultural identities, Korean and Japanese youth have been largely categorized and researched in the Canadian context as Asian youth, with limited attention to their differences (Kim, 2015; Park, 2005; Sasaki, 2015). Problematizing and challenging this universal perspective of viewing Asian youth as a homogenized group with essential features, this study attends more to diversity among Asian youth than their similarities.

The third assumption of this study is a recognition of the ambivalent nature of racial identity. For this, the study draws on Hall (1988, 1990, 1996) and Wright (2012, 2016b), who elucidated racial identity that shifts between (a) an identity focusing on commonality, associated

either with racial stereotypes or racialized experiences, and (b) an identity of a range of differences that result from complex relations with ethnicity, nation, culture, and historical relationships. I contend that the complex nature of Asianness has been persistently left unattended both in our society and in scholarship; thus, it needs to be brought to the fore. This study addresses the ambivalence of Asian identity by examining Korean and Japanese youth participants, two distinct ethnic groups situated within the same racial category. I emphasize that putting a focus on complexity and variation does not mean underestimating the political need for creating a united voice under the same racial category as seen in the movements of Black Lives Matter¹¹ or Stop Asian Hate,¹² an effective way of addressing racial justice (Maeda, 2011). Instead, this study aims to unravel the process of forming and perceiving Asian identity, which entangles with individual experiences as well as different social, cultural, and historical contexts, so that it can help dismantle unfair essentialist views and enhance understandings of Asian immigrant youth.

Notably, Asianness has quickly gained gravity in North America in recent years. COVID-19 has triggered anti-Asian sentiment and hate crimes in which people of Asian descent have been humiliated and attacked not because of what they have done but because of their homogenized Asianness represented by their Asian appearance (Park, 2021). Being Asian has mattered throughout history (Said, 1967), but perhaps not to this level and with this impact in the contemporary world that we believe has advanced. Therefore, I feel an urgent need to denounce

¹¹ Black Lives Matter is a slogan and a movement to highlight and confront racism, discrimination, and inequality experienced by Black people in the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere (Campbell, 2021).

¹² Stop Asian Hate is a slogan and a movement consisting of a series of demonstrations and rallies against violence targeting Asians that peaked in 2021, relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in North America (AAPI Equity Alliance et al., 2022).

the exacerbated stereotypical views of Asians that continue to marginalize the Asian community and threaten their everyday lives. With this significant context in mind, this study explores how Canadian youth labelled *Asian* come to terms with their Asianness and how their experiences as Asian shape their identity and sense of belonging.

1.4 Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In this section, I outline the theoretical framework and methodology. First, critical race theory (CRT) was employed as the central theoretical framework to guide this thesis. With its focus on the inequity and injustice that people of colour face in their everyday lives, CRT helped illuminate how race and racialized experiences are intertwined with participants' identity construction and sense of belonging as racialized youth (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). To be specific, I present the following foci in utilizing CRT: (a) centring race, racialization, and racism; (b) attending to intersection of race and ethnicity; (c) deconstructing essentialism; (d) challenging normative frameworks (e.g., White as normal and people of colour as alien/inferior); and (e) examining multiculturalism.

As another critical aspect of the theoretical framework, perspectives of cultural studies and postcolonial theory informed the key terms and concepts used in this study (e.g., cultural identity, race, essence, essentialism, and ethnicity). These theories, which align well with CRT, served as a critical lens to explain the participants' lived experiences as racialized immigrant youth and illuminate the nuanced relationship between individual and social structure. Further, the theory of transnationalism helped make sense of the participants' transnational activities, a critical feature in contemporary immigrant youths' lived experiences.

For its research methodology, this study employed counter-storytelling informed by CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Counter-storytelling enabled participants and me to reveal and

challenge majoritarian discourses that have historically perpetuated racial stereotypes and racial injustice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). As for the specific research methods, I first interviewed six Korean and six Japanese youths living in Metro Vancouver to examine their cultural identities, focusing on the negotiation process between their two respective cultures. Then I conducted two focus-group interviews with each ethnic group, to examine how members of each group come to terms with their racial identity.

1.5 Chapter Breakdowns

In Chapter 2, I review the literature on the identity and sense of belonging of immigrant youth of Asian descent. In Chapter 3, I first outline the underpinning concepts and theories surrounding identity, identification, and race informed by cultural studies, postcolonialism, and transnationalism. I then introduce critical race theory as the main theoretical framework that will guide this study. In Chapter 4, the methodology chapter, I describe the research paradigm, research tradition, and the details of how I generated and analyzed the data. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on research findings. Whereas Chapter 5 presents findings on the first research interest—immigrant youths’ negotiation of identity and sense of belonging between their country of origin and Canada, Chapter 6 shows findings on the second research interest—the youths’ racial identities and perceptions of one another. Finally, in Chapter 7, the conclusion chapter, I discuss critical findings as well as the strengths and limitations of the study. I also present implications for educators and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The previous chapter illustrated how my life experiences shaped my research interest and why it is critical to examine Japanese and Korean immigrant youths' identity and sense of belonging in Canada, drawing on the historical context and findings from previous research. Based on these multiple contexts, I presented the two main research interests in examining Japanese and Korean immigrant youth: (a) negotiation of cultural identity and sense of belonging between their countries of origin and Canada and (b) perception of their racial identity. In this chapter, I review the literature on three overarching and intertwined areas— transnational identity, sense of belonging, and race/racialization/racism—that constitute critical aspects of studies on lived experiences of Asian immigrant youth. First, let me shed light on studies of transnationalism, a central feature of contemporary immigrants' lived experiences.

2.1 Immigrant Youth and Transnational Identity

Traditionally, studies of immigrants' experiences have focused on linear and fixed variables, such as comparisons of long-settled immigrants and new arrivals over issues of labour market status, citizenship and naturalization patterns, and differences of regional distribution and heritage language maintenance. The purpose of these studies was to understand dynamics of assimilation and integration of immigrant populations (Boyd, 2008; Boyd & Tian, 2016). Scholars like Portes (1993; 1999) and Vertovec (1999, 2009), however, have found that in the United States, patterns of assimilation are closely related with immigrants' transnational activities, especially among immigrants from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean countries. They started to examine a broad range of transnational activities, focusing on grassroots individual experiences to establish and theorize the phenomenon of transnationalism (Portes et al., 1999; Vertovec, 1999).

Research on transnationalism bloomed in the early 1990s in the United States, producing a wealth of literature in the following decades that has documented the diverse paths of immigrant youth from different national origins and class backgrounds in their transnational activities (see Levitt & Waters, 2002; Portes et al., 1999; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Surveys were the main method used at first, but school data, interviews, and other nontraditional methods gradually came to be utilized. According to leading scholars, youth immigrants of the 21st century, who were mostly of Asian and Latin American descent, tend to maintain social, economic, and political links to their homelands, practicing transnational activities with differing frequency and intensity from their parents. This population was distinct from 20th-century immigrants, who were mostly from European countries (Levitt & Waters, 2002).

One crucial and recurring research interest was the effect of transnational activities of immigrants on their assimilation, sense of belonging, and active citizenship (Portes et al., 1999; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Satzewich & Wong, 2006; Wong, 2008). For example, Portes and Zhou (1993) asserted that because of the prevailing discrimination and hostility, immigrant youth were often forced to choose *downward assimilation*—rapid assimilation that results in loss of their mother tongue and the cultural values of their origin countries—and ended up remaining low-class citizens. After observing grassroots transnational activities among second-generation immigrant youth, they argued that transnational activities could act as an effective antidote to downward assimilation under this condition and facilitate successful adaptation by providing opportunities for social and economic mobility, which promotes an enhanced sense of self and belonging to one's communities (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Meanwhile, based on survey data, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) contended that “selective acculturation and bilingualism” (p. 274), instead of total assimilation, could encourage

immigrant youth not only to maintain their origin culture and language but promote understandings of other cultures and languages, thus integrate better to a broader society. Likewise, a growing number of studies in the United States have continued to provide evidence showing that transnational involvement in one's homeland does not necessarily undermine loyalty and sense of belonging to one's receiving country (Levitt & Waters, 2002; Satzewich & Wong, 2006; Wong, 2008).

In the Canadian context, it was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s that scholars started to take up transnational perspectives for the analysis of migration and immigration settlement (Satzewich & Wong, 2006). Since Winland (1998) called for close attention to transnational linkages and their role in producing cultural practices and identities of immigrants and ethnic communities in Canada, several collaborative and empirical studies have attempted to examine the transnationalism of immigrants at the individual and community levels. Satzewich and Wong (2006) presented the first collection of empirical studies in which scholars from various disciplines demonstrated diverse patterns of transnational activities among immigrant populations. Noteworthy in the collection is a study by Hiebert and Ley (2003), who conducted a massive survey in Metro Vancouver. They found that East Asian immigrants had the most transnational activities among all ethnic groups—maintaining the most robust links with family and friends in their origin countries and travelling the most in both directions. Still, the underlying causes of both the active transnational involvement of East Asians and the relationship between transnationalism and loyalty to Canada remain unclear.

The literature has revealed that research on transnationalism in Canada has mostly focused on extensive analysis of transnational activities based on large-scale surveys, whereas there is a lack of in-depth explorations (Satzewich & Wong, 2011). One potential reason for this

trend, as several scholars have pointed out, is the prevalence of discourses of multiculturalism in Canada: multiculturalism facilitated transnational practices among immigrants long before the concept of transnationalism was imported (Cui, 2017b; Satzewich & Wong, 2006). Among the limited empirical studies on transnational activities of immigrant youth in Canada, Cutrara (2018) demonstrated that immigrant youth of various ethnic origins developed allegiances to multiple cultural heritages and a broader sense of citizenship in their transnational activities that occurred mostly in digital spaces across national borders.

As such, recent studies have paid increasing attention to social networks and digital spaces as transnational social fields where immigrant youth traverse multiple boundaries across cultures, nations, and languages. For example, Yoon (2018) examined digital media practices of Korean youth who lived in Seoul, Vancouver, and Toronto and demonstrated a wide range of transnational behaviours that were shared among Korean youth regardless of location. Their transnational activities were highlighted by their engagement with K-pop fandom as a growing global youth culture that is transnationally practiced and shared among and beyond Korean youth, occurring predominantly in digital spaces.

In sum, the literature has shown that contemporary immigrant youth constantly live across national borders and other traditional barriers and develop multiple cultural identities through their transnational practices. This necessitates a transnational perspective for this study in order to come to terms with the process of negotiating cultural identity and sense of belonging among today's immigrant youth (Somerville, 2008; Wong, 2008).

2.2 Sense of Belonging

As discussed in the previous section, the literature on transnationalism suggests a significant relationship between the transnational activities of immigrant youth and their sense of

belonging to their receiving countries (Portes et al., 1999). Sense of belonging has been a heated topic for the past several decades, especially among scholars interested in the effects of immigration on social cohesion (Guo & Wong, 2015). It has been considered a crucial barometer to measure the success of immigrants' integration as well as immigration policies (Berry, 2014).

As a basic human need, a sense of belonging constitutes an essential part of identity and identification (Phinney & Ong, 2007). It generally refers to a feeling of connection with people around one and a belief that one matters to others (Maslow, 1962). The absence of a sense of belonging can cause a sense of alienation, isolation, loneliness, or marginalization, and can even lead to long-term negative effects, such as low self-esteem and depression (Strayhorn, 2018). Because a significant life transition of displacement and replacement (Hall, 1987) is accompanied by immigration, developing a solid sense of belonging can be challenging and complicated for immigrant youth. Findings from previous research imply that recent newcomers to Canada from different ethnic and racial backgrounds may have greater difficulty integrating into Canadian society than earlier immigrants from European countries because of the huge cultural distance they may feel (Portes et al., 1999). In recognition of the importance of sense of belonging in identity construction, the following delves into the literature on sense of belonging of Asian immigrant youth across cultures, nations, and races.

2.2.1 Ethnic Identity Versus National Identity

In an immigration-driven society like Canada, individuals' belonging generally exists in two group dimensions: ethnic belonging (to their heritage culture) and national belonging (to their country of residence/citizenship; Wu & So, 2020). Ethnic identity derives from a sense of peoplehood within a group and culture and develops over time through an active process of involvement and commitment, whereas individuals learn the value and emotional significance

attached to that membership (Phinney & Ong, 2007). During and even before adolescence and young adulthood, racial and ethnic minorities learn ethnic labels with their associated meanings and gradually come to understand what it means to be a member of a particular ethnic group (Phinney & Ong, 2007). A sense of belonging to one's own ethnic group plays a protective role for immigrants (Phinney & Ong, 2007), whereas a sense of belonging to one's host society reflects whether one feels accepted, secure, and at home (Wu & So, 2020).

There is a long history of debate over the complex relationship between the ethnic and national identities of immigrant populations (Jedwab, 2008). No consensus has been achieved which form of sense of belonging best helps society to become a "unified rather than divided nation" (Wu & So, 2020, p. 233). Early research suggested that in order for an ethnic minority to develop loyalty and to successfully contribute to the host society, they must abandon their heritage culture and adopt the culture of host society (Gordon, 1964). This view served as the central notion of the American melting pot.

In the Canadian context, too, it was long believed that immigrants had to shed their old culture and assimilate to Canada to achieve membership as Canadian citizens (Jedwab, 2008, 2014). This belief, however, changed with the narrative of multiculturalism and the emerging notion that recognizing diverse cultures would benefit both immigrants and Canadian society (Taylor, 1994). Soon, the ideology of multiculturalism was confronted with a political backlash that warned of the potential of reinforced ethnic identity to threaten national cohesion, notably after the Islamic terrorist attacks at the beginning of the 21st century (Wright, 2016a). Whereas skepticism toward multiculturalism has grown in Europe and the United States, the Canadian government and public have maintained a relatively positive sentiment toward immigration and cultural/ethnic diversity, both in "spirit and action" (Wu & So, 2020, p. 234).

Although it is still a politically contested issue whether ethnic identity and national identity can co-exist, the literature generally supports a positive correlation (Guo & Wong, 2015). For example, psychological studies have demonstrated relatively consistent findings. Phinney (1989) asserted that *bicultural identity*, the combination of strong ethnic and host-society identity, is the most advantageous predictor for positive outcomes such as self-esteem, educational attainment, and a wide social network. Berry (1997, 2008, 2014), who conceptualized *acculturation*,¹³ a core element shaping society's intercultural relations and a sense of belonging, presented four possible acculturation outcomes—integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (see Berry, 1997, for more detail). According to the author, *integration*, a strategy of maintaining ethnic culture while seeking to participate in the larger social network, was identified as the most beneficial outcome both for individuals and society. After investigating the complex acculturation process of immigrant youth, he concluded that those who are “doubly engaged” (Berry, 2014, p. 234) receive the most support and resources from both cultures and become equally competent in dealing with the two distinct sites.

In a separate study, Berry et al. (2006) highlighted the doubled effect of integration playing in both directions: if members of the receiving country (ethnic-racial majorities) and ethnic-racial minorities both used a strategy of integration with respect to one another's cultures, the authors argued, this would lead to a more pluralistic society. Wu and So (2020) and Hou et al.(2018), who analyzed the data from Statistics Canada's 2013 survey, also found a positive correlation between the two directions of sense of belonging for all ethnic-racial groups. Hou et

¹³ *Acculturation* can be defined as a process of cultural and psychological change that involves learning to live in new social/cultural contexts after one has been socialized into a previous one. It is thus accompanied by continuous tension between the two contexts (Berry, 2008).

al. (2018) found that among four acculturation outcomes, integration was the most salient pattern in Canada and was strongly associated with immigrants' self-esteem, life satisfaction, and social competence.

On the other hand, scholars have shed light on the intervening role of race-related factors. According to Berry (2014), immigrant youth did better both psychologically and socially when they had a balanced sense of belonging to both cultures. However, perceived discrimination was the most significant indicator of poor psychological and social outcomes. The aforementioned work by Reitz and Banerjee (2007) and other subsequent studies that analyzed the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey also suggested that racialized experiences were underlying causes of slower integration and lower sense of belonging among second-generation immigrants of colour than among their White counterparts. However, the specific factors and conditions that interact with racialized experiences remain unknown (Jedwab, 2008; Kobayashi, 2008; Wong, 2008).

Meanwhile, Wu and So (2020), in their empirical study, showed that 1.5-generation immigrants (those who arrived in the country under 13 years of age) had a stronger sense of belonging to Canada than other immigrants and even native-born Canadians. According to the authors, 1.5-generation immigrants who observe the process of how their parents decided to immigrate in search of "better opportunities for their children" (p. 242) are likely to develop a sense of appreciation for their receiving society more than those born in Canada (Wu & So, 2020). They also tend to experience less stressful acculturation processes than first-generation immigrants, who have to adapt to new circumstances in adulthood (Wu & So, 2020).

2.2.2 Belonging to Multicultural Canada

The literature suggests that Canadian multiculturalism has played a mediating role in the sense of belonging of immigrant youth in Canada. Arguably the most crucial feature of Canada's

national identity since its enactment in 1971 (Guo & Wong, 2015; Wright & Nabavi, 2012), it is also officially indicated as one of the most important rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship (Government of Canada, 2016), which conveys the message that becoming a member of Canadian society entails a process of understanding and practicing the ideas of multiculturalism. In 2007, 82% of Canadians agreed that Canada's multiculturalism is one of the best things about Canada (Ipsos, 2007). In a 2018 survey, a majority of Canadian respondents chose multiculturalism and the acceptance of immigrants as Canada's most positive contribution to the world, to a greater degree than a decade ago (EnviroNics Institute, 2018).

This tendency was more salient among young Canadians, especially those born out of Canada. Younger generations and immigrant youth expressed a solid perception and high support of multiculturalism (EnviroNics Institute, 2018). With regard to this consistent tendency, scholars who saw the significant role for multiculturalism not only as policy but as public discourse and national identity (e.g., Kymlicka, 2015) have tried to figure out its effects on the integration and sense of belonging of immigrant populations. Their foremost interest is: Can a strong sense of belonging or commitment to the receiving society be accomplished when maintaining one's heritage culture is encouraged and facilitated (Hou et al., 2018)?

First, it should be remarked that despite its relatively solid public support, multiculturalism has been contested in politics as well as in academics in Canada for decades (Wright, 2016). While conservative critics have critiqued multiculturalism as hegemonic and divisive and called for a return to the assimilation approach, leftists have denounced multiculturalism's failure to address racism and White supremacy (Wright, 2016). Meanwhile, some scholars have asserted in their empirical studies that the enduring core value of multiculturalism is at work. They argued that official recognition and support of diverse ethnic

groups grant immigrant populations legitimacy to perform their ethnic identities and occupy their important roles and places in Canada (Kymlicka, 2015, 2021).

As evidence of the positive role of multiculturalism in the integration of immigrants, Kymlicka (2021) pointed out immigrants' high level of support for multiculturalism despite their awareness of the prevalence of racism and discrimination in Canada, drawing on outcomes of the 2013 survey. He further argued that multiculturalism functions as a solid link to connect native-born citizens with immigrants (Kymlicka, 2021), and without it, intolerance and hostility are likely to overshadow solidarity. Similarly, Hébert et al. (2008), who analyzed narrative data of second-generation immigrant youth in three cities in Canada (Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta), asserted that the multicultural idea of being open to others has fostered individuals' empathizing with others and embracing new groups, which ultimately has allowed them to unite beyond cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and racial boundaries.

On the other hand, racial prejudices and essentialized perceptions toward immigrants have persisted in Canadian society, which has been pointed out as the downside of multiculturalism by multiple scholars (Abu-Laban, 2002; Ali, 2008; Kymlicka, 2021). Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated that immigrant youth of visible minorities frequently experience normalized practices of essentialization and alienation in and out of school, which has a negative impact on their sense of belonging to Canada (Cui, 2015; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2015). These findings reveal the unchallenged hegemonic position of the dominant White group versus the marginalized status of immigrants of colour in Canada, calling into question the viability of multiculturalism as an official Canadian identity.

2.2.3 Racial Belonging: Together but Different

Another critical aspect of the literature on sense of belonging that this study particularly attends to is belonging to *Asian*, a racial identity. As Korean and Japanese immigrant youth enter Canada, a White settler colony, they come to terms with being *Asian*, a newly imposed identity marker that rarely matters in their origin countries but starts to significantly affect their sense of self, sense of belonging, and relationships with others and society in the land where they have arrived (Hall et al., 1996). Without discussing Asianness, I argue, it would be impossible to comprehend the identity and identifications of Asian immigrant youth living in Canada. Here I explore the literature drawing on two different facets constituting a racial identity—in this study, Asianness: (a) an identity externally imposed by the dominant population and (b) an identity politically motivated by actions of the racially categorized group themselves (Kibria, 1998; Maeda, 2011; Tsuda, 2021).

The former, an externally imposed identity, involves viewing race and racial identities such as Asian, Black, White, or Latino as concepts that are historically constructed, predominantly by White people, to differentiate and categorize Others (Fanon, 1967; Said, 1979). Despite an absence of scientific evidence, race has been a persisting identity marker practiced in politics, academics, and educational institutions in Western societies (Hall, 1987). Even in academia, researchers often have easily assumed the common features that they believe are shared among Asian immigrants (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010). Schools have also tended to lump together people from different Asian countries when compiling data for policies and allocating resources (Maeda, 2011; Tsuda, 2021). Particular connotations and essentialist discourses have persisted against people who look different from the dominant group, which has caused various forms of discrimination throughout history (Omi & Winant, 1993). Scholars have documented

stigmatization, discrimination, and violence toward people with Asian appearances when one of the many Asian countries was accused of a particular incident (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Lopez & Espiritu, 1990). For instance, during the pandemic, people of Asian descent were assaulted based solely on their *Asian* appearance, though many were not of Chinese descent (Liao, 2020).

The latter, a politically motivated identity, focuses more on the voluntary aspect of Asianness—a sense of connectedness and kinship among members of the Asian population (Li, 2007; Lopez & Espiritu, 1990). It emphasizes that racial identity, despite its discriminative origin, also derives from the consciousness of non-White status in a White-dominant society through shared racialized experiences, which can bring a sense of togetherness and solidarity regardless of individuals' different ethnic origins (Wright, 2016b). Building on this perspective, pan-Asian identity is closely related to the history of *Asian Americans*, a collective identity that emerged in the 1960s, inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement (Kibria, 1998; Maeda, 2011; Park, 2008). As a means of political empowerment for social justice, the collective identity of Asian American gradually expanded into American society and engendered a growing number of pan-Asian publications and university programs in Asian American studies (Kibria, 1998).

Despite the recognizable achievements of the Asian American movement, which actually brought enhanced conditions to the Asian community, the literature shows that the sense of belonging to a pan-Asian identity has remained complicated among people of Asian descent (Kibria, 1998; Park, 2008). Scholars who explore Black identity have argued that the complexity of pan-ethnic identity stems from two critical, often contradictory aspects of its nature: (a) collective identity based on shared experiences encompassing displacement, diaspora, and racialization and (b) diversity in ethnicity and region (see Hall, 1988, 1993; Wright, 2016b for

more detail). The literature shows that like Black identity, Asian identity entails complex definitions and unresolved ambivalence (Park, 2008). One significant factor in the development of Asian identity was the increased diversification of ethnic groups resulting from the influx of immigrants labelled Asians since the late 1960s (Takagi, 1994). Another obscuring aspect of Asian identity involves the class difference between early immigrants of the working class and highly educated and economically affluent immigrants who have arrived since the 1960s (Kibria, 1998). One crucial factor to note is the different *homeland conceptions* that Asian immigrants maintain through strong links with their countries of origin and transnational engagement. Kibria (1998) suggested that immigrants from Asian countries tend to adopt homeland conceptions that often contain ethnocentric and nationalistic narratives and antagonism toward others from the Asian Pacific region, which intervenes in the formation of Asian solidarity.

Research on Asian identity is yet to be fully explored, but some studies are noteworthy. Kibria (1998), who analyzed attitudes and beliefs of second-generation Asian Americans through in-depth interviews, found that despite their awareness of historical animosity between their origin countries and Japan, Chinese and Korean participants perceived Japanese Americans as closer than other non-East Asian ethnic groups. The author further identified a belief among participants that there existed common cultural codes among East Asians, which were a critical reason for their perception of being similar to but different from their White peers. According to this finding, an emphasis on educational achievement, family, honesty, hard work, and respect for elders was perceived by participants as shared among East Asian cultures (Kibria, 1998). The shared sense of being *similar* among East Asians, the author argued, was further facilitated by the narrative of model minority, which conveys a seemingly favourable socioeconomic image of Asians (Kibria, 1998). Relevant is a study by Min and Kim (2000), who analyzed 15

autobiographical essays of 1.5- or second-generation Asian American professionals. The authors found variations in participants' perception of their Asian identity and further uncovered that Korean, Japanese, and Chinese Americans tended to be involved in pan-Asian organizations more than members of other Asian groups, suggesting their likelihood of banding together (Min & Kim, 2000).

By contrast, a sense of resistance to identifying with pan-Asian identity has been reported among Asian Americans, especially among Korean and Japanese Americans. For example, Kibria's (1998) aforementioned findings revealed that some Koreans who valued their ethnonational identity as Korean resisted identifying themselves as Asians (Kibria, 1998). Similarly, Tsuda (2021) discovered that most Japanese Americans he interviewed felt separate from their Asian co-ethnics and perceived themselves distinctively as Japanese Americans. In addition, most Japanese participants indicated homeland tensions, especially toward Korean Americans with whom they felt difficulty developing a shared pan-ethnic identity (Tsuda, 2021). The Japanese interviewees also commonly demonstrated a notion of the ethnic hierarchy among Asian Americans, which, the author argued, seemed to diminish their perceptions of pan-Asian identity and social relationships with other Asian Americans (Tsuda, 2021, p. 15).

In the Canadian context, despite a growing body of research on lived experiences of Asian immigrants and their history (e.g., at UBC and the University of Toronto), the examination of pan-Asian identity or the identity of Asian Canadians is a relatively recent phenomenon (Lee, 2007). Noteworthy are continued efforts to document cultural activism among Asian artists, writers, and activists to raise awareness and solidarity for the Asian community (see Lee, 2008; Li et al., 2007; Sooriyakumaran, 2020). Yet Asianness in Canada seems to be discussed around a shared history of racialized experiences of Asian communities (Kim, 2016; Lee, 2008; Verduyn,

2008). Therefore, in line with this research trend, a micro-level exploration of Korean and Japanese immigrant youth who are identified as Asians but have different ethnic identities and whose origin countries are in a competitive relationship may take a step toward unraveling the complex process of forming Asianness in the Canadian context, thereby adding nuanced insights to the literature on pan-Asian identity.

2.3 Race, Racialization, and Racism

The literature so far has indicated extensively that discriminatory inequalities underlie visible minorities' slow integration to Canada and low sense of belonging (Jedwab, 2008; Reitz, 2012; Reitz & Banerjee, 2007). Despite increasing awareness of race-related factors that affect the lived experiences of Asian immigrant youth, research has been limited in its scope and methods. In this section, I sketch out how race relations have been taken up in studies on Asian immigrant youth.

2.3.1 From Yellow Peril to Model Minority, and Back to Yellow Peril

According to Edward Said (1979), the term *Oriental* is a historically constructed concept, an invention of the European imagination throughout the 19th century. The concept of *Orientalism*, which portrays people of the Orient as uncivilized, immoral, and therefore deserving of contempt, has profoundly affected institutions and individuals as well as knowledge production in Western countries for centuries (Kim, 2016). As one of many *Others* in Western society, Orientals, or more recently, Asians, have experienced various forms of racism and discrimination (Kim, 2016). Although the racism, racialization, discrimination, harassment, and prejudice that people of Asian descent have faced fall under the umbrella of racism, I contend that it is crucial to understand and document the specifics that might differ from what Black or Latino populations have experienced (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010).

Numerous studies have demonstrated that detrimental discourses such as *aliens*, *threat to Canada*, or *yellow peril* have perpetuated racialized practices and blatant racism at both the individual and institutional levels against people from Asia throughout Canada's immigration history (Li, 1999a; Walker, 2008; Ward, 1990).¹⁴ On the other hand, contemporary anti-Asian racism exists in people's everyday lives in rather implicit and subtle ways, which are associated with essentialist discourses (Cui, 2015a; Shin, 2015). For example, the narrative of the *model minority* is a typical discourse that has long dominated the racial framing and perceptions of Asian youth (Chou & Feagin, 2015). It portrays Asians, especially Asian youth, as academically focused but socially awkward, poor at sports, obedient, quiet, and nerdy (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Lee, 2015; Wong & Halgin, 2006). Scholars have pointed out that this seemingly positive but highly essentializing discourse, initially coined by William Peterson in 1966, is in its nature deeply associated with the long-seated, negative narrative of yellow peril that has persistently marginalized Asian immigrants (Hsu, 2015; Wu, 2015). It has continued to other and stigmatize Asian youth as inherently different from the majority population (Wong & Halgin, 2006).

The damaging effect of such narratives that have been revived during the pandemic period is well exemplified in recent studies and countless media outputs. Studies have demonstrated how ill-intended rhetoric such as *virus=Asians* is associated with offensive reactions and anti-Asian sentiment (e.g., Endo, 2020; Noel, 2020; Reny & Barreto, 2020). Recently, American scholars Reny and Barreto (2020) indicated profound relationships between anti-Asian attitudes and concerns about the COVID-19 virus as well as xenophobic behaviours,

¹⁴ Some examples of institutional discrimination and racism against Asian populations include the Chinese head tax, Japanese internment, and the Komagata Maru incident. These are typically presented but reduced examples of national policies and decisions by the Canadian government (see Johnston, 2014; Weinfeld & Wilkinson, 1999 for more detail).

which were uniquely targeted at Asian Americans, not other racial minorities. The authors argued that the behaviours they documented constituted a recurring form of othering practices and racism against Asian populations (Reny & Barreto, 2020).

2.3.2 Asian Youths' Racialized Experiences in Canada

Studies on Asian immigrant youth in Canada have traditionally focused on explorations of their educational and occupational achievements or comparisons of these achievements with those of other ethnic groups (Boyd & Tian, 2016). Only a limited number of empirical studies have engaged racialized experiences of Asian immigrant youth as central topics. This research trend might involve the tendency of avoiding discussions of racism and racialization experiences, which are often observed in Canadian public and educational institutions (Lund, 2006). Lund (2006) argued that not only educators but students also tended to be reluctant to address or talk about racism, which makes it difficult to research race-related issues or seek to resolve problems in practice.

Whereas literature on Korean and Japanese immigrant youth in Canada is rare, a series of empirical studies that Cui (2015a, 2015b, 2017b, 2019a, 2019b) conducted on Chinese youths' lived experiences is beneficial for informing theoretical and methodological designs of this study. The author has examined, mostly through in-depth interviews, how Chinese youth experience and perceive racialization and racism at school and how these experiences affect their identity construction. She argued that essentializing views and discourses like model minority contribute to the development of a racialized *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) against Chinese youth, which normalizes racialized practices in educational settings (Cui, 2015a). According to the author, three negative connotations constitute a racialized habitus: Chinese Canadians are (a)

academic achievers and foreign competitors, thus antisocial nerds; (b) undesirable immigrants from the non-Western world; and (c) obedient and weak targets of bullying (Cui, 2019b).

Furthermore, Cui and other scholars have reported racialized practices in school curriculums. Among various examples were teachers' biased knowledge construction and Eurocentric textbooks that contained a dichotomous worldview of *the West and the rest*, dismissing Asian culture and history (Cui, 2016, 2017a; Cui & Kelly, 2013). The authors argued that such normalized and racialized school practices as *hidden curriculum* continuously inform and mislead the thoughts and behaviours not only of the non-Asian majority of peers and teachers but also Asian youth themselves, who internalize these essentialized discourses (Cui, 2015a, 2019b).

Some studies have particularly emphasized the role of the Canadian media in producing and reproducing essentializing narratives and misrepresentations of Asian youth (Cui, 2011). For example, Cui and Kelly (2013) critiqued "Too Asian?" (Findlay & Köhler, 2022), an article published in *Maclean's* magazine in 2010, for its racist nature and promotion of essentialization of Asian students. This controversial article, which aroused critiques from various social groups, accused Asian students who are enrolled in Canadian universities of being *overrepresented* and only academically focused and socially inept, thereby disrupting the campus culture that should be White-centred. The authors contended that the article revealed not only the normalization of essentialist narratives against Asian youth but the Canadian media's function in marginalizing racialized youth and reinforcing an unequal racial hierarchy (Cui & Kelly, 2013).

A bulk of literature in the field of language education has also reported racialized experiences of Asian youth. Studies have shown how the Canadian educational system persistently disregards non-Western languages that immigrant students of colour speak. Emphasizing English and French as official languages while underestimating the educational

benefits of heritage language regardless of the abundant evidence has continued to marginalize English language learners (ELLs), who are predominantly from Asian countries (Kubota & Bale, 2020; Shin, 2015).

2.4 Summary of Literature Review

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature on three intertwined topics—transnationalism, sense of belonging, and race/racialization/racism. First, the literature on transnationalism showed that contemporary immigrant youth actively engage with multiple cultural practices with diverse paths by crossing national and other various borders. Among the critical findings was that immigrant youths' transnational involvement with their home countries does not necessarily undermine their sense of belonging to Canada. Race-related factors, however, were found to be related to the extent of transnational activities of immigrant youth.

Secondly, I explored studies on sense of belonging involving three identity dimensions—ethnic, national, and racial identity. In discussions of the negotiation between ethnic identity and Canadian identity, some studies focused on competitive relationships, whereas others pointed to bicultural identity or commitment to both cultures. The literature spoke to the facilitating role of multiculturalism as a national identity in immigrant youths' sense of belonging, yet studies recognized that existing prejudices and essentialization offset this effect. The literature on Asianness as racial identity shows that Asian identity, like Black identity, is constituted of two distinct and contradicting aspects—an externally imposed identity associated with negative connotations and a politically and voluntarily motivated identity. The ambivalent nature of Asian identity continues to complicate the sense of belonging to a pan-Asian identity among the Asian community. Noteworthy for this study were the contradictory findings surrounding Asian identity among Japanese and Korean Americans. They perceive one another as closer than other

Asian ethnic groups, yet they feel resistant to identify with one another, mostly because of the conflicting relationship between their origin countries.

The last aspect of the literature on race/racialization/racism indicates that long-existing stereotypes, essentializing narratives, and misrepresentations of Asian populations perpetuate and normalize racist practices at both the individual and institutional levels, including the media. Such racialized experiences constantly impede the identity work and sense of belonging of youth of Asian descent. Drawing on the literature review, in the next chapter, I introduce and discuss key theories and concepts as the theoretical framework of this study.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The literature reveals that Asian immigrant youth in Canadian society go through a complex process of constructing and negotiating their identity and sense of belonging across ethnicity, nation, and race. It also shows that Asian immigrant youth continuously encounter obstacles that interfere with this negotiation process. Among such obstacles, experiencing racialization and racism has been discovered to be a recurring factor that continues to have a profound impact on their identity and sense of belonging.

This chapter involves the theoretical framework for this study, which consists of three components: key terms and conceptualizations, transnationalism, and critical race theory. The first section lays out a conceptual background informed by cultural studies and postcolonial theorists. Theories of transnationalism constitute the second section and provide guidance for the interpretation of transnational activities. The last section presents a discussion of critical race theory (CRT), the central theoretical framework of this study, which guided the empirical inquiry into the lived experiences of racialized youth.

3.1 Key Terms and Conceptualizations

Theories of cultural studies and postcolonial theory offer crucial explanations of key terms and concepts for this study. These theories have traditionally attended to marginalized populations and contributed to unraveling the dynamic of immigrants' relationships with social structure from a critical perspective. Particularly, Stuart Hall's seminal work provides valuable insights for the core concepts in this study, which are crucial to an understanding of immigrant youths' lived experiences—identity, cultural difference, race, ethnicity, and diaspora.

According to Hall (1987), *identity* is constructed across a sense of *difference*. The notion of difference necessarily entails a sense of *Us* and *Them* that originates from colonial history

(Said, 1979), which produced perpetuating power relations between the West and the Other, and between White and non-White (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1988). Therefore, identity, which is shaped in a historical relationship, is in its nature relational, fluid, and inherently contested and political (Hall, 1987). A topic of immigrant youths' identity necessarily brings to the fore their lived experiences of *displacement*, which, as Hall (1990) argued, refers to dislocation from one's birthplace and entering a new place for settlement. This impactful experience of displacement and subsequent recognition of self through difference influences immigrants' identity and identifications, which shift between who they were and who they have become (Hall, 1990).

Hall (1987) asserted that for those who have gone through historical experiences of displacement (e.g., slavery, dislocation, or migration), what determines their identity and identifications most profoundly is racial consciousness, or simply *race*. As a modern phenomenon, race and racial categories are historically and politically constructed concepts, and the very meaning of race has shifted over time across cultures (Fuss, 1994). Despite no scientific evidence that differentiates one racial category from others, race has worked as a significant identifier throughout history, often in associations with other social identifiers such as class and gender (Hall, 1987). Hall (1988) shed light on the social process by which race and racial differences have been normalized in Western societies, in which cultural and political *representations* have played significant roles. Representations of Others have been overly focused on simplistic and stereotypical characterization of a particular race(s), producing and reproducing essentializing racial discourses, and thereby continuing to reinforce racialized practices in society and marginalize racial minorities (Hall, 1988).

To better understand the dynamic of representations of Others, I turn to the concepts of *essence* and *essentialism* (Fuss, 1994). From psychoanalytic and postcolonial perspectives, Fuss

(1994) conceptualized *essence*, which refers to something that people believe to be true, irreducible, and unchanging. According to the author, the essence (of race) is a historical concept, which is deeply related to production and reproduction of difference predominantly by cultural and political representations based upon no actual, scientific evidence (Fuss, 1994). Therefore, *essentialism*, a social, cultural practice based upon a belief in essence, is problematic. It tends to make one part of a person or group's identity an irreducible and unchangeable core that stands for the whole identity and prevents further investigation into other significant elements. Through the repetition of this process, essentialism contributes to reinforcing stereotypical characterizations of racialized populations (Fuss, 1994).

Several scholars have attended to the multifaceted impact of essentialization and representation on the identities and identifications of racial minorities (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1967; Fuss, 1994; Hall, 1990). According to Hall (1990), racial minorities tend to internalize essentialist discourses that dominant White groups have created against them without realizing their racialist intent. Such double connotations, operating both outside and inside, contribute to perpetuating the marginalization of racialized others and reinforcing the power hierarchy. This is why Hall (1990) argued for a politics of recognition and representation as a necessary task in confronting essentialist discourses and practices. In this vein, he emphasized the importance of understanding race not as an essential category and instead attending to the diversity of social experiences, positions, and cultural identities within and across racial categories (Hall, 1990). Hall (1988) contended that cultural diaspora would eventually signal the end of essence, as increasing diaspora experiences would expose diversity and hybridity instead of essence.

As this study involves the intersection of race and ethnicity, it is necessary to understand the concept of *ethnicity*. Hall (1988) argued that the term ethnicity acknowledges the place of

history, language, and culture that shape different contexts. Such a notion positions ethnic identities as a crucial part of who we are and speaks to the importance of acknowledging different experiences across different ethnicities (Hall, 1988). Another critical concept related to ethnicity is *cultural identity*. According to Hall (1990), cultural identity forms and transforms as a result of dynamics of history, culture, and power. It is composed of both shared historical and cultural experiences and significant differences constituting “what we have become” (p. 436). His emphasis on the continuous process of “becoming” (p. 435) resists essentialist discourses that attempt to freeze racial difference into some “timeless zone” (Hall, 1990, p. 437). Drawing on these conceptualizations, this study looks at identification as a process of constant negotiation between past and future, being and becoming, close and far (Hall, 1990; Wright, 2012).

3.2 Transnationalism

This study takes up *transnationalism* as a crucial theoretical element in elucidating the dynamics of participants’ negotiating process of cultural identity. This section briefly offers a definition of transnationalism and key discussions that informed my interpretation of immigrant youths’ transnational activities. Although transnationalism encompasses a range of scopes and various circumstances (Morris & Wright, 2009), this study is limited to delineating transnational activities with regard to cultural behaviours and practices, which is informed by cultural studies.

Although people have crossed national borders for many reasons from ancient times, it was in the early 1990s when scholars started to pay special attention to the rapid increase of transnational activities (Satzewich & Wong, 2006). With sweeping globalization and advances in communication, transportation, and technology in modern society, there emerged a growing number of immigrant populations who maintained lifestyles of having regular and repeated contact patterns across national borders (Portes et al., 1999). Vertovec (1999) defined

transnationalism as “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states” (p. 451). Understanding this phenomenon is of critical importance to receiving countries because of its impact on cultural assimilation and social integration of the immigration population (Vertovec, 1999).

Drawing on a cultural studies perspective, this study approaches transnationalism as a hybrid cultural phenomenon in which transnational youth socialize across diverse borders of difference in their everyday lives (Vertovec, 1999). As Levitt and Schiller (2004) argued, individuals can no longer be understood by merely looking at what is going on within national boundaries. According to the authors, recent immigrants are often embedded in “multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social fields” (p. 1003) in which they constantly practice *simultaneity*. This means that recent immigrants live lives that incorporate daily activities and routines both in a host country and a country of origin simultaneously through various transnational methods, particularly by utilizing digital media (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Vertovec (2009) pointed out that despite the straightforward expansion of transnationalism among immigrant populations, its processes and outcomes are often complicated by various contexts and also numerous types of inequalities in power and resources.

In discussing transnationalism, this study particularly sheds light on the cosmopolitan aspect of transnationalism. Vertovec (2009) addressed the potential of transnationalism to foster cosmopolitan ways of living in which an individual’s multiple cultural attachments and cultural competencies are evenly assigned to multiple sites without prioritizing or excluding a particular side. To be specific, with increasing transnational activities, immigrant youths equipped with multicultural and multilingual capabilities can position themselves not only between but also beyond their origin countries and host countries by their own choices, participate in transnational

activities that move across two or more national boundaries, and develop cosmopolitan identities and cosmopolitan ways of living (Vertovec, 2009).

3.3 Critical Race Theory (CRT)

This section involves critical race theory (CRT), the central theoretical framework guiding this study. I begin this section by introducing its origin and central ideas, followed by core tenets that characterize CRT. After that, I specify how this study situates CRT for the empirical inquiry.

3.3.1 What Is Critical Race Theory and How Did it Begin?

The core value of critical race theory is in situating race and racism at the center of critical inquiry into inequalities and injustices experienced by marginalized people in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT demands a phenomenon or problem to be situated in social, political, and historical contexts in close consideration with racism, power, privilege, and other types of oppression (Bell, 1995). CRT owes an intellectual debt to certain European philosophers and theorists, such as Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, as well as Black American radical scholars such as Frederick Douglass, Carter G. Woodson, and W.E.B. Du Bois (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). With its particular emphasis on race and systemic racism as its core concept, CRT has engendered a range of support, debates, and critiques within academia but has also entered into political and public sites, particularly in the United States, increasingly through the pandemic era, when racial inequities and political divide have been exacerbated (see Kirsch, 2021). Given the intensified tension and prevalent misunderstandings of CRT in the public, it is vital to clarify what critical race theory is about and how it began.

Critical race theory emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in the work of several Black scholars who were committed to the struggle against institutionalized racism inside the legal system of the

United States (Matsuda et al., 1993). Its founding scholars included Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Cheryl Harris, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams, to name a few (Decuir & Dixon, 2004). Note that the conception of CRT came after the civil rights movement in the 1960s had stalled, and many of its rewards were apparently rolled back (Matsuda et al., 1993). Thus, CRT began as an alternative to dominant perspectives, including not only the conservative mainstream but also critical legal studies, which seemed radical but tended to focus on social class with less concern about racism or race inequity (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2019). These legal scholars shaped the contours of CRT and theorized its primary constructs, and they eventually incorporated it into an intellectual movement (Matsuda et al., 1993).

According to critical race theorists, race, as the core concept of this theory, is a socially constructed phenomenon rather than an immutable biological fact or fixed physical attribute (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This view of race aligns with aforementioned theories of cultural studies. These theorists argued that racialization and racism are not practiced by individual decision-making or prejudiced behaviours but are rather carried out collectively in structured ways, thereby becoming socially and psychologically ingrained (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2019). Bell (1995) addressed a persistent paradox between the absence of scientific evidence of race and the overwhelming impact of race as the social variable in society: the socially and collectively entrenched belief with no scientific base worked to establish institutional structures that perpetuated deprivileging of racialized populations and serving White supremacy (Bell, 1995). Recognition of this persisting paradoxical reality and enduring structural impact of race in American society led scholars to position race as a “viable and reliable analytical tool for holistically understanding and improving the collective fortunes of people of colour” (Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2018, p. 351).

Critical race theory further invited other social science scholars in diverse disciplines, including sociology, political science, and education (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). Particularly, education researchers gained new analytical tools for the examination of race, racialization, and racism that had long perpetuated the othering and silencing process against racialized students (Dixson & Rousseau, 2018). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) emphasized the importance of CRT in education as “a set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (p. 25). Critical race theory requires scholars and educators to go beyond merely documenting and analyzing disparities in reality and endeavour to produce meaningful outcomes that actually correct racial inequity (Dixson & Rousseau, 2018).

In what follows, I introduce the central tenets of CRT, which provide specific theoretical considerations for this study: (a) counter-storytelling, (b) the permanence of racism, (c) Whiteness as property, (d) interest convergence, and (e) intersectionality and anti-essentialism (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Matsuda et al., 1993).

(a) Counter-storytelling

As one of the oldest human art forms, storytelling has played a crucial role for diverse communities to maintain their histories and cultural identities. Stories have been a pivotal means of entertainment, education, and cultural preservation that instill moral values and worldviews of community members (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Critical race theory, by using *counter-storytelling* (Matsuda, 1987), exposes and emphasizes the experiences and thoughts of racialized people. Specifically, counter-storytelling questions and challenges taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs as well as majoritarian stories and frameworks that have distorted and silenced the

experiences of people of colour (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2019). In addition, scholars of CRT, instead of assuming a singular way of understanding reality, recognize different perceptions of various minority populations that intertwine with contextual and social factors. Counter-storytelling aims not only to reveal racial struggles but to situate them within a broad social context so that audiences can better understand the dynamics of how racialized social policies and practices operate in a social structure (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

(b) The permanence of race and racism

Critical race theory emphasizes race's crucial role of determining social structure (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). It shows that racial hierarchical structures have governed most social domains, including but not limited to the economy, criminal justice system, health services, and education, in a way that privileges White people (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2019). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) asserted that racism "is ordinary, not aberrational—'normal science,' the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of colour" (p. 7). Despite the absence of scientific evidence of racial differences, race has continued to have immense effects because people believe and behave as if race were real (Bell, 1995). Acknowledging a normalized feature of race and racism in our living world (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), this study attempts to reveal not only crude, obvious, and explicit forms of racial discrimination but also subtle aspects of racism, such as beliefs, actions, microaggression, policies, and practices that are naturalized and often unnoticed by oppressors or the oppressed themselves (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2019).

(c) Whiteness as property

Critical race theory considers Whiteness as *property interest* resulting from the perpetuated history of race and racism (Donnor, 2013; Harris, 1993). Being White historically

means gaining access to “a whole set of public and private privileges that permanently guarantee basic needs” (Bell, 1995, p. 906) in such natural ways that they are seldom noticeable (Harris, 1993). Whiteness normalizes the belief that cultural behaviours and expressions of people of colour must conform to acceptable standards without undermining Whiteness (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). Donnor (2013) argued that the social system operates to ensure that access to quality public education is the property of White people. For example, some specific educational experiences and curricular activities are likely to prioritize White students, which they take for granted to be their property (Dixson & Rousseau, 2018). Also, White teachers may define particular racist behaviors in school as merely individual and isolated issues, not something involving systemic considerations. In this case, such teachers are exercising their Whiteness as property, a right and ability to define racism and deny their participation in structural racism (Dixson & Rousseau, 2018). In the Canadian context, this tenet is well exemplified in the aforementioned article “Too Asian” (Findlay & Köhler, 2022), in which the authors claimed Canadian higher education as a property of Whiteness.¹⁵

(d) Interest convergence

Critical race theory argues that the interests of racialized minorities are taken into consideration only when they converge with the interests of White people—more precisely, the interests of middle- and upper-class Whites (Bell, 2004). Thus, policies and practices aimed at racial justice are conducted in a way to secure the White interest. Because of the underlying assumption of interest convergence, many seemingly progressive policies have ended up being

¹⁵ The authors of the article argued that Asian students’ competitiveness and work ethic deprived their White counterparts of the best school chances as well as desirable aspects of social life such as sports, parties, and alcohol. The article reveals White supremacy by claiming higher education as a property of White people that should not be undermined by Asian students who are not normal and whose behaviours are undesirable (Cui & Kelly, 2013).

faced by narrow interpretation, administrative obstruction, or frequent delays while racialized groups are often left with conditions little or no better than they were previously and the problem unsolved (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Impressive victories that deliver the rhetoric of social justice and political correctness may exist only to assure that there is “just the right amount of racism” (Delgado, 1995, p. 80) to protect the interests of Whites because too much would destabilize the status quo. In this sense, the remedies provided for the resolution generally remain symbolic and superficial rather than substantive and practical for racialized people (Decuir & Dixson, 2004).

(e) Intersectionality and anti-essentialism

Critics argue that emphasizing race can overshadow other aspects of social hierarchies that also marginalize people of colour (Bell, 1995). In fact, a significant number of studies have attended to other intersecting aspects of subordination, such as gender, ethnicity, class, and nation (e.g., Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1990; Matsuda et al., 1993; Solórzano, 1998). More recently, scholars have examined the intersection of race/sexuality (QueerCrit; Anderson & McCormack, 2010) and minoritized people and dis/ability (DisCrit; Annamma et al., 2013).

Meanwhile, CRT is also frequently accused of viewing the world as a racial binary, usually in terms of a Black–White dichotomy (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Although the early CRT literature focused on African Americans, contemporary studies show a growing interest in different groups, including Latinx people (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001) and Asian Americans (Teranishi, 2002; Teranishi et al., 2009). In addition, CRT confronts essentialist perspectives that portray a particular racial group as homogenous with certain essential features, aligning with the discipline of cultural studies. Acknowledging that everyone has potentially complex, conflicting,

and overlapping identities and allegiances, CRT emphasizes the diversity and differentiation of racialized communities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

3.3.2 Situating Critical Race Theory for This Research

I turn to discuss how this study situates CRT for exploring the lived experiences of Korean and Japanese immigrant youth. Scholars of CRT in education have emphasized the importance of having a boundary map for utilizing CRT for empirical studies to effectively engage with racialized experiences of students of colour and produce practical outcomes. Based on central tenets of CRT, I employ a boundary map with the following specific considerations: (a) centering race, racialization, and racism; (b) intersectionality of race and ethnicity; (c) deconstructing essentialism; (d) challenging normative frameworks; (e) employing counter-storytelling; and (f) examining multiculturalism.

(a) Centering race, racialization, and racism

Race, racialization, and racism are centred in this study for analyzing the lived experiences of Korean and Japanese immigrant youth. Doing so has helped me maintain critical sensitivity toward participants' racialized experiences and focus on the dynamics of how certain educational practices and narratives are systemically used to subordinate racialized youth (Solórzano, 1998).

(b) Intersectionality of race and ethnicity

This study examines how racial identity and ethnic identity are entangled in the identity construction of Asian immigrant youth. Critical race theory in education encourages studies of intersection of race and ethnicity because it helps educators recognize the diversity of immigrant youths and better understand their educational reality. By investigating the lived experiences of Japanese and Korean immigrant youth who share the racial label of Asian but have distinct

ethnic identities, this study can effectively reveal the diversity and subtleties as well as commonalities and differences of Asian immigrant youth, an underrepresented population in educational research (Teranishi, 2002).

(c) Deconstructing essentialism

Critical race theory enables this study to expose persisting discourses of essentialization, homogenization, stereotypes, and biases facing Asian immigrant youth and to show how and to what extent participants recognize and resist these discourses. Asian youth have been essentialized and homogenized in certain ways—as academically successful, socially awkward, and athletically deficient—predominantly under the narrative of the model minority (Chou & Feagin, 2015). This study attempts to examine and deconstruct essentialized notions against Asian immigrant youth and aims to elucidate the diversity and differences existing among this misrepresented population. Given the exacerbation of essentialist discourses against the Asian community and Asian youth in the pandemic era and its multifaceted potential harm, this aspect of CRT is of critical significance to this study.

(d) Challenging normative frameworks

Despite an absence of scientific evidence for race, people of colour have been persistently dismissed as inferior, underqualified, underprivileged, or underachievers (Bell, 1995). Critical race theory has revealed normalized frameworks that position Western perspectives as standard while devaluing and diminishing non-Western—more precisely, non-White—perspectives. This dichotomic paradigm of the West on top and the rest at the bottom (Matsuda et al., 1993) has historically marginalized Asian immigrants based on a *deficit model* that attributed their deficiency to biological and genetic characteristics. This soon transformed into a cultural deficit model (Solórzano et al., 2000) that described Asian culture as unimportant and less than Western

culture. More often than not, people of colour buy into these majoritarian stories and internalize these racist narratives in themselves or their communities (Solórzano et al., 2000). Critical race theory allows for exposing these majoritarian frameworks that have been normalized and thus often go unnoticed in educational settings.

(e) Employing counter-storytelling

Critical race theory serves as a valuable lens for scholars to understand the educational experiences of students of colour by bringing their voices to the fore and centering their narratives on issues of race and racism (Delgado, 1995; Matsuda, 1991). This study employs counter-storytelling, a core feature of CRT, to empower participants to come to terms with race and racism. It also allows me as researcher to illuminate the lived experiences of Korean and Japanese youth who have been traditionally lumped together with other Asian youth and often subjected to racialized practices and racism in and out of school while their specific experiences and educational needs were largely neglected. Counter-storytelling as a core method in this study is further illustrated in the next chapter, the methodology.

(f) Examining multiculturalism

Critical race theory is critical of the tradition of liberalism underpinning multiculturalism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Scholars of CRT have critiqued multiculturalism for its token commitment to diversity and insufficient efforts to see the racial reality and create a new paradigm for justice (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2019). On the other hand, the literature demonstrates that multiculturalism has solid support from immigrants as well as an enduring, mediating effect for the integration of immigrants into Canadian society. In this sense, CRT enables this study to unravel how Asian youths' perceptions of multiculturalism come into play

in real life as they negotiate their identity and sense of belonging between their homeland and Canada and among diverse cultural influences.

3.4 Summary of the Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I discussed pivotal theories and the theoretical framework for this study. First, drawing on theories of cultural studies and postcolonial theory, I presented key terms—*identity, ethnicity, race, essence, and cultural identity*—that provide a conceptual foundation. Secondly, transnationalism was discussed as a useful theoretical lens for the analysis of transnational activities. Lastly, I introduced critical race theory as the central theoretical framework for this study. After the core ideas and tenets of CRT were discussed, I demonstrated how I will apply them in this study. In the next chapter, I turn to the research design and methodology.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the key components of the methodology for this study. Critical theory and counter-storytelling are discussed respectively as research paradigm and research tradition. After that, I illustrate the process of data generation, which consisted of interviews and focus groups, and then discuss my positionality. Finally, I sketch out the data analysis process.

4.1 Research Paradigm: Critical Theory

As a researcher, I subscribe to critical theory as a research paradigm in this study because this paradigm embodies my philosophical—epistemological, ontological, and axiological—beliefs. Critical theory assumes that knowledge is achieved by experiencing and perceiving (epistemology), specifically in research, by engaging with participants, observing their behaviours, and listening to their voices. It recognizes and questions the ways in which race, class, and gender operate as important systems of oppression and brings special attention to differences, experiences, and identities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Critical theory has been proved vital to highlighting the specific needs and strengths of marginalized communities. It also emphasizes the different explanations and interpretations that researchers create as a result of their distinct experiences intertwined with physical, social, cultural, and educational dynamics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Based on critical theory, my ontological belief is that humans are best understood as having agency and the potential to change over time. I value my participants' dignity and the possibility of establishing solidarity together by co-constructing and co-learning (axiology). A qualitative methodology suits this study because its pivotal features align well with critical theory: (a) emphasizing processes rather than outcomes, (b) attentiveness to power, (c) developing contextual understandings, (d) facilitating interactivity between researcher and

participants, (e) adopting an interpretive stance, and (f) maintaining design flexibility (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

4.2 Research Tradition: Counter-Storytelling of Critical Race Theory

This study aims to gain in-depth and nuanced understandings of the identity and sense of belonging of Korean and Japanese immigrant youth in Canada across ethnicity, nation, and race. Simultaneously, in line with critical race theory, I attempt to expose majoritarian paradigms and narratives that interfere with participants' identity construction and negotiation in this study. Given these purposes and theoretical considerations, this study employs counter-storytelling, one of CRT's essential tenets (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), as a research tradition.

Counter-storytelling contributes to this study in three crucial aspects: (a) uncovering racialized experiences and dynamics among participants, others, and the environment; (b) revealing and challenging majoritarian paradigms and stories; and (c) promoting communications between the audience and racialized populations (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The first refers to the emphasis of counter-storytelling on experiences and thoughts of racialized people. Counter-storytelling helps this study bring to the fore participants' voices, reveal participants' multidimensional racialized experiences in their daily lives, and explicate the dynamics of how racialized practices operate in systemic ways (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Given that this study involves Korean and Japanese immigrant youth who are categorized as Asians but come from different and often competitive ethnic backgrounds, counter-storytelling's recognition of different perceptions of various minority groups and particular attention to other intersecting aspects of identity (ethnicity in this study), can be beneficial.

The second way counter-storytelling contributes to this study is that it functions to disrupt majoritarian stories and narratives that have normalized the marginalized status of racialized

populations. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), counter-storytelling tells a story that “aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted promises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (p. 144). It provides means of exposing and critiquing these normalized discourses by giving voices to marginalized populations. By counter-storytelling, racialized people are empowered to realize and confront the othering process and marginalization, which are otherwise often unnoticeable (Decuir & Dixon, 2004). Therefore, counter-storytelling provides Korean and Japanese immigrant youth with agency to create narratives that can counter the master stories that have long portrayed them as deficient (Chou & Feagin, 2015).

The last contribution involves the ability of counter-storytelling to facilitate communications between the audience and racialized minorities. By inviting the audience “into a new and unfamiliar world” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 41) of racialized people, counter-storytelling helps them open their eyes to what life and reality are like for racialized people. Counter-stories by people of colour encourage both privileged majorities and racialized minorities themselves to enter the cognitive process of realizing and communicating racism, which is a first step on the road to justice (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This study aims to offer opportunities of communications between the audience and Korean and Japanese immigrant youth, whose educational needs and challenges have been generally underexplored.

With the rationale of employing counter-storytelling and its potential contributions to the research, I attempted to create interviews and focus groups that would empower participants to notice and confront master-stories and co-construct counter-stories. Accordingly, the interview questions and focus group questions were created to promote counter-stories whereas images and descriptions of certain concepts (e.g., multiculturalism, model minority, Asian identity) were generated to provide multiple/critical perspectives and facilitate critical thinking.

4.3 Research Participants

As this study investigates a particular group of people—Korean and Japanese youth living in Metro Vancouver under certain conditions—a purposeful sampling procedure was adopted for selecting participants (Polkinghorne, 2005). The Metro Vancouver area was chosen as the research site because its multicultural environment with a significant number of Asian populations would not only fit with the contextual background of this research but also facilitate the recruiting process. After considering the nature of qualitative research, scope of the data, and practicability, I decided to recruit six Korean and six Japanese youth.

Drawing on criterion-based selection (LeCompte et al., 1993), which aims at representativeness, the criteria for the selection of participants were set as follows: (a) Participants immigrated to Canada with at least one parent from either South Korea or Japan, (b) participants have lived in Canada for more than two years, and (c) participants are aged from their late teens to mid-20s. Recruitment advertisements (Appendix B)—containing the criteria, basic information on the research, and how to contact the researcher—were disseminated to multiple sites through various networks. Because of COVID-19 regulations, all recruiting activities were conducted via the internet. Details of the recruiting methods and results are presented in Table 4.1.

Site	Method	Korean (six)	Japanese (six)
Social media network	Posted recruitment advertisement	Four (Facebook Group)	One (Facebook Group)
Local ethnic communities	Emailed to leaders/organizers with recruitment advertisement (Appendix A)	One (language school)	Four (language school, Japanese community)
Vancouver School Board	Submitted the proposal to VSB and received approval to contact Settlement Workers in Schools (Appendix C)		One

Table 4. 1 Recruiting Sites, Methods, and Result

The process of selecting participants differed between the Korean and Japanese groups. Whereas a social media network was the most helpful resource for recruiting Korean participants, it hardly helped in recruiting Japanese participants. Instead, most Japanese participants were recruited from a Japanese language school with the help of an acquaintance who was the parent of a student at the school. Overall, the recruitment of Korean participants was easier than that of Japanese participants, for which I assume two potential reasons: (a) a relatively small number of recent immigrants from Japan; and (b) reluctance of the potential Japanese participants to be contacted, likely because my Korean name, indicated on the advertisement, signaled the researcher's position as an outsider to their community (May, 2014).

Consequently, the enduring challenge of recruiting Japanese participants resulted in three Japanese participants who did not completely satisfy the criteria. Two participants were of mixed ethnicity (half Japanese and half Korean: Kai; half Japanese and half *Zainichi* Korean¹⁶:Manami), and one participant was of mixed race (half Japanese and half White: Natalie). Although I was aware of potential effects of deviations from the criteria on the findings, I decided to include them as participants with two considerations. First, all three of them identified themselves as being of Japanese descent and identified their cultural identity as Japanese, and they voluntarily contacted me. Second, I expected that their lived experiences and perceptions, which would potentially differ from those of other participants but represent a critical part of the Asian immigrant youth population, would demonstrate the diversity within the

¹⁶ *Zainichi* Korean: The term usually refers to those who came to Japan during Imperial Japan's colonial rule over the Korean peninsula and their descendants.

categorized population and benefit a nuanced understanding of their identity and sense of belonging (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). It should be also noted that, among the three participants, Manami did not fulfill another selection criterion that participants have lived experiences in their origin country. Manami was born in Canada right after her family immigrated with her older siblings. Nonetheless, I included her because of her solid cultural identity as Japanese and the significant cultural influence of her parents' homeland on herself and her household, which sufficed as features of 1.5-generation immigrants.

As a result, the research participants included 12 individuals—six Korean and six Japanese youths—who were gender balanced, aged from their late teens to mid-20s, and residing in Metro Vancouver. Three participants (Amelia, Kai, and Koei) were attending secondary schools, whereas the rest were attending postsecondary schools or had just graduated. Detailed demographic information for the participants is provided in Table 4.2.

Participants (pseudonym)	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Years in Canada	Legal status	Parent(s)' occupation (father/mother)
Amelia	17	female	Korean	3	Int.	manager in the hospitality industry
Connor	19	male	Korean	4	Citizen	restaurant owner
Glen	26	male	Korean	16	Citizen	professor/property manager
Jason	22	male	Korean	10	Citizen	IT consultant / chef
Jooha	18	female	Korean	14	Citizen	restaurant owner
Kai	17	male	half Japanese, half Korean	5	PR	employee
Kazuo	19	male	Japanese	4	PR	employee
Koei	17	male	Japanese	2	Int.	transportation business
Manami	20	female	half Japanese, half <i>Zainichi</i> Korean	20	Citizen	family business
Mika	22	female	Japanese	20	PR	catering business

Natalie	20	female	half Japanese, half White Canadian	18	Citizen	military personnel/educator
Veronica	22	female	Korean	14	Citizen	medical doctor

Note. Int.: International Student; Citizen: Canadian Citizenship; PR: Permanent Resident

Table 4. 2 Demographic Information of Participants

4.4 Methods

Qualitative interviews and focus-group interviews served as the main research methods in this study. In theorizing these methods, I employed a constructionist conception that considers knowledge as constructed and interview data as accounts that are co-constructed between interviewer and interviewees (Roulston, 2010). In addition, I consider language as constructing social realities that could be discovered by examining human interaction with external environments (Smith & Elger, 2014). Based upon these concepts, I define interviewing as a meaning-making process between the participants and me as an interviewer in which we engaged in a fluid interaction to generate responses that would represent my participants' perspectives, experiences, and thoughts.

In this section, I illustrate how interviews and focus-group interviews were conducted for this inquiry into the lived experiences of Japanese and Korean immigrant youth. Whereas the individual interviews mainly focused on cultural identity and sense of belonging between the participants' homelands (Korea/Japan) and Canada, the focus groups with members of each ethnic group involved issues of racial identity and their conceptions of one another. In designing the methods, *triangulation* (Denzin, 1978, 2009), a term meaning that researchers take into consideration different perspectives, such as several different methods or various approaches in answering research questions, was considered a critical aspect to enhancing the quality of research findings (Mathison, 1988). Involving each participant in two separate interview

sessions—an individual interview and a focus group—would benefit the triangulation and quality of the research findings.

4.4.1 Qualitative Interviews

Here I sketch out the steps of how interviews took place. Upon receiving signed consent forms (Appendix D) from the participants, I set up an interview schedule with each participant that occurred within one or two weeks. Because of COVID-19 circumstances and restrictions, all interviews were conducted by Zoom, the online video meeting platform provided by UBC. All of the participants were familiar with using Zoom because they had frequently used it for their schooling since the start of the pandemic; therefore, no technical issues arose. When each participant and I met on Zoom, we exchanged light conversation to establish rapport (Roulston, 2010). Then each participant's demographic information (age, school, legal status, year of immigration, parents' jobs, family) was briefly collected. All the interviews were videorecorded upon participants' oral consent before each interview started.

During the interview, each participant was asked 10 questions (open-ended, semi-structured: Table 3). With the aim of enhancing the quality of interviews and generating reliable data, I partially employed photo elicitation interviews (PEI), a qualitative research technique that is known to be useful for facilitating interviews (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). To be specific, I collected a series of images from the internet that I considered represented the broad spectrum of particular topics—multiculturalism in the interview and Asian identity in the focus group (Appendix E). Using Zoom's screen-sharing function, I presented these images onscreen when asking questions involving these topics to encourage my participants to reflect on their memories and experiences and to initiate conversations. Each interview took approximately 1 to 1.5 hours, except for the interview with Glen, who was exceptionally enthusiastic about the research topic and brought a

wealth of experiences to the interview that entailed meaningful implications: 3.5 hours was spent on the interview with Glen. All the recorded interviews were transcribed (and translated when interviews were conducted in Korean or Japanese) by me with the help of a web-based application for transcription (Otter). After the necessary revision process, the transcripts were sent to the participants via email with quotes that would be potentially included for publication highlighted. All participants checked the transcripts, and a few of them offered some corrections and additions.

In regard to language use, all participants were given a choice of preferred language for the interview. Two participants (Glen and Veronica) preferred Korean to English in describing their experiences despite their fluency in English, and the rest mostly spoke in English except for particular expressions that were Korean specific. Five Japanese participants chose English with limited use of Japanese for Japanese-specific expressions, and one participant (Kai) used both languages interchangeably to support his expressions.

It is worth discussing the benefits and challenges of using Zoom. My participants, mostly secondary or university students, were already accustomed to communicating via Zoom and using its embedded functions. It was evident that Zoom has become the new norm for learning activities in pandemic circumstances. Because Zoom allowed participants to join from their comfort zone, the space of their personal choice, without any burdensome travel (Archibald et al., 2019), participants seemed to be less stressed about participation or discussing sensitive topics, which would have been different in in-person interviews (Gray et al., 2020). Importantly, the absence of geographical barriers in using Zoom offered more recruitment opportunities by enabling me to reach out to a significant number of potential participants, when I otherwise would have been restricted to a much smaller area.

Several embedded functions, such as polling, screen sharing, and chat, helped keep the conversation efficient and focused and were easily transformed into textual data. Contrary to my initial concern about the negative impact the pandemic might have on the research, interviewing via Zoom turned out to be a powerful alternative for qualitative research (Archibald et al., 2019). On the other hand, establishing rapport with interviewees was a big challenge because casual interactions were hardly achievable, particularly in the focus group session, where all conversations had to occur only in a group setting. It did not allow the kinds of person-to-person interactions at a close distance that would have been available in ordinary interviews. Observing nonverbal expressions, including body language and emotional cues, might have been easier in conventional, face-to-face interviews than Zoom interviews.

As for the interview questions, semi-structured, open-ended questions were created with everyday language for the participants to reflect on their experiences with ease (Kvale, 2007). Here, I present the two sets of interview questions used for the individual interviews and the focus groups, which were based on the two main research questions.

Research Topic 1		Research Topic 2
Cultural identity and sense of belonging between Canada and homeland		Racial identity as Asian and perceptions of one another
Interview Questions		Focus Group Questions
1	Can you tell me about you and your family's experiences with moving to Canada?	How do you feel about the ways Asians are portrayed in media in Canada? (Images: Appendix E)
2	How was your school life?	Did you feel different when hanging out with Asians and non-Asian friends?
3	Can you tell me about your friends during the school years?	Are you proud of being Asian? Why or why not?

4	How do you/your family maintain your heritage culture?	Do you think the model minority narrative reflects reality?
5	How often do you keep in touch with your family and friends in your homeland and visit there?	Have you experienced racism/racialization at school because you are Asian?
6	Can you tell me about your experiences when you felt you were Canadian?	Have you experienced racism/racialization since COVID-19?
7	Can you tell me about your experiences when you felt you were Japanese/Korean?	Did COVID-19 anti-Asian sentiment affect your sense of self and identity as Asian?
8	To which side do you feel you are close between Canada and your homeland?	Did you have any conflicting experiences or feelings between your ethnicity and being Asian?
9	What do you think are the advantages/disadvantages of having dual identities?	Does the conflicting relationship between Korea and Japan affect your perception of them in Canada?
10	How do you feel about the Canadian multiculturalism as immigrants?	Do you think solidarity between Asians is needed? Why or why not?

(Images: Appendix E)

Table 4. 3 Interview Questions and Focus Group Questions

4.4.2 Focus Groups

Focus-group interviews were employed to inquire into participants' racial identities and racialized experiences. The interactive group format of focus groups has potential benefits because they can facilitate conversations between me as a moderator and participants and among the participants themselves, particularly for sensitive topics like race and racism. Given the reality that race-related topics tend to be avoided in youths' daily lives in Canada (Lund, 2006), a focus group setting would benefit this study by encouraging participants to relate to others' experiences and add theirs with less pressure (Vaughn et al., 1996). Studies have shown that

participants feel their opinions are respected in a relaxed group setting, and they are more likely to speak about their experiences and perspectives openly (Byers & Wilcox, 1988). Such openness would allow me to obtain deeper or different levels of participants' perceptions.

Here I briefly describe how the focus groups were conducted. After the individual interviews were completed, I scheduled two focus-group interviews, one for the Korean group and another for the Japanese group, to explore their racialized experiences, racial identity, and their conceptions of one another. All participants were invited except for Natalie, a mixed-race participant who considered herself Japanese but non-Asian. To schedule the focus-group interviews, I utilized Doodle, a meeting scheduling application, to provide the participants with an efficient decision-making process. After the schedule was set, an email was sent to each participant containing instructions on how to access Zoom, a topic list to be discussed, and basic etiquette for communicating during the meeting.

The focus group for the Korean group was conducted first, and then the Japanese group met one month later. When the participants entered Zoom, I welcomed them and exchanged light conversation. When all the participants were present, I gave a briefing about the purpose of the focus group (Kvale, 2007) and the ground rules for participation. After the participants took turns introducing themselves briefly, I asked open-ended, semi-structured questions (Table 4.3), for which participants voluntarily answered and shared their experiences and thoughts. Sensitive topics (racism, conflicts) were situated at a later stage, after sufficient rapport had been developed (Roulston, 2010).

The polling function embedded in Zoom was utilized to facilitate reflection and engagement of the participants: I created ten polls beforehand as simple, multiple-choice versions of the focus group questions (Table 4.3) consisting of multiple choices, each of which

was set to appear on each participant's screen before initiating conversation. After responses were collected for each poll, I shared the automated results with the participants onscreen and initiated conversation by encouraging the participants with minority opinions to speak first. Polling contributed to the focus group by allowing participants to express their opinions as simple responses to each focus group question, which served as valuable data and facilitated participants' engagement. The results were automatically saved into my computer and incorporated for data analysis. Approximately 1.5 hours were spent in each focus group. After the focus group questions and discussions were completed, the focus group was dismissed. The focus-group interviews were recorded, securely saved in my computer, and transcribed (and translated if needed) with the assistance of Otter. All participants checked the transcripts, and a few of them offered additional comments.

4.4.3 Positionality: Insider/Outsider

In this section I discuss my positionality, which raises a critical methodological consideration. This study examines the perceptions of Japanese and Korean youth regarding the conflicting relationship between their homelands and their potentially contested conceptions of one another. Given the sensitivity of the research questions, my identity as a middle-aged Korean woman researcher could potentially have affected my interactions with participants, causing different *insider/outsider* effects for each group (May, 2014). With my ethnic identity, I had both advantages and disadvantages as an insider for Koreans and an outsider for Japanese. For example, I was an insider with the Korean participants because I, as Korean, could relate to their worldviews and make them feel comfortable speaking. However, because of our shared ethnicity and underlying expectations, some explicit topics (e.g., feeling a cultural gap between Korea and

Canada or having conflicting feelings toward Japan) could be perceived as unnecessary; thus, they could disturb rapport (Young, 2003).

On the other hand, I was an outsider to the Japanese participants because my ethnic identity as Korean could introduce biases and tensions, particularly regarding the conflicting relationship between Korea and Japan. However, my outsider position as lacking knowledge about their lived experiences and culture allowed me to genuinely ask questions about their everyday behaviours and stimulate important conversations without the stigma that would be attached to an insider asking the same questions (May, 2014).

Having precarious positionality, I tried to strengthen my advantages and diminish my disadvantages for each group. For Korean participants, I tried to establish my insider status by building rapport through my Korean ethnic identity, while emphasizing my insufficient knowledge and experiences of Korean youth culture in Canada. With the Japanese participants, I positioned myself as someone eager to learn about Japanese culture and Japanese youth in Canada while building rapport by emphasizing the elements of an insider—for example, how close I felt to Japan throughout my life and how we shared similar experiences as Asians. I also indicated that my cultural identity was constantly shifting, and I was negotiating different cultural influences, just like my participants. What mattered to me was whether my participants and I could experience “*insider moments*” (May, 2014, p. 124) to engender a feeling of sharing and construct important meanings together by transcending existing boundaries and differences.

4.5 Data Analysis

When all the data were generated, I conducted a sense-making process with all the available sources, including the interview transcripts, focus-group interview transcripts, polling results, and the field note of my observations on their attitudes and extent of participation. In

order to approach the data analysis in a more systematic way, I decided to employ computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to organize all aspects of my research project in one place (Seidman, 2019). After familiarizing myself with NVivo (version 1.5), I imported all the research data into it and utilized its diverse functions of facilitating the tasks of managing, sorting, and organizing the data. By engaging with the research data extensively, I immersed myself in participants' lived experiences across various contexts. I looked for shared topics in research data and was able to generate about 25 codes from the transcripts, informed by research questions, literature review, and theoretical framework.

Thematic analysis was adopted for the data analysis because it would enable me to focus on finding patterns (*themes*) of shared meanings that tell coherent and insightful stories, thereby providing a better understanding of the topics and participants' lived experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, I grouped multiple codes into themes that captured something important about the data in relation to the research questions. NVivo was beneficial for the thematic analysis as it allowed the codes of textual materials to be easily translated into thematic codes and subcodes.

Referring to the guidelines presented by Braun and Clark (2006), I constructed themes and found the supporting quotes from the data. Specifically for the first research question, I identified examples of the following categories: ethnic and national identity and sense of belonging, challenges, and strategies in negotiating two sides. After I identified themes and found quotes that depicted each theme, I organized the themes to show how they were connected to the CRT themes that I indicated in Chapter 3 (see 3.2.2). Regarding the second research question, I identified all examples of the participants' racialized experiences, racial identity, and conception of one another. I then went through the same process—deciding themes and finding

quotes for the themes (Solórzano, 1998)—and organized them to align with the CRT themes. As a result, I decided to create two chapters to present the findings for each research question.

4.6 Summary of the Methodology

In this chapter, I described the crucial components of the methodology. First, I presented critical theory as research paradigm that reflect my philosophical beliefs. I then explained how counter-storytelling would enable me to design methods to expose the valuable and hidden voices of marginalized youth and empower them as well as readers to open their eyes to the majoritarian paradigm and stories. After that, I illustrated the process of participant selection, described challenges and solutions, and presented the participant list with basic demographic information.

Next, I gave details of the specific research methods of data generation—qualitative interviews and focus groups all conducted via Zoom—and demonstrated the steps by which I conducted each method. As for the data analysis, I employed CAQDAS software (NVivo) for managing, organizing, and filing the data. I conducted coding and identified shared meanings among the participants, informed by reflexive thematic analysis. The findings are presented in the following two chapters, which demonstrate participants’ lived experiences involving cultural identity and racial identity respectively.

Chapter 5: Negotiating Identity and Sense of Belonging Between Two Homes

In this chapter, I present the findings on the first research question: How do 1.5-generation immigrant youth of Korean and Japanese descent in Canada construct and negotiate their cultural identity and sense of belonging between Canada and their homeland? Directed by critical race theory, which centres on race relations, I was able to discern structural injustices and majoritarian narratives that were operative in participants’ everyday lives, especially with respect to their experiences of constructing and negotiating their cultural identity. As indicated in the previous chapters (see 4.5 and 3.2.2 for detail), I undertook the process of constructing themes that emerged as recurring patterns in the data analysis and matched them with CRT themes (see 3.3.2) extracted from the tenets of CRT. The list of themes and CRT themes is shown in Table 5.1.

Themes	CRT themes
Diversity in negotiation Variety in challenges Different coping strategies	Deconstructing essentialism
Ethnic identity and Canadian identity Confronting Western perspective Competent bilingual	Challenging normative frameworks
Precarious membership	Examining multiculturalism

Table 5. 1 Themes and CRT Themes for Research Question 1

In an effort to provide a holistic picture of this chapter, I rationalize how the themes presented here are linked to CRT themes. With the first three themes, aligning with the CRT theme, *deconstructing essentialism*, I intend to present findings that exhibited diversity and variation in how Asian immigrant youth construct and negotiate their cultural identities, which challenge conventional essentialist perspectives viewing Asian youth as a homogenous group (Teranishi, 2002; Teranishi et al., 2009). With the next three themes presented with the second

CRT theme, *challenging normative frameworks*, I attempt to show findings that confront perpetuated discourses and normalized frameworks that dismiss the possibility for Asian youth to transcend imposed boundaries and thrive (Solórzano et al., 2000). In the third theme, *examining multiculturalism*, the findings are focused on how multiculturalism came into play for the Asian youths' identities and sense of belonging in reference to their cultural identities.

In what follows, I first delineate the social and cultural process of how participants integrated to Canadian society and Canadian culture while keeping connected with their respective homelands and heritage cultures since landing in Canada. It is my intent to offer this section to contextualize their experiences as immigrant youth of colour before delving into each theme.

5.1 Canadian Identity and Ethnic Identity

The findings showed that participants' cultural identities had shifted and evolved over time as they had interacted with the environment, others, and themselves (Hall, 1987) ever since leaving their homeland and taking their first steps on Canadian land. As will be demonstrated in this section, the participants' voices revealed a variety of notions and experiences of how they embraced and shaped their Canadian identities yet simultaneously stayed connected with their homelands and ethnic identities.

5.1.1 Becoming Canadian

Korean and Japanese youth participants demonstrated varying degrees and contexts of a sense of (un)belonging to Canadian society. Most participants stated that their school environments were generally welcoming, and the teachers and peers were nice. They pointed out open-mindedness, inclusivity, diversity, and beautiful nature as critical features of Canada that they perceived had helped them adapt to Canadian society. Positive responses were salient

among most participants of both ethnic groups regardless of the conditions they immigrated under, such as their age of immigrating to Canada, their English fluency level, or their school's racial diversity. Their sense of belonging and feeling of being accepted seemed to be encouraged by having both ethnic and racial diversity in their school environment, especially being with those of the same race.

Japanese and Korean youth participants had adapted to Canadian ways of thinking and behaving at different levels and speeds since immigration. Some assimilated into Canadian (Western) culture and lifestyle without much resistance or stress. For example, Jason (age 22, male, Korean), who had a desire to integrate into Western culture, shared his experience of living in a White-dominant, suburban area. Influenced by his education-oriented parents, who wanted Jason to experience a "truly Canadian community," he tried to "shy away from Korean culture." Jason was keen to adopt Canadian values such as open-mindedness and individualism, which he assumed would be more beneficial than Korea's group-oriented perspectives. He felt he was becoming more like a Canadian as those Canadian values were embedded in his mind. Similarly, Glen (26, male, Korean) said the transition was smooth because of the earlier education in Korea that he received from his mother, which predominantly relied upon Western cultural perspectives and resources. Like Jason, Glen tried to stay away from the Korean community to further develop his Canadian identity. Glen said he grew up mostly watching American TV series such as *SpongeBob SquarePants* at a younger age and *The Office* later, which he believed influenced his Westernized identity.

Noticeably, Glen and Jason, both 1.5-generation immigrants who immigrated to Canada around age 10, showed a stronger sense of belonging to Canada than other participants who came at a much younger age. They also seemed to have a less stressful acculturation process than those

who came later, primarily because of their easier acquisition of English proficiency. These findings reflect an empirical study by Wu and So (2020), who showed that 1.5-generation immigrants are more appreciative toward their new home because they have grown up observing their parents' hard work as first-generation immigrants. Glen and Jason's aspiration to become Westernized as immigrant youth denotes their parents' desire to integrate to Canadian society and become legitimate members of society.

On the other hand, several participants who immigrated to Canada as teenagers shared the struggles they underwent, particularly regarding their incompetent communication skills in English and their perceived cultural gap. Amelia (17, female, Korean) confessed that her lack of English skills transformed her character from an active leader into an introverted and passive outsider. However, she gradually learned to care less about how other people would view her, which she conceived to be a critical part of becoming Canadian. Kazuo (19, male, Japanese), who had similar troubles with class participation in his secondary school, stated, "I'm really used to group activities [now]. . . . I feel like I overcame those struggles. I am less shy to present in front of people." Kazuo gradually gained confidence, and he even started to consider Canadian values beneficial to his own growth: "Canadian people are more open and carefree. And they like being friends with everyone. I tried to learn that as well and communicate to a lot of people, even to strangers too." Another aspect of becoming Canadian was highlighted by Kai (17, male, Japanese): "When I was in Japan, I felt like I should do more. . . . I have to be like 90 or 100%. But now, I feel like 'oh, better than 50%, then I'm okay.' (laugh)" To Kai, becoming easygoing about outcomes, particularly with regard to school grades, was something Canadian.

It has to be noted that, unlike male participants like Jason and Glen who endeavoured to pursue Westernization, a few of the female participants showed resistance to becoming

completely Westernized. Veronica (22, female, Korean), who came to Canada at age 8, said, “I was trying to force myself to fit in, but it wasn’t really my style. . . . I decided I’d just live as Korean.” She often felt excluded by other Koreans who did not want to include her in their peer group because she was “too Korean.” Manami (20, female, Japanese), who was Canadian born, also expressed reluctance to hang out with those “whitewashed” Japanese peers, saying, “they were just completely adapted to the Caucasian culture. And I was like, okay, good for you. I didn’t really associate myself with that too much.” As will be demonstrated further, critical notions were generally more salient among female participants than their male counterparts, particularly for issues of social equity and race relations. This finding suggests that the social and cultural processes of immigrant youths’ integration to Canada and their lived experiences of the construction and negotiation of cultural identity might have been affected by gender relations, which will be unpacked further in this thesis.

5.1.2 Maintaining Ethnic Identity

Meanwhile, Japanese and Korean immigrant youth also maintained their ethnic identities to varying degrees, often in highly active and creative ways. There emerged patterns of individual and inter-group commonalities and differences among the participants in how they stayed in touch with their homeland. Three shared patterns are noteworthy: (a) embracing cultural attitudes and values, (b) maintaining ethnic culture, and (c) maintaining relationships.

a. Embracing Cultural Attitudes and Values

Participants commonly emphasized the differences in ways of interacting and building relationships with people between Canada and their homeland and stated that they felt more comfortable with the latter. Jason, a highly Westernized participant, still felt close to Korean culture because of this: “It is . . . how you interact with your family, your friends, seniors . . .

romantic relationships. . . . I think I resonate more with Korean culture.” A few of the Korean participants emphasized respecting *elders* as a significant Korean value originating from strong family relationships, whereas Kazuo (19, male, Japanese) pointed out respecting *others*, including strangers, as the most salient Japanese cultural norm. These findings signified a nuanced difference in ways of practicing respect between Korean and Japanese culture.

Meanwhile, Veronica (22, female, Korean) perceived a relationship-based, group-oriented perspective as a Korean cultural value, in contrast with the Canadian individual-oriented one. After engaging with both Canadian and Korean students’ organizations throughout her school years, Veronica felt more comfortable and connected with Koreans, who valued caring relationships in Korean-specific way, “*정* [jeong]”¹⁷ as she put it. Similarly, Kazuo had felt confused when he sensed this gap in his secondary school in Canada:

I think of others . . . how my action would affect other people around me, instead of just thinking only about individual influences. . . . People contributed a lot of things that sometimes go really off the topic, and it isn’t really a bit relevant and a little waste of time for other people, especially. But the teachers are happy.

Kazuo realized that the mindset of respecting others that derives from the group-oriented Japanese culture, or “*迷惑をかけない* [Meiwaku o kakenai]”¹⁸ as he put it in a Japanese-specific term, was ingrained in his attitude and mind. However, Kazuo said he had gradually started to see its negative side because this mindset often made him feel “small and shy,” preventing him from active engagement in class activities. Similar to Kazuo, Amelia (17, female, Korean) recounted a group project in her school. She said she was surprised to see her classmates

¹⁷ 정 [Jeong]—warm-hearted sentiment that many Koreans feel unique in Korean culture

¹⁸ 迷惑をかけない [Meiwaku o kakenai]—A specific term that is considered a typical Japanese cultural norm, meaning, ‘Do not bother other people.’

caring about whether the process was enjoyable, not on producing output of high quality, which would be the opposite in Korea. Often, group-oriented or relationship-based perspectives would draw them toward their ethnic culture rather than Canadian culture.

One critical and shared aspect among the participants when asked how they maintained their cultural identity was the significant influence of their parents. Most Korean and Japanese participants stated that their parents encouraged them—often in strict ways—to learn their languages, take part in cultural traditions, and keep in touch with family in their homelands, which eventually helped them stay connected with their heritage cultures. It was impressive to hear from a significant number of participants that they were grateful for the ways their parents raised them and instilled heritage cultural influences into their life trajectories.

b. Maintaining Ethnic Culture

When asked what represented their cultural identity in their daily lives, half of the Korean and Japanese participants pointed to the ethnic food they ate daily or occasionally. Some participants expressed enthusiasm about their ethnic food, especially those whose parents' professions were in the food business (Connor, Jooha, Jason, Mika). They also noticed the increasing popularity of their ethnic food in Canada, especially in Metro Vancouver, where a growing number of Korean and Japanese restaurants are easily spotted on the streets. Jason stated, "there's . . . pride and accomplishment when I get to share some of my Korean food with those around me. . . . Everyone's been very pleased and impressed with Korean food. . . . It's something that I continue to associate myself with." For Natalie, who was of mixed ethnicity but had a solid cultural identity as Japanese, eating and cooking Japanese food in the White-dominant dormitory was her own way of connecting with her Japanese heritage. Japanese

participants mentioned their cultural practices, such as eating traditional food (e.g., *Osechi*¹⁹ on New Year's Day) or wearing traditional costumes on special occasions, significantly more than Korean participants did.

Noteworthy is that Korean and Japanese immigrant youths consumed the popular culture of their homeland as a way of maintaining their ethnic culture. For both Korean and Japanese participants, engaging with the popular culture of their homeland—including some genres that have become global phenomena (e.g., K-pop, K-drama/movies, Japanese *anime* and *manga*)—was intertwined with how they perceived and shaped their ethnic identity. Some were more active than others in consuming such cultural content. Specifically, all Japanese participants indicated regular consumption of Japanese popular culture, such as Japanese anime, music, and Japanese TV programs, on a regular basis, regardless of their experience of living in Japan. Natalie, a half Japanese who moved to Canada at age 1, displayed her passion for Japanese *anime* by sharing an Excel spreadsheet in which she documented “what I’m currently watching, what I’m waiting to come out, stuff that I’ve completed and then recommendations that I’ve gotten.” Most Japanese participants stressed that Japanese popular culture made it easy for them to make friends in Canadian schools and helped them stay connected to Japan.

Some Korean participants admitted that they had had little interest in K-pop or other aspects of Korean popular culture, but they said they were motivated to become interested later after witnessing the rising recognition of Korean popular culture among friends who were not Korean. Seeing his close non-Korean friends excited and keen to watch the movie *Parasite*²⁰

¹⁹ *Osechi*: a traditional Japanese food that is served during the New Year's holiday. Comprised of many small dishes, it is usually cold and served in a multi-tiered lacquerware box.

²⁰ *Parasite*: a 2019 South Korean black comedy movie directed by Bong Joon-ho. The movie won four awards at the 92nd Academy Awards among many.

with him was a turning point for Jason, who adamantly kept his distance from the Korean community.

c. Maintaining Relationships

Most Korean and Japanese participants indicated that their ethnic identity was formed by engaging with co-ethnic people in various ways: (a) interacting with people from origin countries in Canada, (b) participating in their ethnic community; and (c) staying in touch with family and relatives in their homeland. A few Japanese participants mentioned that attending Japanese language school helped in maintaining both Japanese language skills and their Japanese identity. Kazuo (19, male, Japanese) felt a strong sense of belonging to Japanese language school because of the comfort and mental support he received amid a challenging period of adaptation into Canadian society. Natalie, who had also attended Japanese language school from kindergarten until Grade 12 and participated in the affiliated Taiko club, said, “[It was] my way of keeping in touch with my Japanese roots . . . and my community.” Veronica (22, female, Korean) similarly stated that participating in the Korean student council at university enabled her to construct a cultural identity as Korean. It is interesting to note that five out of six Korean participants used to go to church in Canada, although none of them had a sincere devotion. This finding indicates the functional role of the church as an essential community for Koreans in Canada (Noh et al., 2012).

Most participants stayed in touch with intergenerational family and relatives (predominantly grandparents) in their homeland on a regular basis. I noticed that those who maintained a close relationship with family in their homeland possessed a high level of speaking skills in their heritage language, which suggested a correlation between transnational activities and heritage language fluency. A few participants who moved to Canada as teenagers said they

maintained relationships with their old friends in Korea or Japan predominantly by using social media. More than half of participants (four Koreans and three Japanese) indicated that before the pandemic started, they made regular visits to their homeland, annually or once every two years, mostly to visit family and relatives. Interestingly, most participants were enthusiastic about visiting their homelands because they could engage with the contemporary ethnic culture, food, and entertainment to which they have only limited access in Canada.

What should be highlighted here is that most participants (eight out of 12) indicated a strong or very strong sense of belonging to their homelands, which seemed to be affected by growing recognition of their homeland culture in the North American context. Another critical point is that at the center of their active engagement with ethnic culture was social media and global youth culture, where participants frequently transcended national borders and easily accessed their homeland culture.

5.2 Theme 1. Deconstructing Essentialism

For the remaining sections, the stories of participants will be illustrated centred around themes informed by CRT. This section is devoted to the first theme, deconstructing essentialism, as one of the core tenets of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). As previously mentioned, essentialist discourses and perspectives produced by the White majority continue to disregard diversity and particularities among communities categorized by a particular race, specifically people of Asian descent in this thesis (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Driven by CRT ideology, this section attempts to deconstruct essentialized discourses that portray Asian youth as a homogenous group with a set of defined, essential features, by exemplifying alternative stories of Korean and Japanese immigrant youth. Three themes comprise this section: (a) diversity in

negotiation between Canadian identity and ethnic identity, (b) variety in challenges, and (c) different coping strategies.

5.2.1 Diversity of Negotiation

Most participants were unanimous that their cultural identity constantly vacillated between ethnic identity and Canadian identity. The findings showed that Korean and Japanese immigrant youth all experienced a process of acculturation (Berry, 1997) in which some intentionally pursued Westernization whereas others felt oriented toward their homeland. Despite some confusion and struggles in the acculturation process, no one seemed to choose complete assimilation as a strategy. Instead, all the participants indicated having maintained their ethnic identity and ethnic culture to varying degrees while adapting to Canadian culture—that is, the “selective acculturation and bilingualism” that Portes and Rumbaut (2001) earlier discovered. For one thing, participants experienced *becoming*, a result of immigration, displacement, and acculturation, which brought them to negotiate between past and present, their old home and new home (Hall, 1990; Wright, 2012). To a significant degree, the negotiation process was affected by their relationships with family and friends and their surroundings in and out of school. In examining the participants’ responses to the question of how they negotiated their cultural identity, I found three patterns, which were not in any sense mutually exclusive; rather, occurring concurrently: (a) being in pursuit of Canadian culture, (b) delving into their ethnic roots and culture, and (c) incorporating two cultures into their daily practices.

First, some participants demonstrated efforts to become Westernized and fit into the Canadian system. As illustrated in the previous section, Amelia and Kazuo struggled because they perceived a cultural gap between their two cultures but eventually adapted themselves to Canadian ways by becoming more outspoken and confident (Kazuo) and caring less about

others' views (Amelia). Meanwhile, Jason and Glen actively engaged in Western culture to become acknowledged members of Canada, thus distancing themselves from the Korean community. Mika recounted that she felt resistant to her parents, who urged her to learn Japanese ways and language. Out of desire to have a sense of belonging, she said, she mimicked her Canadian (White) friends: "I really wanted to be like one of them . . . so that I can maybe be a part of their system."

On the other hand, some Japanese and Korean immigrant youth reflected on how they attempted to connect and reconnect with their ethnic roots and culture. For example, Veronica (22, female, Korean) stated that she had decided to orient her identity toward being Korean after realizing that interacting with her Korean friends was more enjoyable than interacting with others of different cultural backgrounds. She said, "I don't think I've ever thought about sharing my deep concerns or struggles with them [foreign friends]. It's strange, but I just can't." As has been and will be further illustrated in the other sections, most Korean and Japanese participants who had immigrated to Canada at a young age indicated that they had been reluctant and even resistant to engaging in their ethnic community and culture when they were younger, mostly from fear of being excluded from the majority in school. This pattern appeared to have shifted as they approached a later period of their adolescence and young adulthood. To a great degree, they started to (re)connect with their ethnic culture and people from their homeland and become more aware of their cultural identity as Korean or Japanese.

Apart from separating their two cultures, the participants showed how they intended to combine them in their daily lives; more precisely, they injected their ethnic identity into Canadian culture, which was a more salient pattern among participants than the previous two patterns—westernization or orientation toward ethnic culture. For example, Jooha (18, female,

Korean) recounted a time when she felt upset in her secondary school. She recognized that Korea was never talked about in her social studies class other than the simple fact of Japanese colonization of the Korean peninsula, whereas China and Japan were taken up as separate sections. In her determination that people should know more about Korean history because “it’s really interesting, and it’s still really impactful,” Jooha had since tried to share her knowledge about Korean history and culture in her class whenever she had a chance. Similarly, Kazuo (19, male, Japanese) had created his own way of practicing his Japanese identity in the Canadian context. He attempted to incorporate his Japanese attitude of *respecting* others into his daily life in Canada: “If I see someone with need . . . I’m just helping them. That’s how I grew up since I was little, and I still do that. I feel like it really makes me happy when someone thanks me for that kindness and actions.” Kazuo also shared his experience of maintaining the Japanese way of playing baseball on a local baseball team in Metro Vancouver: “I take care of my equipment carefully. I respect. When I go up to hit on baseball in Japan, I used to take my hat off to the umpire to say ‘*お願いします* [Onegaishimasu].’²¹ I still actually do that here too.”

Another interesting example of negotiating cultural identity regards their ethnic names. Jooha had not been happy about her Korean name in elementary school because a lot of people would pronounce or spell her name wrong. She had thought, “it would have been easier if my name was something easy like Kate.” When she was applying for university, her mother suggested that she officially change her name to an English one. She speculated but finally decided to keep her Korean name despite her apprehension about the anticipated disadvantages

²¹ *お願いします* [Onegaishimasu]—A unique Japanese expression said usually before starting something formal to show respect.

she might face because of sounding Korean. She stated, “I think that’s . . . a big part of why I am still connected to Korean culture and heritage . . . just because of my name.” By contrast, the first thing Jason’s parents did when he acquired Canadian citizenship was to register his English name as his official first name, but they mediated it by putting his Korean name as a middle name. Jason said his parents did this with the hope of protecting their son from any potential disadvantage in his career trajectory, just as ordinary Korean immigrant parents would do. Jooha’s and Jason’s dissimilar ways of negotiating their names not only signify the diversity among Asian youth but also show how social practices surrounding naming and hiring are operative in racialized and normalized ways in Canada (Donnor, 2013; Harris, 1993).

5.2.2 Variety in Challenges

In negotiating their cultural identity between Canada and their homelands, Japanese and Korean youth participants encountered challenges that came in various forms. To be specific, three patterns of challenges were found in the interviews: (a) cultural conflicts, (b) an incomplete sense of belonging, and (c) racialization and racism.

a. Cultural Conflicts

Most participants said they often felt confused because of the gap they perceived and experienced between the two cultures in terms of different attitudes, perspectives, and cultural norms. They were constantly in a position of evaluating and judging one side against the perspective of the other side, and vice versa. For example, Glen and Jason felt resistant to some aspects of Korean social norms. Glen (26, male, Korean) recalled one episode in his secondary school when he had heard that some senior Korean students had accused him of not taking a bow to them, a normalized school custom (often in a negative sense) in Korea but not in Canada. This eventually distanced Glen from the Korean community. Jason (22, male, Korean) expressed

disagreement with the Korean social norms defining success and happiness by external standards, such as wealth, fame, or the reputations of schools or companies that people get into, whereas he favoured the Canadian side, where subjective and internal standards are more valued.

Meanwhile, a few female Japanese participants expressed conflicting feelings toward Japanese culture. Manami (20, female, Japanese) said she encountered embarrassing moments in Japan because of her Canadian ways of behaving and speaking (e.g., putting tips on the table, yelling at a molester on the train) that she perceived to deviate from Japanese norms. People in Japan often gently told her not to do certain things. She stated:

They all dress the same, and they all follow the same trends. . . . So, people give me the weird eye on me whenever I go there because, yeah, I have no idea of what's going on there or what's the trend, and [they think] oh my god, she's so different.

These repeated experiences of feeling different in Japan made her feel like a stranger despite her fluent Japanese. Mika (22, female, Japanese) said she often had a hard time communicating with her parents: “They don't have a positive outlook on certain things. . . . My parents are very tunnel-visioned.” It was a persistent challenge for Mika to live up to her parents' expectations because her parents' Japanese ways were too distant from what she had learned in Canada.

In contrast, to some participants like Kazuo, Amelia, and Veronica, whose mindsets were oriented toward group-centred perspectives that they perceived to be crucial social norms in Korea and Japan, the self-centred perspective of Canada that, to their perception, put individual needs and wants before those of the group, were at odds with what they were familiar with. It should be highlighted that the gap they perceived between the two cultural perspectives might have posed a challenge for their integration into the Canadian system to a greater degree than for those from Western countries that prioritize individualistic values (Wu & So, 2020). It also means that Asian youth are more likely to be exposed to alienation or marginalization.

b. *Incomplete Belonging*

Although they had perceived they belonged to both cultures equally (Berry, 2014), most participants said they often felt their sense of belonging was never fulfilled. Connor (19, male, Korean) simply put it, “it’s hard for me to relate to either Korean culture or Canadian culture because I feel like I’m neither.” Veronica similarly stated that she constantly felt like an outsider in both Korea and Canada because of her awareness of herself being *too Korean* in Canada and *too Canadian* in Korea. Jooha (18, female, Korean) recounted that even when she had acquired Canadian citizenship, she did not feel like a Canadian: “I was getting my [Canadian] citizenship. But when I left the building . . . I was like, ‘Am I Canadian?’ (laugh) Like, nothing felt different. But at the same time, I’ve never really felt Korean. . . . It’s just like a mix of everything.”

Participants like Veronica and Jooha, who were competent bilinguals and appeared to have adapted to both cultures successfully, still felt that they belonged to neither Canada nor Korea in a complete manner. Such a sense of incomplete belonging was also discovered in recently immigrated participants. For example, Amelia felt that her sense of belonging to Korea was drifting away as she gradually noticed the difficulty of finding common topics with her old friends in Korea due to the dissimilar educational and living experiences. She stated, “they wouldn’t know how hard it is or how I would feel. They would just say, it’s gonna be really hard to study everything in English. That’s always they tell me, and I also have nothing to tell them.”

What is more, the feeling of belonging nowhere was intense for the participants of mixed ethnicity (Kai, Manami) and mixed race (Natalie). Kai (17, male, half Korean, half Japanese) called himself “ハンパ者 [hanpamono],” a Japanese term meaning someone (only) of half quality. In contrast with Manami, who spoke perfect Japanese but had a troubled sense of belonging to Japan, he felt he belonged nowhere because of his insufficient language capability.

Meanwhile, Manami called herself a *nomad* who does not have anywhere to belong. Her yearning to find comfort and belonging was never fulfilled despite her countless efforts throughout adolescence: “Whenever I got myself in a certain group, it was either my Japanese side or Asian side or the Canadian side, like, this is not right.” For Natalie, who was mixed race but held a stable cultural identity as Japanese, her sense of imperfect belonging was imposed by others who assumed her identity by her appearance and insinuated that half is not enough. What should be noted here is that Korean and Japanese immigrant youth persistently aspired to seek comfort and belong somewhere, which was hardly fulfilled because of the various challenges they faced, even for those who were embedded with bilingual and bicultural capabilities at competent and confident levels.

c. Racialization and Racism

Although this chapter involves negotiation of cultural identity and sense of belonging, notions and experiences of race and racism recurred throughout the interviews. Specifically, when asked about the challenges of living with dual belonging, some participants directly pointed out discrimination or stereotypical comments they had experienced in their life trajectories, which they perceived had to do with their being Asian. The experiences of racialization and racism seemed to have had a negative impact on how they saw themselves and interacted with others and how they had come to terms with their status in Canada. Apart from the aggressive forms of racism a few participants had experienced, some immigrant youth occasionally felt they were “standing out and out of place” (Jooha) or “small and intimidated” (Veronica), especially when they were with White people. I argue that these responses typify how race differentiations and racial hierarchy are underlined and normalized in participants’ lives (Solórzano et al., 2000).

5.2.3 Different Coping Strategies

Directed by the anti-essentialist perspective of CRT, this study illuminated various and specific forms of negotiation and challenges that Korean and Japanese youth participants underwent with respect to negotiation of their cultural identity and sense of belonging. Further, I was keen to examine how and with what variety of strategies participants coped with these challenges. The finding showed an extensive and salient pattern of coping strategy, which was transnational activities that took place in many different ways.

To begin with, participants commonly stated that they constantly switched gears between their ethnic identity and Canadian identity. As Connor (19, male, Korean) put it, “I can switch on and off between Korean type of thinking, like respecting elders and using respectful language . . . and then I can switch back to the Western type of attitude and culture when I meet Western people.” Similarly, Veronica (22, female, Korean) regarded herself as a “chameleon” to represent her cultural identity that transforms colours according to surroundings.

One compelling example was the transnational reading practices that some participants demonstrated. When asked how she managed the difference between her two cultures, Veronica said that much to her own surprise, she characteristically and effortlessly combined two sets of cultural resources in her daily practices. To be specific, she noticed her own reading habit of dividing Korean and English books for different purposes. Among the many books she owned, she realized that Korean books were primarily for emotional comfort while English books were for acquiring information and academic curiosity. This pattern similarly appeared in her consumption of social media such as YouTube: Videos in English were for inquiry, whereas Korean videos were for emotional engagement. A similar practice was found in Glen (26, male, Korean), a competent bilingual, who read Korean books, mostly fiction and essays while reading

English books for academic purposes. These findings exemplify the language dynamics of immigrant youths' bicultural identity (Berry, 2014; Phinney, 1989), in which their mother tongue plays a pivotal role and provides them with emotional connections to their homeland. It might be reasonable to argue that Glen and Veronica's high-level bilingual and transnational capabilities were intertwined with their being *kirogi gajok* [goose family] (Jeong & Bélanger, 2012). I argue that their well-balanced bicultural identity and competencies pose a question to the prevailing narratives that dismiss youth of transnational families as deficient (Jeong & Bélanger, 2012).

Furthermore, participants shared specific ways in which they integrated cultural elements of both sides in their daily lives. A few shared their families' cooking practices of mixing food from each culture for special days like Thanksgiving or New Year's Day. Natalie said, "Although Thanksgiving isn't a Japanese holiday, my mom and I always try to incorporate some aspect of Japanese food into it." For Natalie and her mother, food was an essential way of affirming their cultural identity. She also shared how she intentionally integrated her Japanese ways of responding (e.g., "he~") into daily conversations with her Canadian friends. Another example of creative integration was given earlier by Kazuo, who explained how he incorporated Japanese and Canadian culture into playing baseball. Jooha and Amelia exercised their transnational identities by introducing Korean culture and history to their class in Canadian schools. Participants' stories highlighted the prevalence and variety of transnationalism, which derived from their desire to stay connected with their homelands and simultaneously to be accepted as legitimate members of Canadian society.

Another crucial pattern of transnational activities that had been observed in previous literature appeared in this study. Half of the participants indicated a sense of cosmopolitan identity (Vertovec, 2009), an equal sense of respect for multiple cultures and caring about other

racess and cultures beyond their own (Berry et al., 2006). Some participants expressed a sense of resistance to staying within conventional boundaries and showed a willingness to have a broader sense of belonging and connect with different groups of people. A few of them said they made friends of all different cultural and racial backgrounds growing up, which helped them come to terms with *difference* and appreciate diversity and inclusivity. Jooha and Veronica thought having dual cultural identities and in-depth understandings of both cultures enabled them to connect with others beyond any specific culture or race. Jooha stated, “I see a lot of posts on Instagram that say, oh, Latina people, Black people, Asian people, they all have strict parents. There’s a connection between them.” Seeking a sense of belonging in adolescence, Veronica had attempted to make friends from diverse cultural backgrounds. She had even tried to learn Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino languages to learn more about her friends’ cultures. Through the course of these friendships, Veronica developed a sense of respect for other cultures:

Even if there are some aspects of other people’s culture that I don’t understand, it’s kind of natural in their culture or their world. . . . I’m not entitled to say negatively about their culture. [I think] I need to get rid of those stereotypes.

Like Veronica, Manami expressed sensitivity toward other minority groups: “I think we’ve all waited too long to take action to stand against the injustices that Black and Indigenous communities were facing all these years.” Interestingly, these female participants (Jooha, Veronica, and Manami) who had been more resistant to becoming Westernized in their adolescence than the male participants, also showed a more solid sense of cosmopolitan identity, which suggests a relationship between these two aspects and a possible gender effect, which needs further investigation.

For some participants, positioning themselves as *nomads*, another aspect of transnational identity (Vertovec, 2009), was adopted as a coping strategy. Manami said she strived to seek

comfort and a sense of belonging throughout her school years, pivoting between two (or more) cultural influences but in vain. In her last secondary school years, she met peers who had undergone similar challenges. With them, she was finally able to accept her ambivalent identity and developed a sense of being a nomad who refused to choose one side. She stated, “screw it, screw it. I’m not like you, I’m not like you. We’re just nomads. . . . So, we’re just like, screw it! (laugh)” By contrast, Glen’s sense of being a nomad was a rather self-oriented perception rather than a result of his relationship with others. In university, where he formed a solid sense of self, he started to prioritize other traits such as ethics, lifestyle, and political views rather than cultural or racial labels for building relationships: “I felt that I can relate to these friends much better than a person who is just Korean-Canadian.” He explicitly declared his cosmopolitan identity by saying, “I want to do more, contribute to society beyond ethnic identity. I don’t want to stick with family, country, or community.” He speculated that the fact that he didn’t belong to any specific side might have helped him broaden his vision to the benefit of all.

To sum up, the wide spectrum of diversity discovered throughout the interviews was a manifestation that Korean and Japanese immigrant youth are not homogenous people who could be simply categorized as “Asian youth” (Teranishi, 2002). They had complex, conflicting, and overlapping identities and allegiances (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), while constantly living dual lives, speaking two languages, and having homes in two countries with a dual sense of belonging (Portes et al., 1999). Their cultural identity was broader than how people would see or define them, and it was evolving beyond the two spaces.

5.3 Theme 2: Challenging Normative Frameworks

Scholars of CRT have emphasized the importance of counteracting the stories of the dominant group that persistently marginalize people of colour (Matsuda et al., 1993). Bell (1995)

argued that it is one of the crucial purposes of CRT to reach out to those who are so caught up in a society structured on Whiteness that they cannot recognize its existence or detrimental effects (Bell, 1995). For CRT scholars in education, the purpose of shifting the focus from majoritarian stories to counter-stories is to offer authority and agency to students of colour to confront rhetorical accounts that describe them as culturally and socially deficient (Decuir & Dixon, 2004). In this section, I attempted to expose and confront the normative frameworks that denied Asian immigrant youths' potential to develop multicultural and multilingual capabilities. Three patterns of counter-stories make up this section: (a) deconstructing a competitive relationship of ethnic identity and Canadian identity, (b) confronting Western-oriented perspectives and White supremacy, and (c) resisting the ideology of English as the only valuable language.

5.3.1 Ethnic Identity and Canadian Identity: Not a Zero-Sum Game

Although Canadian multiculturalism legally encourages immigrants to maintain their heritage culture (Kymlicka, 2015), there still exists rhetoric that engaging with one's ethnic culture could undermine one's sense of belonging or loyalty to Canada (Gordon, 1964). Despite numerous empirical studies proving otherwise (Ali, 2008; Hou et al., 2018; Wu & So, 2020), the deep-rooted belief in a zero-sum relationship between Canada and one's homeland continues to affect public discourses and academia .

The interviews with the Japanese and Korean participants provided sufficient examples contradicting this narrative of a competitive relationship between two cultural forces. Most participants perceived that their *double engagement* (Berry et al., 2006) led to maintaining a positive sense of belonging to both sides. Jason stated:

I think it's great because I'm really appreciative of both sides. I love embracing the Canadian like myself, and at the same time, I do like sticking true to my heritage as well. So, both are really important to who I am.

Not only Jason, but many others agreed on viewing their dual identities as valuable assets, which allowed them more advantages than those with only one culture. When asked to describe specific advantages, participants came up with various terms, such as *double asset* (e.g., language, culture, knowledge), *bigger picture*, and *broadened perspectives*, all of which indicated the valuable aspects of belonging to both cultures. Mika put it clearly: “I have two different approaches of thinking in the way I collect information, I think, and I have more knowledge on both sides, like culturally and also perspectives.” Some female participants (Amelia, Jooha, Veronica) pointed to having a better understanding of the status of ethnic and racial minorities as the most valuable advantage. Glen envisioned his multiple identities as a platform to propel himself to contribute to society beyond national borders. For these young immigrants, ethnic identity and Canadian identity were co-existing, co-developing, and co-evolving rather than in a competitive relationship. In contrast to the conventional view, their attachment to one side did not seem to undermine their loyalty to the other.

It is noteworthy that the participants who demonstrated solid and positive bicultural identities were those who performed transnational activities most actively and extensively in their daily lives. This finding suggests that the active transnational involvement that links Korean and Japanese immigrant youth to their ethnic culture and identity may contribute to their developing a positive sense of self and confident bicultural or multicultural identities. It should be highlighted that no participant in this study had experienced the *downward assimilation* that Portes and Zhou (1993) warned of. Downward assimilation is the negative outcome of complete assimilation of immigrants into their host countries, which leads them to lose the mother tongue and cultural values of their homeland yet still suffer from discrimination and disadvantages. On the contrary, participants in this study showed how they embraced and optimized both cultures

equally, embedding double assets, which eventually promoted a positive sense of self and facilitated their successful integration into Canadian society as competent, multicultural beings (Levitt & Waters, 2002; Portes & Zhou, 1993). This distinct finding may be partly due to the selection criteria for participants of this study, which led to recruiting recent immigrant youth from Korea and Japan, relatively affluent countries, who are likely to have more cultural assets and parental support than other underprivileged racialized immigrant youth.

Drawing on these findings, it is undoubtable that the perceived distance from majority populations, especially White people, that participants broadly indicated in the interviews was not because of their attachment to their ethnic culture or homeland or insufficient efforts to adapt to the host society. The force in practice was operating in the opposite direction. It was rather an outcome of experiencing repeated moments of feeling different, isolated, and alienated in their everyday lives, or, more explicitly, of encountering race and racism. When their culture or cultural practices were ridiculed, when they were judged by how they looked, not by how much effort and achievement they made, and when essentialist narratives defined their potential and value, instead of their individual personhood, Japanese and Korean participants felt distant from Canadian society. The dynamics of race relations as a critical aspect of participants' lived experiences will be further unfolded in Chapter 6, the next chapter.

In sum, the findings evidence that the relationship between Canadian identity and ethnic identity was much more complex and multifaceted for the participants than a binary model or competitive relationship. The Korean and Japanese immigrant youths' lived experiences highlighted that a sense of belonging is not about legal status or amount of time of living in one country; instead, it is more about whether they feel welcomed, respected, and emotionally

attached (hooks, 2009), and whether they sensed they had become an acknowledged member of the imagined community (Anderson, 1983).

5.3.2 Confronting the Western-Oriented Perspective

I attempt to expose and challenge another normative framework, the perpetuated ideology constructed by the White majority that claims that people of colour are inferior and culturally deficient (Bell, 1995). As has been indicated in the participants' stories so far, the Korean and Japanese immigrant youth encountered Western-oriented perspectives and notions of White supremacy that implicitly or explicitly appeared in and out of school. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) asserted that the cultural deficit model is a twisted version of the earlier deficiency model that developed out of explicit racism. It persistently normalizes Western culture while dismissing Asian culture as unimportant, less than normal, and homogenous, ideas that have often been adopted by Asians themselves (Teranishi, 2002). The narrative of cultural deficit argues that students of colour should assimilate to the dominant White, middle-class culture to succeed in school and life (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

The findings show that the participants' cultural practices were frequently othered in a way that disrupted their sense of dignity and confidence. Mika and Veronica recounted incidents of being ridiculed because of their *smelly* food, a powerful example of *racialized habitus* (Cui, 2019b) that occurs to students of colour in their ordinary life. Amelia (17, female, Korean) said she felt excluded when her teacher brought up the Super Bowl game in a class discussion, the very Western cultural content about which she knew nothing as a newly arrived immigrant. Findings show how Western culture is normalized and privileged in educational settings through

a form of *epistemological racism*,²² and thereby bringing ethnic food or not knowing Western sports is considered ridiculous or unacceptable. From a CRT perspective, Amelia's teacher exercised her White privilege as property (Harris, 1993) by defining what was important and should be discussed in class. Similarly, Jooha (18, female, Korean) felt disturbed noticing that her school's social studies curriculum and content were predominantly Eurocentric, and Asian history or culture was mostly simplified or omitted. As such, participants' lived experiences revealed Western-oriented school practices that have been normalized at both the institutional and the individual levels, which is referred to as *hidden curriculum* (Cui, 2015a, 2016).

Despite the prevailing Western perspectives entrenched in and out of schools, the participants did not seem to just buy into these ideas of a Western-oriented paradigm or White supremacy. Some attempted to disclose the underlying messages, rationalize their disturbed feelings, or confronted those practices. For example, Amelia felt that it was not right for the teacher to assume that everyone would know about the Super Bowl, especially in a class that had a significant number of immigrant students. Jooha, instead of being silent, tried to raise awareness of respecting *other* cultures that were not included in the textbook and speak about Korean culture and history whenever she had a chance. Meanwhile, Kazuo shared his discovery in his secondary school that self-centred Canadian ways in school, such as overvaluing active class participation, often caused unnecessary questions and comments that led to a waste of time for many others, leaving more important issues unattended to. These episodes revealed

²² While racism is generally conceptualized in terms of individual and institutional injustices, *epistemological racism* attends to how racial inequalities influence our knowledge production. It marginalizes and erases the knowledge produced by non-Western, non-White, and minoritized groups (see Kubota, 2020).

participants' confrontation of normative frameworks, hierarchical structures that determine what should be desired or disregarded in schools in Canada (Decuir & Dixon, 2004).

Another significant pattern of counter-stories that challenged the Western-centred paradigm appeared surrounding Korean and Japanese participants' perceptions of the contemporary popular cultures of their respective homelands. Participants indicated that, in their childhood and adolescence, they had been constantly reminded in the media and public discourses of Asian cultures' inferiority and insignificance and White culture's superiority. Thus, they had never imagined that they would witness unprecedented achievement and recognition of their homeland popular culture in the Western context (e.g., K-pop, K-drama, and K-movie; Japanese anime). These experiences seemed to pose a question to participants about the long-perpetuated dichotomous idea of West as the center and Asia as peripheral (Bhabha, 1994), which has continued to marginalize immigrants of Asian origins and their descendants. Participants in this study perceived their homeland cultures as valuable as or even more valuable and beneficial than any other culture, particularly Western culture.

What should be noted here is the increasing impact of the internet and social media underlying these shifting paradigms that allowed Korean and Japanese diasporic immigrant youth to traverse national, cultural, and language boundaries and access a variety of content created in their homelands as well as other countries. I contend that transnationalism and the increasing ubiquity of transnational social sites in immigrants' everyday lives could serve as a crucial platform that propels immigrant youth to broaden their perspectives, engage in critical dialogues, and participate in counteracting the conventional paradigm that has divided the world between West and East, us and them, and here and there.

5.3.3 Resisting the Ideology of English as the Only Valuable Language

Another salient pattern of challenging a normative framework in interviews was about language ideology. It has been argued that the prevalent ideology of English as a standard and superior language is one of the normalized and naturalized features of Canadian education (Kubota, 2015). This ideology devalues other languages (mostly of non-White people) and dismisses them as insignificant or even hampering English language learning (Cummins, 2001). Anzaldúa (1987) illustrated in an autobiographical piece how this ideology often leads to immigrant children's loss of their mother tongues and thus disconnection from their homeland and even their parents.

Contrary to my expectation to observe the effect of this ideology in interviews, the Japanese and Korean immigrant youth had maintained their heritage language skills up to a native or near-native level, regardless of their age of immigrating to Canada. All the participants, including Canadian-born Manami and Natalie, who came as a baby, indicated that they always spoke their heritage language in their households. Their parents played a significant role by being actively involved in their heritage language learning (Kwon, 2017; Park, 2013). Numerous empirical studies have reported heritage language loss when English was introduced within a family in an effort to accelerate English competency (see Hinton, 2001; Kouritzin, 1999; Park & Sarkar, 2007). Participants in this study were unlike the immigrant youth in those empirical studies or those who had lost their mother tongue and were disconnected from their homeland as illustrated in Anzaldúa's (1987) autobiography.

What should be highlighted here is that the participants' underlying reasons and contexts of speaking their heritage languages in their households were multifold. For one thing, their heritage languages were the only available method of communication for some participants

because of their parents' insufficient English skills. For Glen and Veronica, each of whom was a member of a *kirogi gajok* [goose family] (Jeong & Bélanger, 2012), communicating with their fathers in Korea on a regular basis was an integral part of their life, which helped them maintain an excellent level of Korean competency. Manami recounted how her mother had confronted her ESL teacher, who tried to convince her to speak English in the household to enhance Manami's speaking skills: "My mom was like, no, no, it's not gonna happen, all my other kids, they had trouble speaking English at first, but they were fine. So, she should be fine, too." Speaking Japanese was a necessity for Manami because she had to be able to communicate with her intergenerational family in Japan. Moreover, for parents like Glen's mother, who had to raise her children alone in a foreign country, the Korean language was an irreplaceable means to convey life lessons and experiences to her children (Kouritzin, 1999). For others, their parents had a solid belief that maintaining their heritage language would open up more opportunities for their children in their life trajectories.

Some participants pointed out that their heritage language was an essential part of their cultural identity because it enabled them to keep up with what was going on in their homeland. It was evident from our conversations that transnational activities played a critical role in providing them with opportunities for using their heritage language and cultivating their bilingual identity predominantly in digital spaces (Somerville, 2008). Some of my participants were well aware of the impact of heritage language on their identity and identifications. For example, Veronica said, "You watch TV programs and learn the language, and you start to see the world in that language when you get older." Amelia even said she felt sorry for some Korean Canadians who could not understand Korean, such a "cool" language of rich nuances that allows one to access abundant content in Korean. Like Amelia, Veronica and Glen, who had spent more of their lifetime in

Canada than Korea and had been educated in Canadian schools, nevertheless stressed that Korean language's variety in expressions could hardly be replaced by English. I argue that these findings deconstruct the ideology of English as the only valuable language on one hand. On the other hand, they validate the theories of Cummins and subsequent studies, which asserted the positive effect of bilingualism on the cognitive and academic development of immigrant youth (Cummins, 1976, 2001), as Korean and Japanese immigrant youth in this study showed.

5.4 Theme 3: Examining Multiculturalism

Now I shed light on a rather different theme from the previous ones. Although this theme, examining multiculturalism, is not driven by typical CRT tenets, I decided to include this theme given the critical position of multiculturalism as Canadian national identity that directs the ways immigrant youth perceive Canada, and thus its facilitating role in immigrant youth's identity and sense of belonging (Kymlicka, 2021).

The findings extensively showed that most Korean and Japanese participants possessed a positive image of multiculturalism, in alignment with recent survey data (Envionics Institute, 2018) and existing studies (Kymlicka, 2021; Miled, 2020; Wright & Nabavi, 2012). Most participants said that multiculturalism's narratives of diversity and inclusivity allowed them to feel they legally belonged to Canada (Wright & Nabavi, 2012). For example, Jooha (18, female, Korean), who had heard about racial discrimination that her mother had experienced during a trip to European countries, stated, "I've always thought that I was lucky to have ended up in Canada because it's such a multicultural place." Similarly, Kazuo (19, male, Japanese) asserted that more people in the world should know about how Canada is so multicultural and embraces all people of different races. This was a "fascinating" thing to him "because most of them were born in Canada as well and grew up. So even if they are Asians or Blacks, they're still considered

Canadians.” To Kazuo, from Japan, a country perceived to be less diverse in race and ethnicity than immigration-driven countries like Canada, multiculturalism was an eye-opening concept that transformed his definition of a nation and the membership of a nation. Glen (26, male, Korean) particularly emphasized how he felt at home and proud of being Canadian when he saw Justin Trudeau being elected as the new prime minister and addressing multiculturalism:

I’ve felt for the first time that . . . I can call this my own country . . . literally the highest-ranking person [Trudeau] of the country . . . every single day, saying, we are all Canadians and . . . multiculturalism and diversity is our strength.

Convinced of the prosperous future of Canada and of himself, Glen started to envision himself working in the Canadian government and contributing to society in and beyond Canada.

Although most Japanese and Korean participants appreciated multiculturalism, some participants revealed critical notions. Amelia (17, female, Korean), as a recent immigrant, felt that multiculturalism in Canada did not seem to go beyond recognizing multiple cultures, saying, “I’m just experiencing my own culture. . . . I know that there are a lot of different cultures, but I’m not enjoying all of those cultures.” For Amelia, Canadians seemed to only engage with their own culture, not getting involved with others (Bissoondath, 1994). Similarly, Veronica (22, female, Korean), who participated in events like Multicultural Days throughout her school years, shared her thoughts:

I thought it was so cool. . . . Yeah, I’ve repeatedly been watching this growing up. But I feel like people came to take multiculturalism for granted to the extent that they stopped seeing the essence of multiculturalism. . . . Sometimes I see people are often doing things that are not multicultural at all, hiding behind the rhetoric of multiculturalism. . . . Canada is perhaps less multicultural than other countries who are making real efforts.

Veronica felt the fact that Canada is a country of multiculturalism does not guarantee that Canadians are equipped with a multicultural mindset. Her comment reflects the reality of multicultural education, which focuses on superficial celebration of difference, mostly through

food, clothing, and festivals, rather than probing into how difference actually could serve diversity as well as cultural and racial minorities (Dixson & Rousseau, 2018).

Meanwhile, Glen confessed that he was discouraged from being excited about multiculturalism when he witnessed hateful sentiment against the Asian community and experienced racism himself. Despite his hurt feelings and disappointment at seeing the dark side of multicultural Canada (Bannerji, 2000), he still held onto the belief that Canada is a better than other countries. On the other hand, Manami (20, female, Japanese) shared her relatively strong opinion about multiculturalism based on her experiences. She had witnessed blatant racism targeted at her Chinese employer at a local restaurant where she was working, located in a White-dominant area. It brought her to realize that multiculturalism exists only in bigger cities like Vancouver, where racial diversity reaches a significant level. She stated, “If you actually move into inner Canada, it’s still like, White majority, and the White supremacy is still living, and it’s natural there.”

Natalie, as a mixed-race participant, also expressed sensitivity about racial differentiation underlying multicultural narratives—the view that only White people can be “real” Canadians (Ward, 1990): “There shouldn’t really [be] one defining race that can be Canadian . . . because I might not particularly come off as Canadian . . . but I am [Canadian].” She further criticized existing negative views toward immigrants: “There shouldn’t really be a stigma or kind of a hatred toward people from other countries moving into Canada, because obviously, there’s a reason and they want to try and better the country and lead better lives in this country.” Inviting immigrants to Canada for the purpose of building a better country and then marginalizing them did not make sense to Natalie.

It is important to note that participants' critical views typified the problematic nature of multiculturalism that the literature demonstrated. Drawing on a CRT perspective, I further contend that these notions reveal insidious assumptions underlying multiculturalism, *interest convergence*, one of the crucial tenets of CRT (Delgado, 1995, see 3.3.1). To be specific, this concept ensures that the interest of racialized minorities will be taken into consideration only when that interest converges with the interests of White people (Bell, 2004). Multiculturalism's token commitment to equity and diversity is perhaps evidence that multiculturalism has been employed by Whites because of the risk of more significant loss otherwise (Dixson et al., 2016). Thus, from a CRT perspective, multiculturalism in Canada, which favours colour evasiveness and stays away from discussions of racism, rarely addresses real issues and ultimately works to secure the interest of White or *real* Canadians (Matsuda et al., 1993).

In sum, the findings show a broad spectrum of how Korean and Japanese immigrant youth perceive multiculturalism. It encompasses feelings of being accepted, pride, and appreciation on one side and notions of token commitment to diversity and real issues like racism on the other side. It shows that their notions of multiculturalism were informing and being informed by their desire to belong, fear of being rejected, and precarious status moving between insider and outsider in their adopted new home (Wright & Nabavi, 2012).

5.5 Coming Together

In this chapter, I attempted to answer the first research question centred on cultural identity and sense of belonging, which was directed by CRT. In their authentic voices, the participants extensively exposed and confronted taken-for-granted discourses, dismissing the notion that Asian youth are a homogenous group without much diversity. The findings demonstrated that they are complex beings whose identities are constantly shifting and evolving

as they navigate multiple dimensions of overlapping spaces. CRT served as a useful analytical tool to reveal and deconstruct the majoritarian stories that continuously alienate immigrant youth of colour and cast doubt on their loyalty to Canada while underestimating their potential to embrace multiple cultural influences and thrive to benefit Canadian society.

Their everyday experiences have been constructed on a broadening transnational social field where they actively perform transnational and multicultural identities, counteracting long-held assumptions of immigrant youth of colour based upon a deficiency model (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Their counter-stories manifested that they are equally attached and loyal to Canada and their homelands, and they do not consider their heritage culture or language as less than Western culture or English. Their confidence in the benefits of bicultural identity indicate that contemporary youth immigrants of colour are increasingly embedded with a broad spectrum of vision and knowledge, encompassing multiple cultural assets and perspectives, accompanied by a greater sense of agency and creativity than their predecessors had. The findings challenge the perpetuated binary paradigm of the West as superior and Asia as inferior (Said, 1979).

In the next finding chapter, the focus of the analysis will be shifted to racial identity and race-related narratives. Crucial tenets of CRT will illuminate multiple facets of race and racism in the lived experiences of the Japanese and Korean youth and how they confront the racialized discourses that alienate and marginalize Asian youth.

Chapter 6: Racial Identity and Perception of One Another

In this chapter, I present the findings of the second research question: How do 1.5-generation immigrant youth of Korean and Japanese descent in Canada perceive their racial identity as Asian and identify one another when they share a racial identity but have different cultures, histories, and conflicting relationships between their homelands?

The findings are constituted of two focus group interviews in which Korean and Japanese participants each discussed various aspects of being Asian. Race-related conversations from individual interviews were also included in the analysis. Recurring themes in the interviews were matched with CRT themes (see 3.3.2) that were extracted from the CRT tenets. I present the resulting list of themes and CRT themes in Table 6.1.

Themes	CRT themes
Feeling out of place Race, racialization, racism	The permanence of race and racism
Forming Asianness Pan-Asian identity Different and competitive histories Perceptions of one another	Intersection of race and ethnicity
The model minority Media representation	Deconstructing essentialism

Table 6. 1 Themes and CRT Themes for Research Question 2

Here is a brief elaboration on how these themes align with the CRT themes. The first two themes spoke to *the permanence of race and racism*, which is considered the most crucial tenet of CRT (Matsuda et al., 1993). A broad range of the Japanese and Korean youth participants’ lived experiences of race and racism in and out of school are presented, and the multifaceted impacts of these experiences on them are considered. For the next four themes, representing the CRT theme *intersection of race and ethnicity*, the findings extensively illustrate how Korean and Japanese immigrant youth form and perceive their Asian identity and how their ethnic identities

among other factors play a role in this process (Teranishi et al., 2009). For the last two themes, the findings address *deconstructing essentialism*, which attempts to reveal and confront essentialized notions against Asians and Asian students through participants' counter-stories, which centre on the narrative of the model minority and media representation.

6.1 Theme 1: The Permanence of Race and Racism

This section illuminates the specifics of how and to what extent participants experienced race relations as Asian immigrant youth. Guided by CRT, I was able to develop critical sensitivity to capture moments when the Korean and Japanese participants encountered race, racialization, and racism in their lived experiences. The findings will be presented with respect to two themes—(a) feeling out of place and (b) race, racialization, racism, which together demonstrate a broad spectrum of participants' experiences of race relations, ranging from subtle feelings of being different or out of place to explicit experiences of racialization and racism.

6.1.1 Feeling Out of Place

Despite their overall successful adaptation and positive sense of belonging to Canada, as illustrated in the previous chapter, the Korean and Japanese participants indicated that they experienced moments of feeling “different” or “out of place” to varying degrees and frequencies. Their feeling of being different mainly seemed to derive from their awareness of physical difference from the White majority. A few signified they were othered because of being *FOB* (fresh off the boat)²³ by other coethnic or Asian people who were assimilated into Western culture, which implied the existence of internalized racial oppression (see Pyke & Dang, 2003;

²³ FOB (fresh off the boat): This term, sometimes used with a derogatory connotation, usually refers to an immigrant who just has arrived in the host country and has not yet grasped its culture, language, or behaviours.

Talmy, 2009). Amelia (17, female, Korean), an international student who had moved to Canada three years ago with her mother and brother, said she constantly felt like a stranger upon her arrival to this country. She said she became cognizant that Canadian people would view her as a newly immigrated stranger, not a member of society, because of her different appearance and behaviours, especially her English skills. Amelia shared her ongoing fear of talking to grocery store cashiers, who might say something she could not understand or something hurtful. She stated:

Sometimes, I hope they'll be a little bit nicer to people who are not fluent in English. Then you could talk slowly, or you could like, be nice and smiling. But six out of ten for me would be like, they would just be annoyed. [Their] facial expression would be like, oh, my God, another immigrant again or something?

Amelia's experience reflects Cui's (2019b) argument in her empirical study that Chinese immigrant youth are considered alien or "undesirable immigrants from the non-Western world" (p. 71) in Canadian schools.

Meanwhile, some participants (Connor, Jooha, and Veronica) said they felt "standing out," "small," or "intimidated," particularly with a group of White people, even when there were not any noticeable actions of exclusion or discrimination. For example, Jooha (18, female, Korean), who immigrated to Canada at age 6 with her parents and grew up mostly in an Asian-populated town, recalled an improv camp in her secondary school:

I just felt kind of out of place because . . . everybody was not Asian. I felt like I kind of stood out. I look different from Caucasian people, like, (laugh) no denying that. . . . Whenever we took pictures especially, I think I was very aware of it.

Jooha became conscious of being *different* and *small* for the first time at that camp, an extracurricular activity that she described was mostly dominated by White students. Similarly, Veronica (22, female, Korean), who moved to Canada at age 8 and securely maintained her

Korean identity with a sense of pride, recounted a similar experience when she was attending a college where upper-class Whites were the predominant majority: “I liked to eat alone. I was . . . always kind of intimidated. I would put on my earphones, and without realizing it, I would avoid where White kids were and join Asian kids.” From a CRT perspective, Veronica’s experience of the salience of *Whiteness* (Harris, 1993) and her feeling of intimidation around White people exposes the normalization of racial differentiation and the underlying racial hierarchy in Canadian higher education. It has long been noted by CRT scholars that in the Western context, access to quality education is inherently assumed to be a property of White people (Dixson et al., 2016). The feeling of being different was not exceptional for Natalie (20, female, Japanese), who was half White and half Asian. She said having a half-Asian appearance often disrupted her sense of belonging to Canada because, as she put it, “[Canadian] people will only see me as Japanese and not see me as Canadian.”

CRT suggests that the sense of being different, out of place, small, and intimidated that Korean and Japanese participants demonstrated in the findings is revealing the existence and normalization of the racial hierarchy and White supremacy in Western societies, which continue to other and alienate people of colour (Bell, 1995). Even though these experiences do not cause any significant harm, they continue to remind immigrant youth of their status as strangers and aliens in the country where they seek to belong. In contrast, what follows next illustrates more straightforward forms of race relations that would have a strong and everlasting impact on participants’ sense of belonging and sense of self.

6.1.1 Race, Racialization, Racism

Let me begin with the results of the poll conducted during the focus groups asking if the participants had ever experienced racialization or racism in Canada. Whereas four participants

(Connor, Glen, Veronica, and Manami) said they had experienced racialization or racism, of whom two indicated it was pandemic-related, seven responded that they had “never or rarely” had such an experience. Among those who responded that they had experienced racialization or racism, some elaborated on the moments when they felt ashamed or ridiculed in school. For example, Amelia (17, female, Korean) said she was teased by her classmates for her accent and inaccurate English words. She commented, “They don’t think how I would feel, because, for them, it’s just fun stuff.” Veronica and Mika said they felt ashamed when their classmates made fun of the food they brought to school. Veronica (22, female, Korean) said she felt deeply humiliated when a friend of hers (a White boy) told her, “Ew, don’t touch me. I’m gonna smell like the food you eat.” For many years since then, she had always covered her lunch box while eating. Similarly, Mika (22, female, Japanese) never brought any Japanese food to school since she had found that the smell of *onigiri*²⁴ was “weird” to some of her classmates.

A few of the participants shared blunt forms of racialization and racism that they had experienced. Glen (22, male, Korean), who had actively embraced a Canadian identity, recalled having encountered the notoriously stereotypical question “Where are you from?” followed by “Where are you really from?” These questions convey the underlying discriminatory message “You don’t belong here,” a perpetuated narrative that perceives Asians as *forever foreigners* (Kim, 2016). He nevertheless managed to subdue its negative impact on his loyalty to Canada and maintained confidence in being a Canadian citizen. Then, Glen confessed that he had been bitterly disturbed to see rising sentiments of anti-Asian hate in Vancouver and had experienced

²⁴ Onigiri: Japanese food made from white rice formed into triangular or cylindrical shapes, often wrapped in dried seaweed.

racism himself during the pandemic. He said he had recently been yelled at by a White woman on the street, “Wear your mask!” whereas she said nothing to White people passing by. He stated, “I thought Canada was much better than this. . . . But maybe Canada isn’t as perfect as we say it is.” Experiencing racism in a way he had never envisaged appeared to have shaken his sense of belonging to the country he was deeply proud of.

Meanwhile, Veronica (22, female, Korean) had experienced a rather severe case of racism on a downtown Vancouver Street. She described a scene when a White guy passing by started to stare at her. When her male friend asked if he had a problem with her, the guy said, “Depends on where she is from.” Then some other pedestrians (Asians) got involved too by filming the scene and confronting the guy about his blatant racism. For Veronica, it was the first time she had experienced that type of racism, which was a turning point for her to look at Canadian society and her identity from a different angle. Veronica also recollected having heard comments such as “I just don’t like Asians” or “I don’t see Asian (women) as women.” She did not take such comments seriously when she first heard them, but as she had become more sensitive about racialization since the start of the pandemic, she had noticed that she was being stereotyped, discriminated against based on her race and gender.

These findings reveal that racialization and gender discrimination often overlapped in the lived experiences of the female participants. Like Veronica, Manami (20, female, Japanese) recalled stereotypical comments that had made her feel disturbed, like “You’re outspoken for Japanese” and “You can say no; you’re not like other Asian girls I’ve met.” What should be highlighted here is that these comments connote essentialized notions of Asians, particularly Asian women, that continuously dismiss their individuality, subjectivity, and human dignity (Mok, 1998). As a founding CRT scholar, Crenshaw (1993) called attention to the overlapping

structures of gender and race where women of colour are simultaneously situated. From a CRT perspective, the comments that Veronica and Manami had to endure reveal that the intersections of race and gender continue to play a role in the oppression and marginalization of Asian women. The literature broadly shows that Asian women have long been misrepresented in certain stereotypical and derogatory ways, such as weak, silent, obedient, hypersexualized, and morally inferior, throughout the history of North America (Mok, 1998; Nguyen, 2021). What is more, it should be noted that media representation plays a significant role in reinforcing these harmful stereotypes against women of colour (Crenshaw, 1990, 1993), undoubtedly and particularly Asian women. I argue that the most striking consequence of the perpetuation of such distorted representations of Asian women is highlighted by the Atlanta shooting in 2021 when a sexually obsessed young White man killed eight people, including six Asian women, of whom four were Koreans (see Lang & Cachero, 2021 for detail). Strikingly, 74 percent of Asian American and Pacific Islander women in the United States reported having experienced racism or discrimination since the Atlanta shootings, indicating the exacerbated stereotypes as well as gendered oppressions against Asian women (Yam, 2022). Given the limited scope of this thesis, further exploration of the intersection of gender and race will be reserved for future research.

Now, I shift the focus to how the participants made sense of their experiences of racialization and racism. Noticeably, some participants admitted that they came to realize the existence of racism in Canada because of the anti-Asian sentiment and rise in hate crimes triggered by COVID-19. I was able to notice feelings of confusion, frustration, disappointment, and anger among the participants as they talked about this issue in the focus groups with both Korean and Japanese youth. For young Canadians of colour who have maintained positive perceptions of their new home with feelings of gratefulness for living in a country that officially

encourages diversity and inclusivity, experiencing racism and hearing the news of the spike in anti-Asian hate crimes, specifically in Vancouver, was beyond what they had envisioned about Canada. For example, Veronica (22, female, Korean) explicitly expressed her disappointment:

I realized that there are a lot of people who hide their negative feelings about Koreans. No matter how many numbers we are right now, the fact that people would perceive me as Korean or others as Asian or White cannot be changed. It was so heartbreaking to think that those fundamental facts are beyond my efforts.

The overt racism that Veronica experienced seemed to give her not only a realization of racism against Asians in Canada but, simultaneously, a sense of hopelessness that this reality could not be easily changed.

On the other hand, I was drawn to another shared pattern among the participants, an attempt to diminish or ignore the impacts of their experiences of racialization and racism on them. Here, I spotlight the narrative of Glen, who discussed this issue at length. Glen (26, male, Korean), who had experienced COVID-19-related racism, was determined not to let it affect his sense of self or his relationship with Canadian society, nor did he think vocalizing this issue publicly would solve the problem. He stated, “What are you going to do? Are you just going to complain? That’s just negative energy for no reason.” Although he realized that deep-rooted racism would not disappear anytime soon, Glen believed that if one works hard and performs better than the White majority, one can overcome the huddles of discrimination and racism.

It needs to be highlighted that, from a CRT perspective, Glen’s emphasis on individual efforts as a viable strategy against racism instead of a collective movement for structural change can be considered to constitute a narrative of *colour evasiveness*. It reflects the repeated history of how racism has been easily dismissed as an individual issue in order to serve the status quo of racial subordination, which has been internalized by the racialized themselves (Carbado, 2010;

Dixson et al., 2016). It is important to note that critical race theorists have argued against colour evasiveness because it fails to acknowledge how race has been constructed and situated within a larger sociopolitical and historical context (Matsuda et al., 1993). In this sense, Glen's view exposes a deep-seated discourse of colour evasiveness at work. This discourse is frequently observed in contemporary Canada, where issues of race and racism are generally avoided and replaced by a focus on cultural diversity (Lund, 2006). Furthermore, I argue that Glen's comment also exhibits the work ethic that Asian immigrants generally value as an aspect of successful adaptation in their host countries, which influences their stance of staying silent and continuing to work hard rather than speaking out about the injustice or unfair treatment they have lived through.

It is important to speculate on the poll result indicating that seven participants (Amelia, Jason, Jooha, Kai, Kazuo, Koei, and Mika) had "never or rarely" experienced racism or racialization. In the course of the interviews, on the contrary, I discovered that three participants (Amelia, Kazuo, and Mika) among them had experienced subtle forms of racism, such as being ridiculed for their English accent (Amelia) or food they brought (Mika) or hearing stereotypical comments on their Asian identity (Kazuo). According to CRT, racism is defined to encompass subtle aspects such as beliefs, actions, microaggressions, and politics and practices. For example, CRT scholar Solórzano (1998) used the term *racial microaggressions* to describe the racialized incidents that students of colour face in college every day in the United States, which, the author asserted, have a grave impact on their life. In this sense, it is argued that these Korean and Japanese immigrant youth demonstrated a narrow conception of racism—a reality that makes racism difficult to notice or recognize for people of colour despite the harm inflicted on them (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2019).

6.2 Theme 2: Intersection of Race and Ethnicity

This section is dedicated to exploring how the Korean and Japanese immigrant youth formed and perceived their Asian identity, and how their ethnic identities among other factors played a role in this process (Teranishi et al., 2009). CRT not only emphasizes race but also investigates intersectional relations of race with different social identities such as ethnicity, gender, and class. Teranishi et al. (2009) pointed out that today's educational practitioners have a tendency to overlook diversity in Asian students' experiences, arguing for the importance of taking into account their different cultures and family features. He further asserted that looking into differences would help educators draw on strengths and values in understanding Asian students, rather than relying on dominant narratives focusing on deficiency (Teranishi, 2002). Driven by CRT, which demands that studies of race and ethnicity acknowledge the complexity and diversity of immigrant youth to understand their educational reality better (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), this study examined Japanese and Korean immigrant youth who are from two competing countries with different cultures and histories while being similarly categorized and racialized as Asians.

In this section, the findings will be presented with respect to the following four themes: (a) forming Asianness in Canada, (b) pan-Asian identity, (c) different and competitive histories, and (d) perceptions of one another. The exploration of these themes will unravel the complex notions of Asianness that encompass similarity and pride on the one hand and difference and negativity on the other hand, which are intertwined or in conflict with the participants' ethnic identities.

6.2.1 Forming Asianness in Canada

Most participants indicated that they had formed close friendships primarily with Asians rather than people of other races, even though they said they cared less about racial or ethnic backgrounds in making friends. Their experiences, therefore, can be assumed partially as a result of the demographic characteristics of Metro Vancouver, where a significant proportion of the Asian population resides (Statistics Canada, 2017c). Among those who had mostly Asian friends, Jooha, Veronica, and Mika particularly showed a strong preference for Asian friends over people of other races during their childhood and adolescence, primarily due to their perceived common values and sense of familiarity. For example, Mika, who had a humiliating experience because of her Japanese lunch in school, stated that the similarity of food was an important factor that linked her to Asian friends: “I think that’s how my Asian friends and I bonded . . . when I realized that I shouldn’t be ashamed of my food.”

Like Mika, participants who had grown up in the community of Asians of various ethnic backgrounds in Metro Vancouver pointed out a broad range of similarities they perceived, such as cultural norms, practices, and attitudes. It is crucial to remark, however, that their perceived similarity was mostly driven by people of East Asian origin, which denotes their limited perception of who is Asian, a hotly debated issue surrounding Asianness (Kibria, 1998). For example, Kazuo (19, male, Japanese) said his father chose Vancouver as a destination over other places with a hope that living in a community with a huge (East) Asian population would facilitate their transition into Canadian society with less culture shock. To Jooha (19, female, Korean), it was easier to make friends with Asians than others, as she knew she could comfortably join them around commonly enjoyable topics. She stated, “I had already this basis of friendship because we had shared experiences.” Veronica (22, female, Korean) emphasized

“undeniable common factors” that people of Asian origin shared, which offered a sense of similarity as a minority and feeling of connection. She explained:

I think that’s something that we can really connect to, and the reason why I prefer to hang out with Asian or Korean people over other races . . . you can enjoy the group together. But if you’re hanging out with someone who’s of a different culture . . . it won’t be connecting and relating and sharing . . . but they will be more like, sharing in a way I will be teaching you something different, and you’re learning from each other.

Veronica said she found it more fun to hang out with Asian friends because they already had underlying cultural codes shared among them, thus there was no need to explain the details. A similar experience was recounted by Mika (22, female, Japanese):

I felt really close with them [my Asian friends] because they understood my family situations or arguments that I had with my family . . . because they had the same in their household. . . . And they understood the academics that I had back then or what I needed to achieve.

The similar upbringing that Mika mentioned was what other participants (Jooha and Veronica) also identified as Asian-specific values. For example, Jooha said her White Canadian friends sometimes did not understand why she had to go home early or could not hang out with them every single day, which was easily understood by her Asian friends who had similar family rules.

Another salient aspect of their perception of being similar or connected with other Asians involved being respectful. As illustrated earlier, the majority of participants perceived respecting others and being polite as core Asian values. For example, Manami (20, female, Japanese) articulated, “I think we have the ability to put ourselves in other people’s shoes and think about what kind of situation they are in.” The findings demonstrate that the Korean and Japanese immigrant youth participants perceived and constructed their Asianness by connecting with the Asian community and Asian friends, which was driven by perceived commonalities in cultural norms, practices, and attitudes that they believed to be shared features among Asians. As Mika

indicated, however, their feeling of being similar and being connected was often an outcome of racialized experiences (Kibria, 1998; Park, 2008).

6.2.2 Pan-Asian Identity

This study further explored how Korean and Japanese youth perceived pan-Asian identity, a more voluntary and politically motivated concept of Asian identity that stresses similarity and solidarity more than diversity or differences. As previously reviewed, CRT emphasizes the importance of the intersection of race and other social identifiers for examining the lived experiences of racial minorities (Crenshaw, 1993). For example, attending to the intersection of race and ethnicity, Teranishi (2002), a CRT scholar, argued that assessing attitudes toward racial identity of different ethnic subgroups is one crucial way of understanding the diversity within a particular race, which illustrates the purpose of this section.

To start with, when given the Zoom poll asking, “Are you proud of being Asian or not?” more than half of the participants answered that they were proud of being Asian “very much.” It is important to note that the participants who responded positively were those who earlier pointed out positive aspects of Asian culture and values, such as respecting others and elders, being polite, and having a strong work ethic. It needs to be highlighted that their positive perception was likely influenced by the fact that they were living in Metro Vancouver, where a significant Asian population maintains a relatively solid social status to a greater extent than in other areas that have fewer Asians. What is more, it can be argued that rising global recognition of the popular cultures of the participants’ origin countries, as was illustrated in the previous chapter, seems to offer another viable reason for their positive perception of being Asian, given that it could be understood as a significant achievement of Asians.

Noticeably, the participants who had been close friends with Asians of different ethnic backgrounds throughout their school years were likely to demonstrate a positive and solid identity as Asians. Among them, Jooha and Mika were both living in areas where the dominant populations were Asians of diverse backgrounds, a circumstance that enabled them to engage in other Asian cultures, which ultimately brought them a sense of belonging to an *Asian* community rather than a Korean or Japanese one. Jooha said, “I never really talked about my experience, specifically as a Korean person with anybody. . . . I just talked about Asian things with my Asian friends. (laugh) Yeah, that’s why I felt more Asian than Korean.” After a short contemplation, she added that being physically far away from her homeland might have led her to feel distant from where she originally came from and instead feel attached to people who she was with and the ongoing cultural influences at work. On the other hand, Veronica assumed that being in a foreign country and sharing “common factors” as minorities as well as immigrants might have been what facilitated her identification with Asian friends. Jooha and Veronica’s notions of being Asians speak to a critical aspect of racial identity—a voluntary and collective identity prompted by commonality of people of the same race, resulting from common experiences of *displacement* and *diaspora* (Hall, 1996; Wright, 2012).

Another salient and compelling aspect of being Asian was uncovered among the female participants. Jooha, Veronica, and Manami shared critical thoughts with respect to the ongoing racial injustices against the Asian community. They all concurred with the idea that what is needed now is to take action together to confront the injustices against the Asian community, which was undoubtedly triggered by having witnessed hate crimes and racism against the Asian community or by having experienced racism themselves since COVID-19. Importantly, their notions of solidarity are argued to be a critical aspect of pan-Asian identity. This type of identity,

which initially emerged as political movement in the United States (Kibria, 1998; Park, 2008), has drawn increasing and urgent attention in the pandemic era. Furthermore, Jooha and Veronica's lived experiences showed that Asian youth immigrants who have long been involved with Asian people and the diverse ethnic cultures of the Asian community growing up are likely to develop a critical sense of pan-Asian solidarity. Jooha elaborated on her thought:

I think a big problem for Asian hate is that it's just never vocalized enough. It's always very hidden . . . if we compare it to, like, the Black Lives Matter movement that was huge and actually did make a lot of political changes . . . it was really effective.

Having been exposed to another facet of Canadian society that had gone unnoticed before, Jooha and other participants seemed to develop political awareness and critical views about race-related issues. For example, Manami (20, female, Japanese) emphasized the need to declare to White people that "We're different from you, but that does not make us any less than you." It was noteworthy that, unlike Jooha and Veronica, who felt close with people of other Asian cultures, Manami said she never felt close with other Asians. Instead, her Asianness was predominantly forged by shared experiences of injustice and discrimination as a racialized minority, not by sharing common values or features, which underscores the complicated nature of racial identity.

Now, I turn to the other side of being Asian. It was not only Manami who expressed feelings of distance from other Asians. Despite the sense of familiarity and pride the Korean and Japanese participants demonstrated toward Asian values and the Asian community, their perception of pan-Asian identity seemed to be disrupted when the focus was on perceived *differences*. To be specific, participants showed reluctance to identify themselves with other Asians because of fundamental difference they perceived, especially in relation to different historical experiences among Asian countries. What should be noted here is that contradictory feelings and tensions concerning pan-Asian identity have been a persisting and contested issue

among the Asian communities in North America, which has led to repeated coalitions and divides throughout history (see Kibria, 1998; Park, 2008; Yi et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, another aspect of the complicated notion of pan-Asian identity was found in some participants with respect to the recent anti-Asian sentiment. For example, Kazuo confessed that he felt confused by Asian hate crimes as well as the narratives of coming together because he perceived the crimes as targeting a particular ethnic group, not all Asians, and thought that some Asians were simply mistargeted. Interestingly, the tendency of disassociating oneself and one's ethnicity from Asian hate crimes and the negative sentiment against Asians was more salient among Japanese participants than Koreans. Although this finding seems to align with Tsuda's (2021) finding that Japanese Americans identified less with a pan-Asian identity, other factors such as group dynamics of focus groups, which depend on who participates in and who facilitates the conversation, may have affected the findings; thus, further exploration is needed. These findings demonstrate the complicated and contested nature of pan-Asian identity, serving to caution against assuming that someone will identify with others from the same racial background (Teranishi, 2002).

6.2.3 Different and Competitive Histories

As indicated in the previous section, several participants expressed a sense of resistance to being identified just as Asian. For example, Glen said, "I don't really care that I'm Asian because Asian is just such a broad category, and I'm not proud of that general term. . . . I think using the word Asian is fine as we do the same thing to Whites, Blacks, Browns, etc. But I mind if I'm called something else, like Japanese, Chinese, etc." Although he admitted his racial identity as Asian, he strongly refused to be identified with other ethnic groups. Whereas Glen's notion reflects the internal variation and underlying tensions under the umbrella term *Asian*

(Tsuda, 2021), Natalie's (20, female, Japanese) narrative demonstrated a different angle on how to define pan-Asian identity—issues of boundaries (Kibria, 1998). She stated, "It's not just like Chinese, Korean, Japanese, there's also like, Southeast Asians. . . . I think a lot of people forget that the countries in the Middle East are technically considered as part of Asia." Natalie felt it was important to recognize different countries and ethnicities in the category of Asians. Natalie's perspective is different from those of other participants who perceived Asians mostly as East Asians, which is likely to be influenced by her own perceived precarious status as half Asian.

On the other hand, some participants contended that it is problematic to lump together Asians without recognizing differences among them. For example, Jooha (19, female, Korean), who was a strong advocate of Asian identity and solidarity, stated:

Because Korean, Chinese, and Japanese people have had lots of conflicts throughout history . . . Canadian people don't learn about this, so they would have no idea, but . . . even until now, these East Asians still have kind of conflicting feelings for each other.

Jooha justified her statement by saying that having common values and shared experiences with her Asian friends did not mean that she and her friends could be simply identified as the same group. She instead felt that going through a distinctive history involving conflicts with one another engendered significant and undeniable differences among Asian countries, which needs to be acknowledged.

Meanwhile, the competitive relationships and tensions existing in the Asian community were highlighted by Manami's lived experiences. Being half Japanese and half *Zainichi* Korean, Manami (20, female, Japanese) possessed complex feelings toward her pan-Asian identity. She said there had always been tension in her household deriving from the troubling relationship between Korea and Japan, two competing sites of her cultural roots. It seemed to be unavoidable to Manami that the acute sense of conflict and tension she experienced in her life prevented her

from developing pan-Asian identity or building a sense of community with other Asians. She stated, “yes, definitely we’re all not White, but what we have gone through throughout history, they’re completely different. Some may be already history at this point, and some still may be just like a living trauma.” Although she recognized the importance of building solidarity among Asians to address racial justice as a non-White population, she felt more strongly about the importance of acknowledging the different and conflicting histories existing in Asian countries as well as substantive consequences that still affect people’s lives.

Similarly, Veronica (22, female, Korean) stated, “When someone tries to ignore other’s culture and try to assimilate them, conflict arises [in history].” She speculated that the idea of dismissing cultural differences and emphasizing similarities would entail a fundamental risk of causing conflict. She then acknowledged her contradictory feelings about the normalized practice of categorizing people under racial labels:

I am personally guilty . . . because I think that’s the most convenient way of categorizing something you have no idea about . . . but if we have to decide on whether we should just do it for the sake of convenience, I will say definitely no.

Veronica’s comments reveal race-based narratives and practices that have been too normalized for people, even those who are racialized, to develop critical perspectives or recognize the underlying problems (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Finally, it should be emphasized that participants who did not take the concept seriously before the interview became cognizant of multifaceted aspects of racial identity by reflecting on their Asianness through the conversation in the focus group, which suggests a crucial benefit of counter-storytelling.

6.2.4 Perception of One Another

After having conversations about how they perceived pan-Asian identity, which entails a broad spectrum of similarities, differences, and conflicts, the participants were further asked how

they perceived one another. For one thing, even though they were aware of the conflicting relationship between their two origin countries, most Japanese and Korean youth participants said it rarely affected their perceptions of or relationships with one another in Canada. This finding reflected the study of Kibria (1998), which demonstrated that Korean and Chinese Americans perceived Japanese as closer than other Asian ethnic groups despite historical conflicts because of the familiarity they perceived.

Among those who indicated no impact, Glen (26, male, Korean) said he recognized the similar status of Japanese immigrants who “have their own stories” and who “are the victims of their own upbringing” just like Korean immigrants. Jason (22, male, Korean) similarly agreed with Glen that Japanese immigrants in Canada are not responsible for or related to the historical conflict between two countries and expressed his empathy by saying, “They are here to hold their own lives in Canada.” Meanwhile, Kazuo’s (19, male, Japanese) similar response was likely informed by his having a girlfriend of Korean descent. He added:

Japanese people, we might have done . . . not great things to Korean people. Some people say that it’s in the past. And I personally think that we need to move on. We definitely can’t forget about it, but I think we need to move on and build a new relationship.

It should be noted that Kazuo’s notion of *moving on* resembled the mainstream narrative of contemporary Japan, where the conservative party that inherited Imperial Japan has long dominated politics. Moreover, the *homeland conceptions* (Kibria, 1998) revealed by Kazuo suggest transnationalism at work. As Kazuo indicated in the previous chapter, he frequently accessed Japanese news sites to catch up with current trends in Japanese society, mostly via the internet, which might have instilled homeland narratives into his mind. Meanwhile, it was discovered that identification with trends in their homeland also appeared among several Korean

participants who demonstrated contrasting perspectives from Kazuo with respect to the relationship between Korea and Japan, which will be illustrated next.

It was a few of Korean participants who responded that the conflicting relationship between Korea and Japan slightly affected their perception of Japanese people. For example, Amelia (17, female, Korean) recounted an incident of seeing the flag of the Japanese Rising Sun²⁵ once in her secondary school, which made her feel offended by the Japanese students holding the flag. She also talked about the inevitable influences from her friends in Korea who participated in the *No-Japan Campaign* that Korean people initiated nationwide, which was triggered by recent trade conflicts between the two countries.²⁶ As tensions between the two nations intensified, Amelia's friends often talked about the movement and told her not to buy or use Japanese products in Canada. She stated, "I'm affected by my friends talking about those. And when I see Japanese people here and also wearing *욱일기*[Ukilgi],²⁷ I'll be kind of not feeling good about them. (laugh)" Jooha similarly expressed uneasy feelings:

I understand that these people aren't directly responsible for what happened in the past, but . . . I'm still a little bit, maybe angry or a little bit upset that happened. And knowing that a lot of Japanese in Japan, they're not educated properly on what happened in history . . . what they learn is altered and seen in a better light. So, a lot of them don't know the truth about what happened.

²⁵ Using the flag is controversial in Asia because it was used by the Imperial Japanese army in the Second World War. Most Koreans consider the flag a symbol of Japanese militarism and imperialism (Hollingsworth et al., 2019).

²⁶ The Japanese government enacted trade restrictions on Korean companies in 2019 with the intent to show dissatisfaction against an order of the Korean supreme court that Japanese companies pay reparations to the Korean labourers who were forced to work in Japan with unfair wages during the Second World War.

²⁷ *욱일기*[Ukilgi]: A Korean term indicating the flag of the Japanese Rising Sun which was used as a symbol of Imperial Japan during the Second World War.

To Jooha, who learned the history of Korea and Japan mostly from books published in Korea and through transnational activities that allowed her to access homeland conceptions, it was upsetting to know that some Japanese people in Canada may not know about the true history.

As indicated previously, Manami's (20, male, Japanese) notions of the troubling relationship between Korea and Japan derived from her unique and conflicting ethnic background: Her Korean Japanese (*Zainichi*) father is of North Korean descent whose family moved to Japan during the Japanese colonial period, and her mother is Japanese.²⁸ This had caused continuous tension for her family both from the inside and the outside and a sense of confusion for Manami, which was frequently entangled with ongoing geopolitical circumstances. Nevertheless, she managed to develop her own critical views in dealing with the separate cultural forces that accompanied the contentious nationalistic narratives from both sides. Specifically, given that her *Zainichi* relatives who survived Japanese colonialism still live in the past with a painful memory that "haunts them to this day," Manami said she could not agree with the narrative in Japan saying that the colonial history is over, and that Japan and Korea need to move on, leaving behind the past. Manami further shared a controversial episode pertaining to Korea and Japan's conflicting history that took place several years ago in Canada near where she lived. The Korean community had attempted to build a comfort woman²⁹ statue in Burnaby after seeing statues built in the United States and other countries (see Kwon, 2019 for detail). Yet the

²⁸ *Zainichi* are a historically and politically marginalized Korean diasporic populations in Japan, and they have had a conflicting relationship with the Japanese government with respect to their legal status and naturalization (see Ryang & Lie, 2009).

²⁹ The term *comfort woman* indicates a woman from an occupied country or territory, including Korea, China, Taiwan, and the Philippines, who was forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army before or during the Second World War (Frost & Vickers, 2021).

Japanese community living in Burnaby boycotted the project because they believed the statue would negatively affect the image of Japan and the Japanese people (see Yamaguchi, 2020).

On observing the incident, Manami felt deeply disturbed. She stated, “If they’re actually sorry about it, why would they worry about their image? . . . I think a lot of older people, they’re still not acknowledging the fact that it happened in the past, but it’s not history just yet.” Instead of avoiding this contentious issue that could trouble her sense of self and identity, Manami chose her own critical way of interpreting the episode, drawing not on homeland conceptions or the nationalistic narratives of either side but on what she had learned and experienced as a result of her family history.

6.3 Theme 3: Deconstructing Essentialism

One crucial aspect of CRT is the deconstruction of essentialism involving a particular race (Bell, 1995). Drawing on a CRT frame, in this section, I attempt to illuminate the resistance of Korean and Japanese participants to narratives of essentialization, stereotypes, and biases against Asian youth. The findings are constituted of two themes: (a) the narrative of the model minority and (b) media representation.

6.3.1 The Model Minority

CRT directed this study to delve into a range of discourses and social structures that continue to reinforce the marginalization and essentialization of immigrant youth of Asian descent. As the literature broadly illustrates, the narrative of the model minority is one of the most perpetuated narratives of Asian community that is still operative in the contemporary North American context. In an effort to provide a better sense of what it means or what does not mean to be Asian to Asian immigrant youth, this study examined how the narrative of the model minority is perceived by Korean and Japanese immigrant youth, how it plays a role in their

construction of Asian identity, and how they notice and resist the negative connotations beneath the seemingly positive term.

To begin with, in the focus groups the participants were first asked how they think about the term *model minority*. Because most participants in both ethnic groups said they were not familiar with the concept, I gave them a brief explanation: The model minority refers to members of the Asian community or Asian youth who are believed to achieve a higher level of success than other minority groups. When further asked what they thought of the statement “Model minority narrative reflects reality” through the poll in Zoom, most responded that they strongly agreed with the sentence. On one hand, this result mirrors the literature (Kibria, 1998), revealing that the model minority narrative conveys a favourable socioeconomic image of Asians and even entails a positive effect on their self-esteem and self-perception (Teranishi, 2002). On the other hand, it underlines the reality of how Asian youth internalize and easily conform to the model minority narrative and become subjects of essentialism (Fuss, 1989).

However, when I further explained the connotations of the term, which portray Asian youth as academically focused but socially awkward, poor at sports, obedient, quiet, and nerdy (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Lee, 2015), several participants expressed a sense of disagreement and further articulated counter-stories. For example, Kazuo (19, male, Japanese) recalled an episode in his secondary school when he had aced his math test. On hearing his peers saying, “Oh, that’s because you’re Asian,” which he now realized was the model minority narrative, he felt that was unfair. To Kazuo, his good score resulted from studying hard and putting a lot of effort into the test, not merely being Asian. Similarly, Manami (20, female, Japanese) recollected stereotypical comments that she had heard growing up, such as “you’re very outspoken for Japanese” and “you can say no; you’re not like other Asian girls I’ve met,” which respectively showed

racialized and gendered notions of Japanese and Asian women. Moreover, she had felt shocked to hear, “Your parents must be rich, right? Since you guys came from Japan.” Against this stereotypical comment viewing Japanese immigrants financially privileged, she put forward a counter-story:

They actually worked hard to give me and my siblings a life that couldn’t have been possible in Japan. I guess the work and the intentions we put to all the actions, it kind of gets brushed off by, “Oh, it’s just because you’re Asian,” when that is really not the case.

Manami felt that these narratives dismiss the efforts behind the achievements of Asian people without an appropriate understanding of the complete context (Wong & Halgin, 2006).

On the other hand, it should be highlighted that some participants conceived of the model minority narrative as something related to immigrant experiences rather than Asian specific. For example, Glen (26, male, Korean) stressed that features such as trying hard and being academically motivated are not just characteristics of Koreans or Asians. Instead, he stated, “I think most immigrants tend to come here with a vision and a dream, or at least their parents came here to support you to do these things.” Jooha (19, female, Korean) similarly added:

My parents always pushed me to do good in school because they knew it’s hard to get in university here, and they knew that I needed to have to go to university and get a degree to get a substantial job in order to support myself as an immigrant.

To Jooha, who heard the term *model minority* for the first time, the phrase sounded weird because it didn’t make any reasonable sense to her; the idea that Asians are smarter or academically better than other races seemed overexaggerated to her. A more feasible explanation to her was that being in a foreign country propelled immigrants to push themselves to the maximum and achieve tangible outputs, which was the least they could do as newcomers with minimal resources, a shared reality among other immigrant populations. Veronica (22, female, Korean) shared a similar thought:

Living as a minority in any society comes with the most vulnerable status because you get judged by trivial things. . . . I think it brings the mindset of working hard and trying to succeed, not to face something unfair. . . . My parents and other ordinary immigrant families might think we have to succeed because we struggled and worked hard.

In her reflection, Veronica came to conclude that the model minority myth reflects part of reality if the focus is solely on the outcome, not the process of hard work. She added that she felt sorry and grateful at the same time for the older generations of Asian immigrants for working so hard to a degree that they would be referred to as a model minority.

The findings show that the Korean and Japanese participants who were not familiar with the model minority narrative came to notice that it operates to solidify stereotypical views against the Asian community and misposition them as a privileged homogenous group by dismissing context and individual experiences (Lee, 2015). As Teranishi (2002) argued, it is important to recognize that the essentialized narrative of the model minority is likely to push Asian youth away from discussions of educational inequity as well as academic research because of the assumption that there is no need to investigate their educational needs or issues. I contend that the educational experiences of Asian students should be examined in broader social, institutional, and historical contexts, not by essentialized discourses (Delgado, 1995).

It needs to be highlighted that the participants' engagement of the model minority narrative in this study brought them to recognize the essentialist and stereotypical nature of this narrative on the basis of the deficit model (Wu, 2015). However, they did not further reach the realization that this seemingly favourable but detrimental discourse would possibly and indirectly affect other racial minorities in negative ways, which is frequently critiqued and well documented in the United States. Indeed, the model minority narrative normalizing the image of successful Asians had served as the excuse for the White majority to avoid any responsibility for

addressing racism and justify the claim that racial inequalities faced by Black or Latino people can be overcome by hard work like what Asians do (Chow, 2017). I assume that the lack of awareness and sensitivity among the participants toward the model minority narrative in this study might be related to the demographic characteristics of Metro Vancouver, where Asian populations are dominant among racial minorities, and other minority groups such as Black or Latino people have less visibility. This circumstance might have made it difficult for participants to develop critical sensitivity surrounding the narrative of the model minority toward other racialized minorities.

6.3.2 Media Representation

Directed by notions that the normalization of race and racial differences is profoundly related to how a particular race has been culturally and politically represented (Hall, 1988), this study explored how the participants perceived and confronted representations of Asians in the media, which informed and was informed by their perceptions of being Asian. Some participants explicitly demonstrated sensitivity to as well as critical perspectives on media representations of Asian people. For example, Glen (26, male, Korean) described feeling disturbed whenever he saw Asian characters portrayed as “comic relief” or “jokes” in Hollywood movies. What he had frequently observed in the Western media was a normative narrative constructed by the White majority that views people of colour as inferior and less than White people (Bell, 1995). To his excitement, however, Glen had recently noticed a shifting trend in Asian representation, particularly when he saw Steven Yeun star in the TV series *The Walking Dead* and other movies that attained a global reputation in which the actor played a main character as an ordinary person, not as a joke or comic relief.

Meanwhile, Manami (20, female, Japanese) said she was able to discern two extreme ways of portraying Asians in the media: being independent and whitewashed versus having “a weird accent, being petty and gullible.” Whereas participants agreed that representations of Asians had improved recently, Manami still viewed either overexaggeration or mockery as the reality of Asian representation. Similarly, Veronica (22, female, Korean) articulated her thought about the media’s two ways of portraying Asians, either as very oriental or as very American Asians, which, she added, was well exemplified in the movie *Crazy Rich Asians* (Chu, 2018):

They try to pick out the thing of Asian characteristics that they know about, that really stands out, therefore, making their results quite extreme . . . now that [we see] the movies that are more relatable to everyday lives and normal people, like *Parasite* and *Minari*.

Veronica, who had long been annoyed by essentialized portrayals of Asians, felt relieved to see this shift in trends, which was highlighted in recently awarded movies—created by Asian directors—that received landmark popularity in Canada and worldwide.

As illustrated in this section, some Japanese and Korean youth participants demonstrated sensitive and critical views informed by their lived experiences on why stereotypes and biases toward the Asian community and Asian youth are false. I noticed that CRT offered a critical lens through which they could start to see as problematic the model minority narrative, which seems to praise Asian youth but is in fact highly essentializing and inherently detrimental.

Simultaneously, their counter-stories revealed resistance to the ways that social discourses and the mass media have portrayed Asian people in highly essentialized ways with the purpose of maintaining the racial hierarchy (Harris, 1993).

6.4 Coming Together

In this chapter, I presented the findings of the second research question on participants’ racial identities, perceptions of one another, and their racialized experiences. The Japanese and

Korean immigrant youths' accounts demonstrated several critical CRT themes—permanence of race and racism, intersection of race and ethnicity, and anti-essentialism. Participants' multifaceted lived experiences brought to light normalized social practices of race, racialization, and racism in Canada, which continued to marginalize people of Asian descent and Asian youth. It is important to note that their Asianness was frequently imposed by the dominant group through racialized practices that asserted participants' status as strangers, both implicitly and blatantly. Discriminative comments like “your food is smelly” and “your accent is weird” are still alive in Canadian schools as normalized practices. Participants still had to endure such comments that constantly and insidiously reminded them that they do not belong here.

Moreover, the findings illustrate nuanced perceptions and complicated notions of Asianness. In this regard, the chapter was particularly dedicated to exploring the intersection of race and ethnicity as a crucial way to approach the complexity of pan-Asian identity, which has been largely understudied. An examination of Korean and Japanese immigrant youth who are categorized as Asians but from two competing nations enabled this study to expose a depth and breadth of what it means to be Asian to Canadian youth of Asian descent in a moment of anti-Asian sentiment. It should be highlighted that the participants' perceived Asianness encompassed a variety of dimensions—feelings of difference and similarity; desire to belong, connect, and disconnect; resistance to injustice and discrimination; and senses of hopelessness and frustration; which were all profoundly entangled with their historical experiences both as individuals and as members of the imaginary communities of their homelands, the Asian community, and Canada.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

My research examined Korean and Japanese immigrant youths' identity and sense of belonging surrounding nation, culture, and race. Specifically, I began my study by examining how Korean and Japanese immigrant youth negotiate and construct their cultural identity and sense of belonging between Canada and their homelands. Then I explored how they come to terms with their racial identity that comprises a critical part of their identity and sense of belonging in Canada. In this concluding chapter, I discuss the research implications drawing on the research objectives and the research findings. First, I begin by reflecting on how the research findings have fulfilled the research objectives that I presented before the research. Then I elaborate on my critical flexibility, discuss the contributions and limitations, and suggest recommendations for educators and researchers. Finally, I put my concluding thoughts.

7.1 Research Implications: Counter-Stories of Korean and Japanese Immigrant Youth

In the Introduction, I indicated three assumptions for this study: (a) acknowledging the complex nature of cultural identity and identification, (b) challenging essentialist perspectives on Asianness, and (c) recognizing the ambivalent nature of Asian identity. These assumptions indicated my determination to reveal and challenge normalized master-stories that continued to marginalize immigrant youth of Asian descent in Canada. Accordingly, they served as guidance as well as research objectives for this study in inquiring lived experiences of Korean and Japanese immigrant youth. In what follows, I discuss how participants' counter-stories in the research findings fulfilled these research objectives.

The first assumption was the acknowledgement of the complex nature of cultural identity and identification. The findings demonstrated a number of counter-stories that confronted the master story emphasizing the competitive relationship between Canadian identity and ethnic

identity, which intends to dismiss Asian immigrant youths' agency and individuality. Participants' counter-stories particularly revealed their double engagement to Canadian culture and their homeland culture—growing a solid sense of belonging to Canadian society while seeking and staying connected with their homelands at the same time. Belonging to both cultures was not considered something they are required to negotiate, rather it was perceived as natural and beneficial. None of them experienced downward assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993) that would put them into a marginal space in society. The findings suggest that the relationship between Canadian identity and ethnic identity was not competitive, rather it was a co-existing and co-developing process where multiple variables involved.

Among many variables at play in the complex dynamic of cultural identity and identification, two social practices were highlighted in the findings—multiculturalism and transnationalism. The findings showed that multiculturalism, with the messages of diversity and inclusivity through policies and public discourses, allowed participants to feel they legally belong to Canada and to pursue both Canadian identity and ethnic identity. However, despite their overall acknowledgement of multiculturalism's benefit, participants also exhibited their critical awareness of its limitations surrounding the insufficient commitment for diversity and equity, which seemed to be partly triggered by the spike of anti-Asian sentiment and their and others' experiences of racism and racialization.

Another compelling variable was transnationalism. The findings showed that transnationalism was naturally embedded in Korean and Japanese immigrant youths' everyday lives (Vertovec, 2009). To be specific, participants in this study constantly crossed the boundaries of culture, nation, and language and engaged with various content of their interests from their origin countries as well as others. It was greatly facilitated by social media and other

media platforms as well as upgraded communication tools through the internet. Among the noteworthy findings was that active engagement with homeland cultures was intertwined with global recognition and rising popularity of their homeland culture, such as K-pop, drama, movies, and Japanese *anime*.

Although the findings discovered Korean and Japanese participants' solid connection to their origin culture through active transnational activities, their loyalty to Canadian society did not seem to be undermined. Unlike the immigrant youth of Asian descent portrayed in the literature as vulnerable, isolated, and marginalized, most participants in this study with double engagement were confident in belonging to two cultures and having bicultural identity (Portes et al., 1999). They expressed a range of perceived advantages of bicultural identity, such as doubled cultural assets, a broad picture of worldview, and bilingualism. They felt these advantages, as Veronica put it, placed them "ahead of others" on their path to success.

Their competent bicultural identity evidence that the deep-rooted belief in a zero-sum relationship between Canada and one's homeland that continued to affect public discourses and academia needs to be abandoned. The relationship was much more complex and multifaceted than a binary model or competitive relationship. By transcending national, cultural, and lingual boundaries, participants drew an identity landscape that was as broad as or broader than that of a monocultural youth who didn't have to grapple with a sense of belonging across multiple borders.

My second assumption was challenging essentialist narratives on Asianness, especially Asian youth. In this study, I did this by demonstrating the counter-stories that addressed: (a) Korean and Japanese immigrant youth are not homogenous people with a set of essential features and (b) the narrative of model minority and media representations of Asians are highly

essentializing and misleading. First, the findings showed a broad diversity and subtlety in how Korean and Japanese immigrant youth constructed and negotiated their cultural identity between multiple cultural influences, particularly through their active transnational activities in various forms. Digging into the specifics, I observed a range of differences among individuality, family relationships, and social and historical contexts that appeared in participants' counter-stories. Although there existed certain types of perceived commonality, such as group-oriented perspectives, parents' involvement, and working ethic, it should be noted that one differed from another in terms of particularity. Korean and Japanese immigrant youths' counter-stories were evidence that they are not homogenous people who could be simply dismissed as *Asian youth* (Teranishi, 2002) with their individual characters unattended to. Nevertheless, I contend that majoritarian stories on Asians and Asian youth continue to focus only on collective commonality while dismissing individuality, which reinforces the stereotypical image of Asians as trivial, alien and far from standard (Matsuda et al., 1993; Said, 1979).

This study further attempted to challenge essentialist perspectives on Asianness by deconstructing the model minority narrative and media misrepresentations. Participants first perceived the narrative of the model minority as favourable, not recognizing the underlying detrimental nature, which reveals the enduring impact of such essentialist discourses—reality of how we all get used to being subjected to othering narratives crafted by the White majority (Bell, 1995). However, encouraged by the critical dialogue informed by counter-storytelling, they developed their counter-stories that confronted the narrative of model minority. Participants' various counter-stories asserted that their success stories were the outcomes of their individual efforts and passion, not because their homogenous ways of being and doing Asians. To them, those common features that are frequently portrayed as Asian-specific—e.g., academically

focused, socially awkward, and obedient—were rather perceived as shared features among immigrants who need to hold their lives with minimal resources in foreign countries.

In recognition of media's powerful role in reinforcing essentialization against a particular race (Hall, 1988), this study examined how Korean and Japanese participants perceive Asian representation in the media. Some participants demonstrated their critical views toward the master-stories, the extreme ways of portraying Asian people in the media: Asians are petty, alien, comic, or all of the above. It is important to note that these participants' critical notions seemed to be influenced by their perceived shift in Western-oriented media paradigm, which has been initiated and mobilized by Asian-directed and Asia-originated movies, dramas, music, and other popular culture. It seemed that diversified descriptions of Asians in the media out of stereotypical portrays were empowering these participants to have a better sense of self and being Asian. I argue that the more people—both majority and minority—are exposed to alternative stories and subtleties within and across marginalized communities, the better they can understand the diverse reality of community beyond essentialist discourses. As Hall (1988) contended, attending to diversity and various social and cultural experiences instead of essence would eventually signal the end of essence and essentialism.

My third assumption was recognizing ambivalent nature of Asian identity. With this stance, I attempted to unravel how Asian identity forms externally through shared experiences of displacement, diaspora, and racialization and/or internally through the voluntarily motivated sense of connectedness (Kibria, 1998). The findings showed that the Japanese and Korean participants generally perceived similarities among (East) Asians and their close relationships with Asian friends, which seemed to be related to their living in Metro Vancouver where a significant number of Asian populations reside. It should be remarked that those who had been

involved with diverse ethnic groups and had Asian friends of different ethnic backgrounds while growing up were more likely to have a sense of connection with other Asians and be proud of being Asian than those with less exposure. The implication here is that for solidarity to form, it is important for Asian people of different ethnicities to get to know one another and engage in diverse Asian communities. However, feeling connected differs from being willing to be considered a homogenous group. Participants were cognizant of difference, especially based on collective historical experiences. When the focus was on difference, most participants indicated resistance to being identified merely as Asian, particularly because of their perceived distinct historical experiences as collective ethnic groups. The finding suggests that their Asianness made sense to them and can be identified only through the prism of their ethnic identities.

The complicated nature of Asian identity was highlighted by examining how Japanese and Korean youth perceive one another who are categorized as Asian youth but have distinct cultures, histories, and the conflicting relationship of their origin countries. Although most participants said that the conflicting relationship between their origin countries barely affected their perception of one another in Canada, some implied homeland conceptions, which influenced their ways of understanding and interpreting the ongoing conflict between the two countries. As a result, the political messages that participants employed from their homelands through transnational activities often contradicted one another, which brought conflicting feelings to some participants, particularly those Korean participants toward Japanese people internalizing and practicing the narrative of the Japanese conservative party. These findings spoke to the multifaceted and ambivalent nature of Asian identity that encompasses a broad spectrum of racial identity (Hall, 1993; Wright, 2016b)—feelings of difference and similarity;

desire to belong, connect, and disconnect; resistance to injustice and discrimination; which were all profoundly intertwined with their individual and collective historical experiences.

7.2 Theoretical and Methodological Implications

In this section, I discuss the implications of critical race theory and counter-storytelling as a crucial tenet of critical race theory that guided this study theoretically and methodologically.

First of all, CRT enabled this study to recognize race and racism as normalized social practices affecting participants' relationships with society, others, and themselves. The central tenets of CRT helped this study discover the contemporary and concrete ways race and racism take place in and out of schools in Canada, and how they continue to impact on racialized youth.

Particularly, these tenets allowed me to look into Japanese and Korean participants' lived experiences from multiple aspects, with which I was able to examine everyday messages that participants encountered and their effects: what kind of master stories were underlying these messages and how and to what extent these messages were operating as normalized practices and contributing to maintaining racial hierarchy.

Secondly, critical race theory helped expose and question the normative framework that structurally marginalized and essentialized Asian youth. Investigating the racial impact of the normalized narratives such as the Western-oriented perspective, deficit model, or model minority narrative on participants' lived experiences was an urgent task for this study, particularly when anti-Asian racism dramatically revived with the pandemic. Among the valuable discoveries directed by critical race theory was that participants did not simply internalize the binary idea of the West on top and the rest at the bottom as a norm (Matsuda et al., 1993). Some participants doubted and confronted the normalized practices. They attempted to fill the missing pieces of their educational experiences by teaching their teachers and peers the history and culture of their

homeland or sharing their (non-Western) cultural values and practices with non-Asian Canadians in various contexts. To my participants, their heritage culture and language were as valuable and cool as the Western culture and the English language. I argue that transnational activities, which offered participants freedom to transcend conventional boundaries, actively engage with their homelands, and discover their and other cultures' values, have potential to serve as a crucial platform that propel counteracting the Eurocentric paradigm that had long dismissed Asian culture as inferior and peripheral. I contend that by equating the value of their origin culture with the Western culture, these youth were pulling their long-dismissed cultures from the *margins* to *center* (Bhabha, 1994), which signifies a meaningful challenge to the Eurocentric paradigm.

In addition, it is important to note that critical race theory in this study revealed confronting notions among some female participants against the perpetuated portrayal of Asian women as passive and obedient (Mok, 1998). Notably, these female participants equipped with the high level of critical perspectives offered the compelling counter-stories on racial inequity and injustice to a great degree than male participants—an undeniable declaration that this pernicious, essentialist view of Asian women as petty and submissive is simply wrong.

Last but not least, count-storytelling informed by CRT allowed participants and me as a researcher to develop critical sensitivity for the structural racial hierarchy or *epistemological racism* (Kubota, 2020) that persists in Canadian educational settings, which determines what should be taught and desired and what can be ignored in schools. Shifting the focus from master stories to counter-stories offered authority and agency to Korean and Japanese immigrant youth to confront master stories built on Western-oriented narratives and White supremacy, such as deficit model, Western-oriented perspectives, English as only valuable language, and model minority and then empowered them to develop their alternative stories. With these counter-

stories, the participants and I constructed a new reality together in which we can confront those harmful narratives and devise strategies to actively counteract and forestall the racialized practices and their negative effects.

7.3 Critical Reflexivity

Here I briefly but critically discuss my reflexivity: my awareness of personal and relational dynamics in the research and its impact (Finlay, 2012). Although I have endeavoured to expose my complicated position and the entanglement of my lived experiences with this study, I am aware that my effort was never enough.

Among the multiple aspects of reflexivity in this research, I want to focus on *relational reflexivity* (King & Horrocks, 2010), which highlights the dynamic between researcher and participants. I had to grapple with my positionality as insider and outsider with the two ethnic groups to which I occupy my ambivalent sense of belonging for different backgrounds. Particularly, I anticipated in Chapter 4, the methodology chapter that I might be considered an outsider (May, 2014) to the Japanese participants who could bring biases and tensions, particularly regarding the sensitive issues on the conflicting relationship between Korea and Japan. I tried to position myself as someone eager to learn about Japanese culture and Japanese youth in Canada, and I attempted to build rapport by emphasizing elements of an insider status, namely my living and working experiences in Japan. Nevertheless, I admit that I felt unsettled myself and sensed tension underneath the surface when we engaged in conversations that touched upon the political and historical relationship between Korea and Japan, which might have affected the flow and the content of conversations.

As a researcher, I acknowledge that I brought my character, belief, and my personal, political agenda to this study. For example, I was keen to see how participants' perception of

Asianness in the Canadian context might differ from their homeland conceptions that emphasize competitive relationships and ongoing conflicts among East Asian countries. Directed by critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000), I was interested in discovering political and historical awareness of injustice among participants, which, I believe, is a necessary step for reconciliation and solidarity among these countries. Particularly with Japanese participants, when I navigated the historical background of Japanese immigration in the Introduction, I wondered if participants' knowledge of history of Japanese internment in Canada that they might have acquired during school years would promote their critical reflection on injustices committed by Imperial Japan against other Asian people during the Second World War (Kubota, 2021).

These inquiries, however, were not fully unpacked because of the participants' uneasiness that I sensed during the focus group, coupled with my fear of inflicting emotional distress on them. With the limited time, space, and experiences, it was difficult for me to create a safe site for discussing "struggles for meaning, identity, and power" (Mackie & Norton, 2006, p. 234) where participants could develop critical reflections on injustices and oppression, including those perpetrated by their homeland. It calls for closer examinations on how to critically and sensitively approach the issues of injustice and racism when participants' origin countries are involved (see Kubota, 2014 for further discussions).

7.4 Contributions and Limitations

Several contributions of the study are noteworthy. First, this study attempted to deconstruct the essentialized perspectives and narratives on Asian youth by demonstrating a breadth of diversity in their ways of constructing and negotiating their identity and sense of belonging, particularly by highlighting the two subpopulations of Asian youth—Korean and Japanese immigrant youth. There is still a paucity of empirical research in the scholarship of

Asian immigrant youth that attends to diversity and specifics among these homogenized populations; therefore, this study adds to the existing literature a meaningful description of Asian youth in Canada, which will contribute to dismantling the deep-seated essentialist narratives that continued to alienate Asian youth. The empirical approach to the intersection of race and ethnicity further reveals multitudes of pan-Asian identities, how Asian youth themselves perceive their Asian identity differently from one another, depending on their individual and collective experiences and various contexts. I argue with this study that upon discussing solidarity, it is also crucial to acknowledge the nuanced perceptions and definitions of Asianness among Asian communities, which is often complicated by unresolved historical conflicts and colonial legacy that exist among Asian countries.

Secondly, this study demonstrates the multiple facets and contexts of transnationalism among contemporary immigrant youth. Despite transnationalism's unprecedented impact on immigrant youths' daily lives and identity construction, research on transnationalism among Asian youth is limited in its scope and methods in the Canadian context. The wealth of specifics in participants' transnational activities in this study helps understand multiple aspects of transnationalism with regard to immigrant youths' identity and sense of belonging, particularly surrounding its facilitating roles in promoting immigrant youths' sense of self, bicultural identity, and critical notions against Western-oriented paradigm.

Thirdly, this study revisited the controversial issue of multiculturalism's effects on a sense of belonging of immigrant youth, an issue that so far has produced complicated findings in scholarship. While the study confirmed the positive mediating role of multiculturalism in the integration of immigrant youth to Canadian society, participants' accounts also revealed the

continuing reality of multiculturalism's superficial commitment to diversity and its insufficient efforts to confront racism, which has been evidenced in the pandemic with a rise of racism.

The study's last contribution relates to the employment of critical race theory. It is undeniable that the founding scholars of CRT have predominantly focused on the historical experiences of African Americans. Although CRT expanded into different disciplines and studies of other racial minorities, including Asian community in the American context (Teranishi, 2002; Teranishi et al., 2009), research on Asian youth in the Canadian context that utilizes CRT framework is yet to be expanded (e.g., Bablak et al., 2016; Yi et al., 2020). The more we recognize the perpetuated effect of structural racial hierarchy and White supremacy on immigrant youth of colour, particularly of Asian descent, in Canadian schools, the more urgent become our needs to employ CRT to look into Asian youths' lived experiences. I hope this study makes a meaningful addition to emerging CRT scholarship on Asian youth.

There are important limitations to this study. As for the methodological limitations, for example, I was not able to recruit socioeconomically marginalized youth—who, more than my generally privileged, middle-class participants from highly educated families, would have revealed critical aspects of inequity and injustice. Yet, given the strengthened immigration criteria in Canada in the past years, the difficulty of finding such marginalized youth was anticipated. In addition, in examining the topics of race and racism, the study revealed the critical thoughts of Asian youth participants—mostly among female participants like Veronica, Jooha, and Manami—on injustices against other racialized groups. However, this study did not go further to investigate how and to what extent participants are aware of their privilege as Asian in Canada, where Asians often unwittingly become complicit in reinforcing and maintaining the

racial hierarchy that continue to marginalize Indigenous people or other racialized minorities (Kubota, 2021).

For example, the findings showed that the participants were not familiar with the narrative of the model minority. This typical discourse has not only perpetuated a stereotypical image of Asian people for a long time but also has contributed to justifying social inequalities faced by other racial minorities, thereby reinforcing and reproducing the White centre (Bablak et al., 2016). I assume the participants' lack of awareness of this narrative, as well as the absence of critical sensitivity toward other racialized minorities even after this concept was explained from a critical perspective, is partly due to the demographic feature of Metro Vancouver, where Asians make up a large proportion of the population, while there is a small number of Black or Latino people. Given the limited time and settings, it was difficult for me to engage the participants in critical reflections and deeper discussions on these complicated aspects of racial injustices.

Another important limitation was the disparity between the Korean and Japanese participants, which may be related to recruiting processes. Most Korean participants voluntarily contacted the researcher for participation after seeing the advertisement, which suggest they were potentially equipped with a sense of agency and positive cultural identities. By contrast, the Japanese participants were mainly recruited through the researcher's acquaintance, thus they were less enthusiastic about discussing research topics except a few, in particular, racial identity and historical conflicts between Japan and Korea. What is more, the difficulty of recruiting Japanese participants resulted in having three participants who did not fully meet the selection criteria. Despite the apparent benefits of demonstrating diversity and complexity within the Asian immigrant youth population, this limitation might have prevented the study from gaining

richer and deeper interpretations of Asian youth under particular circumstances defined by selection criteria.

7.5 Implications for Educators and Suggestions for Future Research

Participants demonstrated a range of experiences of racialization and racism in Canadian schools. According to the findings, schools were generally welcoming and accepting, but under the surface, there existed a hidden racial/cultural hierarchy that centred Eurocentric perspectives and White supremacy, continuing to marginalize Asian youth and hurt their dignity. Despite the widespread narratives of equity and social justice in Canadian education, this study showed that *epistemological racism* is still alive in school both in implicit and explicit ways, noticed or unnoticed by students and teachers. Therefore, it is my intent to raise awareness among educators and teachers of the reality of *hidden curriculum* that normalizes those Western-oriented ideas and practices—e.g., overemphasis on Western cultures and histories in social studies, individualistic active class participation, or overreliance on North American pop culture to develop rapport, such as Super Bowl games—that dismiss students of colour as inferior and their cultures as insignificant and of second class.

It is required for schools and teachers to have critical sensitivity in designing curricula to level the playing field and include more diverse cultures and histories in their teachings beyond what is written in textbooks, not as a superficial commitment but based on considerable understanding and the respect for difference. Even before meaningful changes take place, teachers can offer opportunities for immigrant students to share their knowledge on their heritage cultures and histories in class, which helps their successful integration in and out of school. This would not only embody the narratives of multiculturalism in school but also exemplify how multiculturalism in practice can benefit people and society. Other students could also benefit

from being exposed to broader perspectives and different ways of knowing and thinking, which would nurture their multicultural competency and cosmopolitan citizenship (Wu & So, 2020).

Teachers are also encouraged to question the normative ideology of English as a standard language, which continues to devalue other languages, particularly the languages that immigrant students of colour speak. The critical findings showing educational benefits of a bilingual approach in instruction (Cummins & Early, 2015) need to be communicated to more teachers and practitioners. Having an accent in English should be considered not as deficiency but as potential to thrive with multicultural and multilingual capacity. Respect for difference should be encouraged and displayed in daily practices and interactions between and among teachers and students—for example, respecting what other students pack for their lunch. This study suggests that encouragement of bicultural and bilingual competency promotes youths' sense of self, general life satisfaction, and appreciation for and loyalty to Canadian society (Berry, 2014).

I suggest several directions for future research. First, transnationalism needs to be further examined by empirical inquiries on its entanglements with immigrants' cultural identity, sense of belonging, and its effect on their long-term life path. Given that immigrant youths' transnational activities in digital space are yet to be fully explored, I suggest an ethnographic study that examines transnationalism by utilizing popular social media in and out of the Canadian context.

Further research topics I suggest are (a) how transnational immigrant youth utilize and negotiate social/cultural capital and values from both their origin and host countries in their workplaces; (b) how immigrant youth from the same origin country practice their transnational identity in different ways in countries with distinct sociopolitical and historical perspectives (e.g., Korean youth immigrants in Canada, the United States, and Japan); and (c) how the

increasing prevalence of Korean and Japanese popular culture in Western contexts, constituting a crucial part of global youth culture, affects their cultural identity and identifications.

Lastly, I suggest that more studies employ CRT to research people of colour. Critical race theory allowed me to keep the eyes and mind open to participants' authentic voices and their counter-stories, revealing the subtlety and differences within a group of people categorized under the same racial label. Additionally, I hope more studies on Asian youth will explore the intersectionality of race and other social identities such as gender, sexuality, and class. In particular, I call attention to the overlapping structure of gender and race that continues to marginalize Asian women, as was evidenced in this study as well as in the current pandemic crisis when an increasing number of Asian women are being reported to be oppressed.

7.6 Concluding Thoughts

This study mirrors my academic and life journey of the past two years in Canada, my newly adopted home. It is also a reflection of social circumstances of a pandemic that had a profound impact on this thesis and perhaps on my participants in many known and unknown ways. I was nervous about bringing up the issues of race and racism in conversations with my participants out of concerns about inflicting further harm during a pandemic era, the period already coloured by racial injustice and anti-Asian sentiment. My fear, however, evaporated when some of my participants expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to take part in the research and to voice their lived experiences, both good and bad, and their *wound* (Matsuda et al., 1993) they never revealed to others.

I realized in this study that the dialogue on the difference between Japan and Korea was something Korean and Japanese people have avoided because of the enormous gap between the two groups in what they experienced and how they interpret colonial history. This study showed

that their perceived difference from one another was entangled with their collective historical experiences, which derive from the legacy of colonialism. Upon observing the tensions and confusions in how participants dealt with these issues, I thought without more inter-ethnic conversations about differences, conflicts, and reconciliations within Asian communities, pan-Asian identity would continue to be faced with ambivalence and resistance. In other words, inter-ethnic dialogue could help create room for more concrete, reality-based, and situated understandings of one another. In this sense, I argue that paying attention to the different and conflicting voices within the Asian community drawing on the awareness of the *danger of a single story* (Adichie, 2009) is a necessary step on the road to justice—a step that would deepen understandings of Asian communities, disrupt essentialist narratives, and empower them to confront racial injustices and heal their and others’ wounds together.

Writing this thesis was a way for me to take part in the process of healing the wounds of my participants, myself, and readers who felt the past two years had erased their dignity and the world where they believed they belonged. As a researcher, I want to participate in this process by calling for a better understanding of immigrant youth of Asian descent. I want to show with this study that we should focus on the diverse voices of Asian youth who have been too often denied their potential of transcending ethnic, racial, and all other barriers because of the limited discourses imposed on them. I want to demonstrate that they are actively embracing their past and present and their two homes simultaneously, and that they are better than a model minority or any other narratives that history has created against them. They were brave, creative, and hopeful. I hope this thesis played a humble but meaningful part in the healing process by inviting us to “enter that space where words renew the spirit and make it possible for one to hold onto life” (hooks, 2009, p. 174).

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Appendices

Appendix A

LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Dear potential participant,

I am writing to inform you of a study regarding the identity formation of Canadian youth of Korean/Japanese descent.

My name is Jiin Yoo, an MA student of Educational Studies at UBC and the co-investigator of this research study. My supervisor, Dr. Handel Wright, the principal investigator of this study, is a professor in Education Studies and Director of Centre for Culture, Identity & Education in UBC.

The goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of how Canadian youths of Korean/Japanese descent having life experiences both in Canada and Korea/Japan are constructing and negotiating their identity and sense of belonging in their daily life. Also, by exploring both groups' perspectives, we anticipate that this research will help us understand how Asian youth perceive other Asian youth from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds.

The research involves the two sessions: 1) individual interview that will take approximately one hour and 2) focus group interview with other youths that will take about one hour. In the interview, you will be asked to talk about your experiences and thoughts about identity and sense of belonging in your daily life. To acknowledge the time and effort of participating, all participants will receive a gift card of \$25 after the two interviews are completed.

For more information about the study or to arrange for your participation, please contact Jiin Yoo at _____ or _____@_____.

Sincerely,

Jiin Yoo

Appendix B

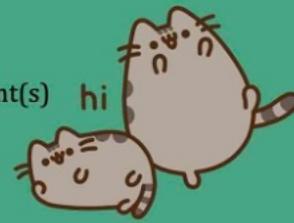
ADVERTISEMENT (English)

RESEARCH STUDY

Japanese youths' Transnational & Racial Identity

We are looking for youths who:

- are age 17~25, living in Metro Vancouver
- moved/immigrated from Japan to Canada with parent(s)
- have lived in Canada for at least two years so far.



Please join our study!

We'd like to hear:

- 1) your experiences and thoughts about living between two cultural influences (Canada and Japan),
- 2) how you perceive the identity of 'Asian' of yourself and others from different countries.



You will participate in two sessions:

1. **individual interview (one hour)**
2. **focus group with other Japanese students (one hour)**

Because of COVID-19, all sessions will be conducted **online.*

You will receive a \$ 25 gift card for your time.



The researchers conducting this study are:

- Dr. Handel Wright (Professor, Education Studies / Director of Centre for Culture, Identity & Education, University of British Columbia)
- Jiin Yoo (MA Student, Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia)

If you are interested in participation, please contact Jiin Yoo

RESEARCH STUDY

Korean youths' Transnational & Racial Identity

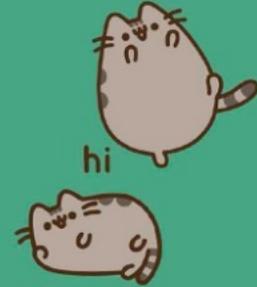
We are looking for youths who:

- are age 17~25, living in Metro Vancouver
- moved/immigrated from Korea to Canada with parent(s)
- have lived in Canada for at least two years.

Please join our study!

We'd like to hear:

- 1) your experiences and thoughts about living between two cultural influences (Canada and Korea),
- 2) how you perceive identity as 'Asian' of yourself and other Asians of different origins



You will participate in two sessions:

1. individual interview (one hour)
2. focus group with other Korean students (one hour)

**Because of COVID-19, all sessions will be conducted online.*

You will receive a \$ 25 gift card for your time.



The researchers conducting this study are:

- Dr. Handel Wright (Professor, Education Studies / Director of Centre for Culture, Identity & Education, University of British Columbia)
- Jiin Yoo (MA Student, Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia)

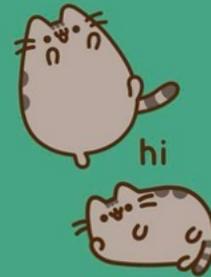
If you are interested in participation, please contact Jiin Yoo

リサーチ研究

バンクーバー地域日系青年のアイデンティティ・所属意識研究

😊 下の条件の学生を探しています。

- 17~25歳、現在バンクーバー地域（サレー、バーナビー、リッチモンド、コキットラム含む）のセカンドリや大学に通っている
- 家族と一緒に（親の一人以上含む）カナダに移住、または移民
- カナダに暮らして2年以上



😊 次のような研究に招待します。

二つの目的を持っています。

- 1) カナダと日本という二つの文化的な影響の間で暮らしている日本青少年のアイデンティティ、そして所属意識に関する経験と考えを理解する。
- 2) 'アジア人'という自分のアイデンティティについてどう思っているのか知りたい。



• 参加者は以下の二つのセッションに参加します。

1. 個別インタビュー（1時間）
2. グループインタビュー（1時間）

• COVID-19のため、全てのインタビューはZoomで行う予定です。



*参加される方にはギフトカード(\$25)をプレゼントします。



リサーチの研究者は次のとおりです。

- ヘンデルライト Dr. Handel Wright (UBC 教育学科教授/ UBC Centre for Culture, Identity & Education ディレクター)
- 柳智仁 (リュウ・ジイン) Jiin Yoo (UBC 教育学修士課程)

リサーチに関してご興味、ご質問のある方は柳へご連絡ください。お待ちしております！

리서치 연구

밴쿠버 지역 한국 학생들의 정체성과 소속감



아래 조건에 해당되는 학생들을 찾고 있습니다.

- 만 17 세~25 세로 현재 메트로 밴쿠버 지역 (서레이, 버나비, 리치몬드, 코퀴틀럼 포함) 고등학교 혹은 대학교에 다니고 있는 학생.
- 가족과 함께(부모님 두 분 중 적어도 한 분 포함) 캐나다에 이주 혹은 이민하였음.
- 캐나다에 산 지 2년 이상



다음과 같은 연구에 초대합니다.

두 가지 목적을 가지고 있습니다.

- 1) 한국 젊은이들이 캐나다와 한국이라는 두 문화의 영향 속에서 겪은 정체성과 소속감에 관한 경험과 생각을 듣고 싶습니다.
- 2) '아시아인'이라는 본인의 인종적 정체성에 대해 어떻게 생각하는지 듣고 싶습니다.



• 참가자는 두 가지 세션에 참여하게 됩니다.

1. 개별 인터뷰 (1 시간)
2. 그룹 인터뷰(포커스 그룹) (1 시간)

- 코비드로 인해 모든 인터뷰는 zoom 을 통해 이루어집니다.

*참여하시는 분께는 감사의 뜻으로 기프트카드 (\$ 25) 를 드립니다.

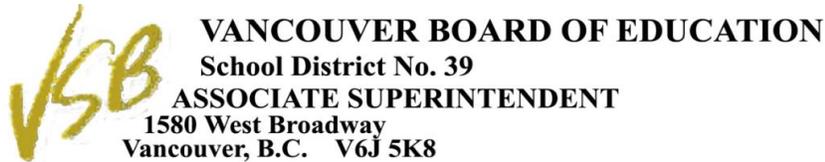


본 리서치의 연구진은 다음과 같습니다.

- 라이트 헨델 교수 Dr. Handel Wright (UBC 교육학과 교수 / UBC Centre for Culture, Identity & Education 디렉터)
- 류지인 Jiin Yoo (UBC 교육학 전공 석사과정 학생)

연구에 대해 관심 혹은 질문이 있으시면 언제든지 류지인에게로 연락 주세요.

Appendix C



May 18, 2021

Jiin Yoo
Educational Studies
6445 University Boulevard
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z2

Dear Jiin Yoo,

Thank you for your research proposal on “*Study of Identity Formation of Canadian Youth of Korean/Japanese descent*”. On behalf of the VSB Research Committee, please accept this letter as approval for you to contact members of Vancouver School District SWIS (Settlement Workers in Schools) Team at the Newcomers Reception Centre regarding your research in the Vancouver School District. Please contact the Manager/Principal of the school first. Administrators, teachers, and staff are very busy with other obligations and have the right of refusal. The Vancouver School District does not find subjects for researchers. At this time, access to VSB sites is limited to students and school staff only. Additionally, given the current limits on instructional time, survey data is not to be collected during instructional periods.

This approval expires on May 18, 2022.

The VSB Research Committee would be very interested in learning of your results and its implications for students. When your research is completed, please send us an abstract of the results.

Thank you for focusing your work within the Vancouver School District. I wish you the best of luck as you proceed with your inquiry.

Sincerely,

Jody Langlois,
Associate Superintendent

Appendix D

CONSENT FORM

“Study of Identity and Sense of Belonging of Canadian youth of Korean/Japanese descent.”

1. STUDY TEAM

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Handel Wright, Professor, Education Studies / Director of Centre for Culture, Identity & Education,
University of British Columbia

Co-Investigator:

Jiin Yoo, MA Student, Education Studies, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia

2. INVITATION AND STUDY PURPOSE

Why are we doing this study?

Canada is a multicultural/multiracial society with an increasing immigrant population, especially from Asian countries. The goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of how Canadian youths of Korean/Japanese descent having life experiences both in Canada and Korea/Japan are constructing and negotiating their identity and sense of belonging in their daily life. Also, by exploring both groups’ perspectives, we anticipate that this research will help us understand how Asian youth perceive one another from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds.

3. STUDY PROCEDURE

What happens if you say, ‘Yes, I want to be in the study’?

- I am inviting you to participate in two interviews: one for an individual interview and then another for a focus group.
- Each interview will be conducted via Zoom provided by UBC for approximately one hour. It will be video-recorded interviews, and we encourage you to turn on the video while interviewing because facial expressions and gestures are valuable data for this study.
- Before the individual interview, you will be asked to take pictures (about five or six pictures using any available digital device such as a mobile phone), which will show who you are (identity) and where you belong (sense of belonging) in your daily life, including online and offline activities. For confidentiality, the pictures should not contain any identifying information, including you and other person’s faces, names, or any recognizable private items/places. In case the pictures contain identifiable information, please erase/blur the parts by using picture-editing tools.
- In your individual interview, which will take about one hour, your demographic information will be briefly collected. After that, you will be asked about your daily experiences and opinions related to your identity and sense of belonging. You will also be asked to talk about the pictures you have taken.
- After the individual interview, you will be invited to participate in the focus group interview, which will take about one hour. Along with other youths from the same origin country (Korea), you will be asked to talk about how you perceive your racial identity (being Asian) in your daily life.

- With your permission, the interview/focus group will be recorded and then transcribed to record your views and opinions accurately. Your personal information will be strictly protected and not be revealed to anyone.
- You will have the right to refuse to answer any question, and you may end the interview at any time.
- You will receive a copy of the typed interview transcript once it is ready. You will have two weeks to review it and make any changes you consider appropriate.

4. STUDY RESULTS

This study is for the dissertation of Jiin Yoo for her MA degree. The result of this study will be documented and reported in a graduate thesis in the UBC library and will be publicly available on Google Scholar and Jiin Yoo's personal website. It may also be published in journal articles or books and used for conferences, webinars, presentations, teaching, and social media postings at some point. We will ensure to inform you how the research findings or your data will be distributed. Researchers may be required to make their data publicly available at the time of publication, as some journals may decline to publish papers unless the data is publicly accessible. Also, the data may be re-analyzed at some point when there will emerge future research interests and relevant projects. However, any of those data collected for this study will be anonymized, and none of your personal information or identifiers will be accessible or attached to your data. If you want to access the findings, you can provide your contact information on the consent form at the end.

5. POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY

Is there any harm to be in this study?

We do not think there is anything in the study that could harm you or will be bad for you. Some of the questions you will be asked may seem sensitive or personal. You have the right to refuse to answer any question if you do not want to. Please let the researcher know if you have any concerns. Because none of your private information will be revealed, nobody will be able to identify what you have said as yours.

6. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

What are the benefits?

We do not think taking part in this research will have a particular benefit or help to you. However, you will have an opportunity to voice your opinions on your experience as a member of Canadian youth of Korean/Japanese descent, which will help us gain a better understanding of their identity and sense of belonging in Canadian society. The findings, therefore, may contribute to providing teachers, educators, and parents with valuable information to support the youth population of Asian origins.

7. CONFIDENTIALITY

How will your privacy be protected?

- All identifying information, including your name, school and community, will be confidential, and alternate names will be used in the interview transcript and published document.
- All video/audio recordings and other electronic data will be encrypted and password-protected and kept on the local hard drives of the researcher's computer or secured digital space provided by UBC. Only the research investigator (Jiin Yoo) and supervisor (Dr. Handel Wright) will access the data.

Appendix E

IMAGES OF MULTICULTURALISM



IMAGES OF ASIAN

