



CHAPTER 2

Growing Up Korean Canadian in the Time of the Korean Wave

Abstract Diasporic Korean youth in Canada grow up while realizing their cultural differences. Their awareness of difference often limits the scope of their possible lives. They internalize the White-dominant cultural frame that presents a view of themselves as the other. Young Korean Canadians feel that they are subject to (and have to be validated by) the dominant cultural norms of White Anglo groups at least for a period in their childhood, and later in life they develop more positive ethnic identification. As these young people grow up, they try to explore and negotiate their ethnic options and what it means to be Korean *and* Canadian. In this process of growing up, transnational Korean media offers the diasporic Korean youth cultural resources for exploring who they are in between different identity positions.

Keywords The Korean Wave (Hallyu) · Diasporic youth · Ethnic identification · Racialization · Stereotyping · White-dominant cultural frame

In a recent interview, Hanmin Yang, a young Korean Canadian IT startup entrepreneur (and the founder of the Asian-specific dating app Alike), shared his experiences of growing up in Toronto as a child of a Korean immigrant family. He spoke about the identity crisis that he faced as a child of a minority background since his landing in Canada at the age of 8.

I failed to identify what I was and how I fit in. I didn't know how I perceived myself because I was thrown into this thing. From the moment that I arrived, I wanted to find how I fit in this picture. Where's my place? What am I? How do others see me? It was difficult because I didn't have a sense of self-identity of my own. So, I think I relied heavily on how others saw me. And because of that, I put on airs and I acted bigger than I was. That was always in my mind. What am I? How do other people see me? What is the right way to behave? And I think others saw me as some sort of small geeky Korean kid who's good at school. (BeyondAsian 2020)

Yang's struggle growing up as a Korean Canadian reveals how minority youth have been treated in Canada, where multiculturalism was adopted as an official policy as early as the 1970s. In the interview, he speaks about a coming-of-age journey to explore Korean Canadian identity and the struggle to move beyond the pervasive stereotypes of Asian people in Canada. This retrospective account seems to still be relevant for understanding today's Korean Canadian youth.

Yang's story is echoed in the accounts of many young Korean Canadians interviewed for this book. The interview participants shared their experiences of growing up, especially in association with the pervasive racialization of Asians in their schools and neighborhoods. Some admitted that they had not felt "fully Canadian" at some moments in their childhood. Despite their Canadian citizenship and education in Canada, several interviewees separated themselves from the category of Canadian. For example, speaking about his school days, Lucas, a 24-year-old recent university graduate, described his White classmates as "Canadians" in comparison with non-Whites who were often addressed with ethnic identifiers such as "Korean" and "Chinese." Like Lucas, some interviewees were not free of the White-dominant culture in which White people represent "Canadians" without a particular identifier while non-Whites are positioned as the racialized other of society (Henry and Tator 2010).

This chapter addresses how the recent rise of the Korean Wave (or Hallyu) may be integrated into Korean Canadians' identity work in their transition to adulthood, especially in relation to their responses to the White-dominant cultural frame that has taken the White Anglo culture for granted as the default cultural mode constituting Canadian culture. Recent Hallyu media may be different from other examples of diasporic cultural flows, such as the Bollywood cinema popular in Indian diasporas, because Hallyu is far more extensively circulated beyond diasporic

audiences who are culturally and linguistically proximal to the cultural texts. In the latest phase of Hallyu, known as the “New Korean Wave” (since the 2010s), which does not necessarily target culturally proximal audiences, diasporic youth’s engagement with Hallyu does not simply mean the nostalgic consumption of ethnic language media but involves complicated audience experiences. In particular, young Korean Canadians receive transnational Korean media not only as inherited cultural texts rooted in their ancestral homeland but also as highly hybrid cultural texts.

This chapter begins by discussing how young Korean Canadians feel or do not feel fully Canadian and what it means to be fully Canadian. By reflecting on their experiences of racialization in childhood and adolescence, the young people interviewed for this book reveal how seemingly multicultural Canada shapes the identity positions of young people of color and immigrant backgrounds. The chapter situates the rise of Hallyu in diasporic young people’s everyday contexts and negotiation of diasporic identities. Drawing on in-depth interviews with young people of Korean heritage in Canada, the chapter explores how young Korean Canadians engage with Hallyu in their transition to adulthood in response to the White-dominant cultural frame that is still experienced by many youth of color in the seemingly multicultural society of Canada (Henry and Tator 2010).

RACIALIZED YOUTH

What is it like growing up as a Korean Canadian? Empirical studies of young Koreans of immigrant backgrounds have revealed that they grow up as racialized subjects and are under the pressure of assimilation. As existing studies in North America have shown, in comparison with their White peers, the diasporic Korean youth are often racialized, marginalized, and “tolerated” as the other in (and of) the “host” population—White settlers (Danico 2004; Kibria 2002; D. Y. Kim 2013; Oh 2015). As Yang’s anecdote above implies, young people of color appear to experience unstable, ambivalent feelings of belonging. Experiences of racialization were observed among the accounts of the young people interviewed for this book. Growing up, they became aware that their family was “different” and that they were different according to the White-dominant cultural frame. They learned to see themselves as racialized others according to the lens of the White Canadians.

Growing Up “Different”

In schools and public spaces, the Korean Canadian youth were constantly reminded that their immigrant families were different from those of their White peers, and thus often felt tensions between the cultural atmospheres of their home and the outside. Many interviewees admitted they felt confusion about their cultural identities between their Korean immigrant families and the White-dominant cultural norms that they encountered outside the home. Ben, a 21-year-old student who immigrated at the age of 5, recalled:

At school, I was being shaped to be the ideal Western individual but at home I was raised to be the ideal Korean individual. Because of that mix, in my mind, it’s just impossible to be fully integrated or fully successful in the Canadian society.

The young Korean Canadians grew up thinking that their family was foreign and might not fully belong to Canada. They learned to think about themselves as marginal subjects rather than an insider of Canadian society. Regardless of their age of immigration (or even whether they were born in Canada or not), most of the young Korean Canadians in this book had experiences of realizing their home culture as foreign or the other of mainstream Canadian culture. For example, Blake, a 26-year-old schoolteacher in Toronto, who immigrated at the age of 4, recalled an occasion in Grade 2 when he was invited to his White friend’s residence and felt embarrassed about his lack of particular cultural knowledge.

I was eating spaghetti with him. His dad was a cop, and they were a White family. I didn’t know how to eat spaghetti. It was my first time even eating spaghetti. I remember his mom was like (making a gesture) “This is how you eat it.” It was almost embarrassing that I didn’t know how to eat it. After that point, I was thinking, “Well, this is how you eat if you are Canadian.”

This way, the young Korean Canadians were reminded that they might not be fully Canadian and thus they built anxiety about their otherness or marginality as a person of color in White Canada.

Although all the young people interviewed were permanent residents or citizens in Canada, they tended to show ambivalent feelings about their sense of belonging to Canada. “I do still think I’m sort of a minority.

It's something that you can't just get rid of no matter how long you stay here," stated Nicole, a 26-year-old professional born in Seoul yet raised primarily in Vancouver. After immigrating to Vancouver during her elementary school period, she studied and worked hard to integrate into Canadian society. Different from her parents' generation (first generation immigrants), who had limited access to the general economy such as the public sectors and mainstream industry sectors, Nicole successfully landed in a public sector job soon after graduation. However, she saw herself as only partially Canadian. Many young people interviewed for this book spoke about their restricted sense of belonging to Canadian society. Such feelings were more evident among those who were born in Korea and moved to Canada during their childhood rather than those who were born in Canada; however, the latter (second generation) also expressed their ambivalent sense of belonging to Canada. Regardless of their age of migration or birthplace, most of the interviewees, explicitly or implicitly, felt like "forever foreigners" who remain on the margins of the White-dominant society, to some extent (Tuan 1998; Zhou 2004).

Most of the interviewees' shared experiences of racialization resonate with Kim et al.'s (2014) survey of adolescents in Toronto, conducted in 1997 and 1998, in which 92% of Korean Canadian respondents reported encountering at least one experience of discrimination related to their ethnicity such as being insulted or called names (83.7%), experiencing rude behaviors (79.3%), having family members discriminated against (68.2%), and being treated unfairly (52.6%). In the same survey, 75.3% of other ethnic minorities and 50% of White adolescents reported such an experience. These forms of discriminatory experiences, which were also echoed in the accounts of the young people interviewed for this book, reportedly could result in mental health problems.¹ Experiences of racial discrimination sometimes begin at a very early age (even before they were aware of the concept of racism). Especially those who immigrated at the beginning of school age encountered the gaze and prejudice of others on their difference, which later they were able to interpret and

¹ Experiences of racialization adversely affect the mental health and self-esteem of Korean Canadian youth as shown by Kim et al.'s (2014) study. They found that Korean Canadian youth, compared to White and even other minority youth, show a much higher rate of depressive symptoms; this result also resonates with findings in previous studies of Korean American adolescents (Hovey et al. 2006; Seol et al. 2016).

articulate as racism. In several interviewees' recollections, their experiences of discrimination and stigmatization occurred as early as in their daycare. For example, 16-year-old Sherry, who immigrated to Kelowna, a predominately White-populated city, at the age of 3, recalled her feelings and interactions with others in early childhood: "There was this one place I would go to for day care and there was a lot of discrimination that happened just purely because I was Asian. They just always isolated me. All the time!" In comparison, several other interviewees realized racial discrimination relatively later in their childhood and adolescence—especially after the elementary school period. For example, 21-year-old university student Paige, who was born in Canada, recalled, "In Elementary, I don't think I ever felt different. I was like 'you're my friend and you're also my friend.' But as I got older, I feel like I can get discriminated because of my race."

Through the White Lens

According to the interviewees, growing up was a process of racialization and a struggle to "fit in." During this time, they seemed to learn how to see themselves through a White-dominant frame of reference. The young Korean Canadians' experiences of racialization often occurred in their interaction with White peers, some of whom made negative comments on their skin color, appearance, and/or food. Common examples included insulting comments such as "why are your eyes so small?" and "why does your lunch smell so stinky?" For example, Mia, an 18-year-old high school student who immigrated to Canada at the age of 3, recalled, "[while growing up] I felt really disconnected with kids in Canada because I was different from them. Usually they would point out like, 'Oh, why is your food weird?'" Similarly, 28-year-old second generation Ethan, who grew up in Toronto, described (like many other interviewees) how he had to be cautious about and ashamed of his lunch: "we [i.e., Korean Canadian kids] were almost hiding our Korean identity. In elementary school, if I brought *kimchi*, it was kind of like, eat it, cover it up, eat it, and cover it up. It's because we got made fun of." Reportedly, children of color in Canada are bullied in the lunchroom because of their lunchboxes packed with "ethnic" foods. This phenomenon has been called "lunchroom racism" (White 2011). Whether or not they immediately articulated the experiences as racism, most of the interviewees learned that they were

treated differently and as the other of their White peers. Thus, they felt “insecure,” “shameful,” or “uncomfortable” because of their ethnic background. Several interviewees recalled that they wished they were White for a period of time when they were younger.

Being Asian in Canada brought feelings of being on the margin for most of the young people interviewed for this book. Interviewees recalled that they had perceived themselves as different from their White Anglo peers. 19-year-old university student Grace, who used to be a writer-wannabe, had considered White Anglo characters as the default of character creation: “I wanted to become a writer when I was younger. And I felt that if I had to write stories or a novel I had to write only White people with White names like Sarah Finnegan or something like that. I felt that because there just weren’t any Asian names in books.” Even those who grew up in Asian-populated large cities, such as Toronto and Vancouver, and thus did not feel exposed to harsh racism in their school days, were subject to pervasive stereotypes of Asians in school. 19-year-old Beth in Toronto stated, “I definitely think that as an Asian there’s less racism than there are toward other races here. Maybe one problem is people expect you [as an Asian] to be better at school.” That is, even those who recollected few racial discriminatory experiences were still exposed to stereotypes of and expectations about Asian people as a “model minority” in Canadian society. As addressed in Hanmin Yang’s anecdote above, young Korean Canadians’ constant awareness of stereotypes against them influenced how they behaved and thought about themselves. Indeed, Rosie, a 21-year-old second generation student, recalled, “I used to have this weird feeling that if I was in a room with many White people and I felt kind of uncomfortable... I look so different from them and I felt like they were judging me for it.”

Overall, experiences of racialization, such as those experienced by the young Korean Canadians, are incorporated into the process of socialization through which children learn the cultural values of their society and position themselves in society as they are growing up and transitioning to adulthood. While Canadian public schooling embraces (liberal) multiculturalism, the students of color were not free of the discourse of Whiteness-as-norm, which may be reproduced through the hidden curriculum of schools—a curriculum that is taught without being formally ascribed (Ghosh 2008; Henry and Tator 2010; Moodley 1998). As a result, both White and non-White youth (and the mainstream society)

accept Whiteness as the “norm” (i.e., the standard by which others should be validated), for instance when Nicole thought she had to create White characters as the default in writing fiction rather than characters of her own ethnicity. Indeed, many interviewees recalled that they tried to “fit in” and conform to the White-dominant peer culture during their childhood, whereas they later realized that they did not have to rely on the discourse of Whiteness-as-norm (Bonilla-Silva 2017). The dominant discourse and institutions of socialization appear to not treat Whites as an ethno-racial category because they are constructed as “normal”; in contrast, non-Whites are constantly essentialized as racialized groups (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Lewis 2004). This process of socialization and schooling may serve to reproduce subtle racism through which children learned to accept and internalize the dominant understanding of races (Henry and Tator 2010). As illustrated by the interviewees’ experiences, diasporic young people’s identity work was subject to pervasive racialization through which they learned to see themselves as the other of the White-centric society. Indeed, many interviewees explicitly or implicitly spoke about their limited sense of belonging to Canada as *Korean* Canadians, along with a troubling sense of built-in shame and marginality as people on the margin.

NEGOTIATING IDENTITY, LIVING IN CANADA

Strategies of Negotiating Racialization

The racialized youth in this book struggled to “fit in” and to negotiate their situations and ethno-racial identity. In their recollections of growing up in Canada, some young people desired to be *fully Canadian*, which in fact meant to be White, at least for a certain period of their childhood and adolescence. To “fit in” and to be “fully Canadian,” the young people hid their Korean ethnic identity especially during their childhood and adolescence. Some asked their parents to pack a type of lunch that the majority of their White peers would have, whereas some young women would dye their hair blonde to look like White kids. Even after having grown up, some young Korean Canadians still tried to hide their ethnic identity sometimes. For example, Olivia, a 19-year-old university student in Toronto, who immigrated at the age of 9, was worried about the disadvantages related to using her legal, Korean name.

When I put my name on my resumes it's always Olivia. I never put my legal (Korean) name because, well, I don't know. I want to believe that there is no ethnic discrimination, but I think there is more or less. (...) Like there's always that chance of getting an interview after knowing that you're Canadian. Um, instead of just you know, having your resume thrown out at first glance after seeing your name.

Olivia admitted that the use of her English name can contribute to defining her as fully Canadian without signaling her ethnic attributes. She was aware that non-English-sounding names might not be welcomed in the labor market.² Rosie, who grew up in Vancouver, also admitted how she had had low expectations in her job hunting, due to her ethnic background and others' stereotypes against it, until she finally got a job in a White-dominant workplace.

When I applied to work at a large popular coffee shop, I have this mindset, like, "Oh, they're probably not going to hire me" because I hadn't seen that many Asian people working there while I was there. (...) But, I applied and made it. I did turn out to be the only Asian kid [working] in the whole store.

The young Korean Canadians in this book gradually learned how to negotiate and position their ethnic identity on a personal or interpersonal level when growing up. In response to childhood (and indeed lifelong) racialization, the young people negotiated their ethnic attributes. Their common responses included distancing themselves from their ethnic culture—"ethnic disidentification" (Kibria 2002)—and/or developing further ties with their ethnic culture—"ethnic identification" (Oh 2015). That is, under the pressure of assimilation, diasporic youth may initially desire to be like the dominant White group and thus seek ethnic disidentification.³ More specifically, young Korean Canadians may oscillate between different "individualized ethnic options," such as (a)

² Such discrimination exists in Canada as proven by Oreopoulos's (2011) experiment in 2009 of sending 12,910 mock resumes in response to 3,255 job postings in Toronto, Canada. The experiment revealed that the percentage for receiving a callback from employers was 4.4% higher for resumes with English-sounding names than those with non-English sounding names.

³ Furthermore, Oh (2015, pp. 24–25) identified five different positions observed among young Korean Americans—hostility to one's diasporic identity, lack of interest in one's diasporic identity, curiosity about one's diasporic identity, explicit bicultural identifications,

adherence to dominant norms of behavior, (b) opting out of an ethnic group, and (c) partial identification (Song 2003). D. Y. Kim's (2013) study of Korean American youth found that the young people, albeit rather unintentionally and ambiguously, navigate between four identity choices as immigrant (Korean), ethnic American (Korean American), pan-Asian (Asian American), and American. Overall, the previous studies confirmed that diasporic young people's ethnic identification is influenced by social contexts and interactions with others and increase/decrease throughout their transition to adulthood.

Many young people interviewed for this book tried to deny or hide their ethnic identity, at least for a short period, yet later (in high school and university) as they were transitioning to adulthood, they engaged more with their ethnic identity. George, a 20-year-old university student who left Korea at the age of 8 and was raised in a White-populated neighborhood in Kingston, a medium-sized city, described how his ways of self-identification changed at a university located in Toronto and known for its multiethnic student body.

I'm more Korean than Canadian. But, I was kind of confused because... I was more like "um is this right?" Because when I was in high school, I mostly hung out with non-Asian, non-Korean people. I lived in a city called Kingston where a lot of people are Caucasian. So, I would place myself not super Korean but not super White, I guess (laughs). But like, the University of Toronto changed me a lot, because there are so many Koreans, so it's only natural for me to hang out with Korean people. So, it is only natural for me to learn about K-pop, talk in Korean, my Korean actually improved when I came here [Toronto], surprisingly.

For George, and many other interviewees, transition to university was a significant moment to socialize with many other Korean and Asian peers, and in so doing, to learn to overcome the internalized desire to "fit in." As Maira (2002) noted, ethnic or diasporic young people tend to "come out" as ethnic subjects during the college period (Maira 2002, p. 189), so that they learned to see themselves not necessarily through their White peers' gazes.

and heavy involvement in one's diasporic identity. That is, diasporic youth may oscillate between ethnic identification and disidentification, while sometimes having multiple senses of belonging.

Ethnic identification is a way of taking refuge in one's ethnic identity (D. Y. Kim 2014) or creating a symbolic home (N. Y. Kim 2018). Especially for those who were born and raised in Canada and thus do not have any embodied memories of an ancestral homeland, ethnic identification requires time, media, and effort. In this regard, as discussed in the next two chapters, the recent rise of Hallyu seems to play an increasingly important role in the second generation's development of ethnic identification. Diasporic youth's ethnic identification is also influenced by those with whom they hang out in school and in their neighborhoods—potentially Korean, Asian, non-Asian, and/or White peers. The aforementioned George described how he had difficulty managing White *and* Korean friendships simultaneously.

In grade 12, I started to hang out with a lot of Korean people, because first time in grade 12 I found that there are some high school students who are Korean, so I started hanging out with them. And then, my other friends got really angry at me because, I would never, like, hanging out with them, and, I think there was a frustration for myself that like, I can't keep up with - I can't do both. So, I think it was either choose between these two groups, I guess? (laughs) So it was frustrating, it was, sometimes there was a point that I thought to myself I lost my identity.

Meanwhile, for Lucas, a 24-year-old recent university graduate, who grew up in the White-populated, medium-sized city of Kelowna and the more multiethnic city of Vancouver, geocultural contexts mattered in his identity work.

When I go to Vancouver, because there are so many Asian Canadians, it's easy to say "I'm Canadian." (...) But in Kelowna, which is a very Caucasian-dominated city, it's hard to say I am Canadian, because in a small town like Kelowna, where the majority of people are Caucasian, I feel like I should look like them, and act like them... and the same lifestyle as them, like playing hockey and wearing a hockey jersey. So, it all depends on where I am. If I'm in Vancouver, I could say I'm Canadian, and I feel Canadian. If I'm in Kelowna, it's hard to say "I'm Canadian" because I'm not White. (...) We're definitely not White [like those] who claim they're Canadian. If we start to see more people who would look different, I think I would feel encouraged to call myself a Canadian as well.

Their family context is another important factor, as some interviewees had been deeply immersed in Korean media, culture, and language at home. Rosie, who grew up with parents who kept emphasizing her Korean identity, recalled how she was advised to identify her cultural identity.

My parents were very strict on not speaking English in the house because they thought that they wanted me to be bilingual (...) In the past I felt like my identity was a 50/50 [i.e., 50% Canadian and 50% Korean]. (Laughs). It was actually what my parents were telling me to believe, but I am not actually feeling that way [i.e., I am more Canadian]. I don't think I could ever live there [i.e., Korea]. I never imagined myself living in Korea in the future.

The availability of ethnic options was believed by many of the interviewees. Apart from their experiences of being racialized and discriminated against, they also noted that their bicultural and bilingual attributes can be advantageous in certain circumstances. The young people who participated in interviews were able to speak Korean at least for conversational purposes, while primarily using English in their daily lives. "It's always an advantage for me to speak both languages," stated 24-year-old designer Stella from Vancouver. Ethan, a 28-year-old Toronto teacher also noted, "I know both cultures, so I'm almost like a hybrid, like blended in. So, more like open-minded." These accounts echo Kasinitz et al.'s (2008, p. 273) assertion of "the advantage of second generation immigrants," with which cultural differences are maintained or overcome.

However, these "advantages" may be questionable in reality. While most of the interviewees appreciated ethnic options and the potential of multicultural identities for Korean Canadians, a few remained critical about these "second generation advantages" (Kasinitz et al. 2008). For example, 23-year-old Henry in Toronto questioned the bicultural benefits of being Korean Canadians.

Hyphen doesn't work, Korean-Canadian doesn't work, Canadian-Korean doesn't work. Korean who becomes Canadian doesn't necessarily work. Canadian who speaks Korean doesn't work. There are a lot of things that don't work in my experience.

While experiencing continued racialization and discrimination during their childhood, young Korean Canadians somehow explored their strategies to cope with pervasive racialization. Many seemed to be more accepting of their ethnic identity during late adolescence or during their university years. Some interviewees appreciated available ethnic options rather than simply seeking assimilation to the dominant “Canadian” culture. Speaking of their gradual acceptance of the Korean and Asian ethnic options, the young Korean Canadians in this book felt they became more “mature” (their own term) than before, while recalling their refusal to identify with their Korean origin as an “immature” state. In hindsight, several interviewees regretted having made an effort to quickly assimilate to the dominant cultural norms even at the expense of their culture and language. This “thinking of ethnicity” among second generation Koreans (D. Y. Kim 2013) has also been observed in several studies (D. Y. Kim 2013; Oh 2015). They gradually accepted their “second generation advantages” (Kasinitz et al. 2008) and believed that they had “more” ethnic options (which can potentially be transferrable to a form of cultural capital) compared to their White peers.

Imagination of Multicultural Canada

The young Korean Canadians’ acceptance and affirmation of their ethnic identity especially in their late adolescence and youth seemed to be facilitated by their belief in the dominant multiculturalism ideology circulated widely in Canada through media and schooling. The young Korean Canadians commonly considered Canada as a multiculturalism-oriented country. For some interviewees, imagining Canada as a multicultural location appeared to be a strategy of negotiating racialization. While a dominant version of (liberal) multiculturalism might operate as an ideology that can serve to reproduce the existing cultural and racial order (Fleras 2014), the young people considered multiculturalism as a solution to or at least a refuge from existing racialization. Indeed, some interviewees emphasized Canada as a “culturally tolerant,” “easy going” country, especially compared to the US or Korea. They identified multiculturalism as what distinguished Canada from other countries, such as the US. For Emily, a 25-year-old second generation Korean Canadian, Canada was a country that “embraces and retains traditions and cultures from other areas and respects them.” She compared Canada with the US.

If you look at the States [i.e., US], there are a lot of racist attacks. A lot of people that aren't afraid to show racism. But when you look at videos that were taken by other people on racial encounter in Canada, you always feel like bystanders standing up for the victim in Canada. But when you look at the States, no one says anything. (...) Canada is very multicultural. People respect that people can come from different countries. And they don't tolerate racism at all.

19-year-old Olivia similarly described Canada as “all encompassing” and a cultural mosaic.

In Canada it's just really taboo if you don't accept anyone because of their culture. Because Canada is always all-encompassing. Is this, like a mosaic mentality, right? So it's “Oh, we're all Canadian.” It's like, “we all love pancakes and maple syrup.” (Laughs) So I really like that. It gives me a way to avoid the question of “Oh are you Chinese or are you Korean or are you something else?”

In the interviewees' accounts, while Korean culture was more concretely described, components of Canadian culture were not clearly identified especially among those who immigrated to Canada relatively late. For example, 19-year-old Olivia, who immigrated to Canada at the age of 9, pointed out, “One of the biggest problems with Canadian culture is that it doesn't exist.” For some interviewees, Canada was considered as a country that has no culture, and thus, each ethnic group may claim their own cultural legacy. 16-year-old Sherry stated, “I feel like Canada doesn't really have a culture. In fact, I feel like it's just a culture that's made up of different cultures together because of how much diversity there is in the country. I would say that being Canadian is just being really nice.” However, this description of Canada as an open and nice country of diversity may conceal the settler colonial history of the country in which Indigenous people and people of color have been severely oppressed.

Although most of the young Korean Canadians interviewed for this book had discriminatory experiences and felt marginalized, they at least partly celebrated their country of residence as a culturally diverse, inclusive country. The perception of Canada as a relatively open and inclusive country was evident among several interviewees who grew up in multi-ethnic neighborhoods in Toronto or Vancouver. However, according to several interviewees, openness may also mean emptiness of national

symbols and cultural content. Many interviewees did not regularly access Canadian media content, such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) programs, but rather frequently accessed American content through digital platforms such as Netflix. This finding resonates with critics' arguments that Canada lacks in national symbolic cultures and experiences, which may be related to the national mediascape where national content is assigned by regulation but remains unpopular among audiences (Taras 2015). According to Canadian media scholar Taras (2015), "Canada is the only developed country in the world whose citizens prefer watching foreign programming to watching domestically produced shows" (p. 207). Indeed, most of the interviewees were not very aware of popular Canadian media content and instead regularly viewed American shows. The near absence of experiences of regularly engaging with national cultural content was considered by the interviewees as an aspect of Canadian culture and the "multicultural" atmosphere of the country.

The young Korean Canadians' understanding of Canada as a multicultural country may reflect the publicly proposed ideology of liberal multiculturalism to some extent. As critics point out, the liberal or official version of multiculturalism implies a particular (hegemonic) way of managing difference (Fleras 2014; Henry and Tator 2010; Harris 2013). For example, as shown by the discourse of "cultural tolerance" adopted in the liberal multiculturalism framework, people of color and from immigrant backgrounds are defined as subjects "to be tolerated" by the dominant group of people (Brown 2006; Harris 2013). However, by appropriating the rhetoric of "multi-culture," the diasporic youth sought to reimagine their home country (Canada) as an open-ended location in which they can explore their own sense of belonging. In this regard, the diasporic youth's perception of Canada can be explained by the "new forms of national belonging" that Harris (2013) claimed in her study of migrant youth in Australia. Harris noted that many migrant youth refuse to participate in the imposed notion of the nation and national culture. Thus, according to her observations, "while many (young people) talked about the importance of feeling Australian, this was about acknowledgement of their equal belonging rather than a desire to embrace singular and exclusionary forms of national identification" (Harris 2013, p.134). The young Korean Canadians interviewed for this book may also challenge the top-down definition of Canada as a White-dominant nation-state, and seek their own imagination of Canada, in which their ethnic options and possible lives are realized.

ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION THROUGH HALLYU

The young Korean Canadians' experiences of racialization in their transition to adulthood taught them how to think about their ethnic identity and how to deal with the existing racial order. Most of the interviewees recalled that they felt ashamed about their difference as people of color, but gradually felt less shameful about who they were especially at university. In this process of exploring and reconnecting with ethnic identity, the recent Korean Wave phenomenon played a significant role. The rise of K-pop, Korean dramas (known as K-drama), and Korean films in the global mediascape contributed to motivating the diasporic youth to "come out" as ethnic subjects (Maira 2002). Furthermore, through Hallyu media, young Korean Canadians further explored and maintained their pan-Asian peer networks.

Mediated and Embodied Contact with Korea

Diasporic youth seek ethnic identity "because it provides a sense of community and self in the face of racial oppression" (Oh 2015, p. 5). Exploring ethnic identification and connecting with other Koreans—other 1.5 generation or second generation Korean Canadians, international Korean students, and Koreans in Korea—the diasporic youth in this book virtually or physically cross national borders and engage with their ancestral homeland. In this regard, the recent rise of transnational Hallyu through global digital media platforms allows the diasporic youth to access and reinterpret Koreanness. Recent Korean media's styles, themes, and content are considered highly hybrid and do not necessarily fit with the stereotypes of Korea, which the Western discourse of Orientalism conveniently assumes (Hong 2020). Diasporic youth's engagement with Hallyu offers *mediated* experiences of home-making, and it is sometimes synergized with *embodied* experiences of traveling to the ancestral home. That is, young Korean Canadians explore a sense of community by elaborating on their ethnic identification through several (often interwoven) activities, including mediated and embodied contact with their cultural heritage.

While mediated experiences with Hallyu media are increasingly significant for diasporic Korean youth, embodied contact with the ancestral homeland offers them intensive and impactful experiences, which trigger their interest in Korean language, culture, and Hallyu. Many young

Korean Canadians in this book recalled that their regular or occasional trips to Korea during childhood and adolescence enhanced their interest in Korea (Oh 2015, pp. 42–43). Except for one interviewee who was raised in the Greater Vancouver area and had never been to Korea, all the interviewed young people had been to Korea at least once at the time of interviewing. Some interviewees whose parents were relatively well off and had flexible work schedules spent several summer or winter breaks in Korea during their childhood, which contributed to reinforcing their ties with their ancestral homeland. Trips to the ancestral homeland seemed to play an overall positive role for the Korean Canadian youth in this book. A few interviewees who were enthusiastic about Hallyu used their trips to Korea as a form of pop culture pilgrimage. For example, second generation university student Paige, who is a K-pop fan, described a past trip to Seoul that occurred when she was in Grade 11.

I was really into Korean media and K-pop and all that stuff. So the trip was really fun for me. So like visiting the labels like JYP, YG, and SM Entertainment companies [i.e., three major K-pop companies]. I went to their buildings and the concerts. So it was an overall very positive vacation.

Hallyu indeed influences how diasporic youth organize and make homecoming trips. They want to visit places they viewed on K-dramas and in K-pop music videos, and they want to do what Korean reality TV show participants do. For second generation Stella who has never been to Korea, a trip to Seoul is on her bucket list.

Korean TV is just so interesting to me. It's just so fascinating to see what it looks like through Korean TV... like the food, the way they dress, subways, and getting a food delivery. It's just so interesting to me. So through TV I could learn what Koreans look like. If I go to Korea, I want to do so many things. Just anything like a normal Korean person would do. I wanna ride the subway, I wanna go to *hugeso* (a highway rest area), I wanna go to *sijang* (a traditional market)... All the stuff like that. Just like the daily things that Korean people do, but I never had the chance to.

In addition to and combined with homecoming trips, transnational Korean media was an essential resource for Korean Canadians to imagine their ancestral homeland. For example, 20-year-old Joanna noted, “Korean media is so important here in Canada. Koreans who grew up here don't know what is actually happening in Korea, and only know

what they saw on TV. They think what TV says is true.” 28-year-old schoolteacher Ethan, who was born in Canada, stated, “Watching Korean media makes me want to go to Korea more because it highlights the best parts in Korea.” The interviewees were not all equally enthusiastic and excited about the Korean Wave, as a few interviewees did not extensively access Korean media in their daily lives. However, whether or not they were an enthusiastic consumers of Hallyu media, the Korean Canadians agreed that the Korean Wave can function as a form of “soft power” of Korea (Nye and Kim 2013), and eventually may contribute to enhancing the cultural recognition of diasporic Koreans.

Many interviewees appreciated the increasing availability of K-pop music videos and K-dramas on streaming platforms. Global circulation through digital media convergence has been considered a contributing factor in the rise of Hallyu (Jin 2016; S. Y. Kim 2018). Young people are introduced to K-pop or K-drama via digital platforms that synergistically connect different genres, content, and stars, while offering audiences transmedia experiences (S. Y. Kim 2018). 25-year-old Luke exemplifies how a Korean Canadian is introduced to Hallyu.

I access it through the Internet because obviously I can't get Korean TV, news, or radio in Canada. You go on Internet websites. (...) You hear K-pop songs and, if you like it, you watch it, maybe a hundred times. And then you pirate it, or buy it. Mostly pirating I suppose. Yeah, so, that's how you get K-pop. And also YouTube, because most of it's video-based. So it's called video hopping, isn't it? You watch one, and you watch the next hundred, on the recommended. You also download TV shows. It's there. Sometimes you watch things like *Running Man*, [popular Korean entertainment TV show], you see pop stars, and obviously they're there to promote their new songs, so there's like a little clip of it. If you like it, go on YouTube, search up their name, right?

In this 2015 interview, Luke confirmed that “video hopping,” followed by (pirate) downloading through commercial platforms or (illegal) streaming sites whose servers are overseas, is a popular way of accessing and consuming K-pop. Moreover, he implied different digital media are extensively used by both Hallyu industries and overseas audiences.

Most of the interviewees were initially exposed to Korean media through their parents when growing up. For many interviewees, their parents (first generation immigrants) were often depicted as someone who extensively consumed Korean media but rarely accessed non-Korean,

English media. 25-year-old Luke in Toronto, who immigrated at the age of 8, described his family home: “Inside my family’s house is like little Korea. There’s nothing very Canadian about it.” 22-year-old Jim in Vancouver similarly stated, “I remember at our house we always had something playing on the TV and it was always Korean. My dad loved the reality TV shows and my mother loved dramas and would always just sit in front of the TV.” Thus, it may be natural for young Korean Canadians to be familiar with Korean media from an early age. In some cases, Korean TV dramas offered time and space for family viewing. For example, 25-year-old Emily recalled that her family “usually watched a Korean drama everyday together.”

The exposure to Korean media at home did not necessarily keep Korean Canadian youth interested in Korean media and popular culture. According to several interviewees, their early exposure to Korean media (via their parents during the pre- or early Hallyu period) did not always evolve into enthusiasm for more recent Hallyu media, such as K-pop (since the mid- or late 2010s), unless certain motivating factors were present. In some cases, early exposure even discouraged exploration of new Korean media. Several motivational factors, such as homecoming travel and friends’ or family members’ recommendations, were important in driving the young Korean Canadians’ interest in Korean pop culture. Possessing the linguistic and cultural literacy necessary for understanding Korean media was another motivational factor in the diasporic young people’s continued access to and interest in Korean media.

Although there was varied exposure, motivation, and interest related to Hallyu among the interviewees, the recent Hallyu media allowed the young Korean Canadians to access and reinterpret Koreanness and also feel positively attached to their ethnic roots. Thus, several 1.5 generation youth saw the rise of Hallyu as a badge of their ethnic pride. For example, 24-year-old Lucas, depicting himself as a K-pop “ambassador,” noted that public interest in K-pop in North America is “a good thing” and he wanted to share his knowledge about Korea and K-pop further. Lucas, a fan of Blackpink, seemed to think that Korean fans were more authentic than other fans and he felt obliged to promote this Korean group whenever opportunities arose. For Lucas, consuming Hallyu media was to affirm his Korean ethnic identity and partly fulfill his cultural nostalgia through Korean language and imaginaries. In comparison, some other interviewees were somewhat reluctant to overtly promote Hallyu

because they tried to avoid reducing their identities and cultural tastes to an ethnicity.

Overall, Hallyu is renewing diasporic young people's interest in their ethnic culture and identity (Oh 2015). For most of the interview participants, the Hallyu media significantly facilitated their interests in Korean culture and language as well as their ethnic identification. 21-year-old second generation Paige stated, "I had no knowledge of the Korean language until Grade 8 or 9. And then when I got into K-pop and K-drama that's where I basically re-learned Korean." In this manner, some second generation youth learned or were motivated to learn the Korean language out of their interest in K-pop, K-drama, or Korean entertainment shows. By consuming the imaginaries and representations of Korea, the diasporic youth were able to appreciate their own cultural heritages and come out as ethnic subjects.

Exploring Pan-Asian Ethnic Identity

As seen in the increasing multiethnic, global fandom of K-pop groups (e.g., Hong 2020; Jin et al. 2021), Hallyu media has been accepted and consumed by audiences with non-Korean backgrounds. Studies of Hallyu media have shown that diasporic Asian youth constitute a core overseas audience group of K-pop and K-drama (Ju and Lee 2015; McLaren and Jin 2020; Park 2013; Sung 2013; Yoon and Jin 2016). According to a recent survey of BTS fans in Canada, people of color (including those of Asian backgrounds) constituted over 60% of the survey respondents (McLaren and Jin 2020). Several empirical studies found that young audiences of Asian backgrounds identified with Hallyu media as a way of affirming their ethno-racial identities in response to White-dominant cultural contexts and media environments (T. S. Kim 2020; Sung 2013; Yoon 2017). According to Sung's (2013) study of Austrian youth of East Asian backgrounds, Hallyu media functions as a substitute for dominant Western media among the diasporic youth, while engagement with the Hallyu media becomes a significant marker of their self-identity. Moreover, Yoon's (2017) case study found that Asian Canadian youth's feelings of racial and cultural affinities with K-pop facilitated pan-ethnic consumption of Hallyu among diasporic youth. Similarly, Choi and Maliangkay (2015, p. 14) claimed that diasporic Asian fans consume K-pop as an ethno-cultural asset with self-celebratory fascination.

For fans of Asia and Asian diaspora/descent, the nature of this fascination is self-celebratory. For them it is a long-overdue vindication of their potency in cultural creativity. Summoning up an overinvested signifier of Asia, they would lay collective claim to K-pop and Hallyu as an embodiment of their ethno-cultural asset: “My cultures by my folks.”

In this manner, Choi and Maliangkay (2015) suggested that Hallyu media served as cultural resources for young diasporic Asians’ self-affirmation, which moves beyond the White-dominant cultural frame. The existing studies have described diasporic Asian youth as an important audience group in Hallyu. However, the studies focus on Asian youth of non-Korean backgrounds and thus have insufficiently examined how young people of Korean backgrounds and other Asian backgrounds interact with each other.

The diasporic youth interviewed for this book agreed that some of their Asian peers constitute the core fandom of K-pop and K-drama. According to the interviewees, some of their Asian Canadian friends are far more dedicated Hallyu fans. For example, Emily, a 25-year-old second generation Vancouverite who accessed Hallyu media but did not identify herself as a dedicated fan, spoke about her Hallyu-dedicated Asian friends.

I have a group of Asian friends who are very into K-pop and dancing and like celebrities and stuff. They are much more into K-pop than I am. They do like cover dance videos. They know all the celebrities by names. They go to their fan meetings stuff like that. I don’t really talk to them about it because they’re just on a different level.

Several interviewees identified cultural proximity as a key motivational factor in Asian Canadians’ interest in Hallyu media. For example, 25-year-old Torontonion Luke observed that K-pop is an Asian youth cultural form, based on cultural proximities.

K-pop appeals more to Asian oriented people than non-Asians, to be explicit, White people, right? I think that’s because first of all, proximity. And people are more used to it. (...) if you’re Asian you’re more likely to go seek out Asian food, Asian ethnic communities, and shopping malls, like Pacific Mall, right? So, it’s like, if you go to those places, you’re more likely to be exposed to Asian culture and content, including Korean. And then you, if you like it you get into, if you don’t like it, you step out, right? So, non-Asians don’t have that proximity and they’re not likely to

step into a Korean restaurant. I think that's the reason why it seems as if it's only Asian girls chasing an Asian pop star.

In this regard, it is not surprising that common interests in K-pop, K-drama, and Korean TV shows evolve among Asian Canadian youth. Several dedicated K-pop fans in this book were connected with their Asian peers in their fan activities. Especially in small fan group settings, they introduced K-pop content to their Korean Canadian and/or Asian Canadian peers. For example, 20-year-old Dale, who was a member of a dance group, recalled how his dance group turned to K-pop and K-pop cover dance.

It got started when they actually were like listening to each other's songs. So one day I had my earphones on and the Taiwanese girl just took my earphones and started listening to it. And then she was like "Oh this is really catchy," and she started asking me "Is there a dance routine to this?" and I said "Yeah, there is." And then we first did our cover of a dance in the talent show, our school talent show. And that's how we actually got into it.

As Dale noted here, a cultural taste for K-pop was shared in intimate groups, comprised of primarily Asian Canadian young people. In such activities, transnational Korean media seemed to increasingly serve to facilitate inter-ethnic (pan-Asian) or intra-ethnic (between other diasporic Koreans) youth culture.

The dissemination of Hallyu between Asian Canadians reported by the interviewees shows how early trans-Asian flows of Hallyu in Asia may resurrect in North America and other non-Asian regions. Before its visible arrival in North America across the Pacific Ocean, Hallyu in the late 1990s and the early 2000s was known for its intra-Asian cultural flows, in which K-drama and K-pop created large fan bases in China, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and many other Asian locations (Chua and Iwabuchi 2008; Shin 2009). At least partly due to shared cultural and historical backgrounds, such as similar experiences of compressed, post-colonial modernization, Asian audiences were increasingly interested in Korean media, often as a supplement to or a substitute for Western media (Chua and Iwabuchi 2008). The intra-Asian cultural flows may be further diffused to diasporic Asians outside of Asia (Yoon and Jin 2016). Indeed,

most of the interviewees agreed that K-pop and K-drama were common items through which they got along with their Asian Canadian peers.

As core consumers and early adopters, diasporic Koreans and Asians have played a pivotal role in the global rise of Hallyu (Park 2013). They are not only dedicated consumers but may also serve as “proselytizers” who adopt early and disseminate extensively Hallyu media. Jenkins et al. (2013) pointed out the role of diasporic audiences as “proselytizers” and disseminators of transnational cultural content. As discussed earlier, young Korean Canadians explore ethnic options by developing their attachments to being Korean, Asian, and Canadian, and they may share their cultural tastes with their peers of other Asian backgrounds.

AMBIVALENT FEELINGS ABOUT THE KOREAN WAVE

While increasing transnational flows of Korean media may facilitate young Korean Canadians’ ethnic identification and positive self-affirmation, these young people do not always welcome this cultural trend. The diasporic young people interviewed for this book were sometimes worried about the racial and marginal meanings still attached to Korean media, which may reproduce Western stereotyping of Koreans and Asians. They also had ambivalent feelings about Western audiences’ potential fetishization of Hallyu.

Stereotyping of the Korean Wave

The increasing publicity and popularity of K-pop and K-drama seemed to offer the Korean Canadians a cultural resource with which they felt positively about their ethnic identity and ties with Korea. However, Hallyu media has been racialized by general publics and mainstream media in Western contexts (Jin et al. 2021). Thus, the interviewees—especially those who participated in early interviews in 2015—expressed their concern about probable stigmatization and stereotyping by their (White) peers and the general public. In the interviewees’ recollections, their cultural and ethnic connection with Korea used to be something they wanted to hide during their childhood and adolescence, but partly due to the recent wave of Hallyu, the young people seemed comfortable to now speak openly about their ethnic identity. Those interviewed in 2021 commonly noted that, perhaps due to extensive media coverage, Korean pop culture was sometimes mentioned in class or among peers.

For example, 16-year-old Kimberly was excited about the release of the McDonald's BTS meal in May 2021,⁴ as many of her classmates were trying the menu item and taking a picture of it for their social media.

However, because Korean media is sometimes consumed and fetishized by Canadians of non-Korean backgrounds, the diasporic Korean youth had ambivalent feelings about the rise of Hallyu. Those who were interviewed in 2021 strongly agreed that Korean popular culture was consumed not only by ethnic Koreans but also increasingly by other young people. 16-year-old Samuel, who was interviewed in 2021, spoke about his surprise when he heard about BTS from his peers in school.

In my school, my friends talk a lot about K-pop. There was a day they would be like, "Do you know who BTS is?" And I didn't even know who that was because when I was younger, I didn't really listen to any K-pop. And then I actually didn't know who this was. And after that, I went home and googled. And that's when I actually started listening to K-pop. Because my friend suggested it and I didn't want to be ashamed and embarrassed. So I started watching K-pop YouTube videos. And that's how I socialize with my friends these days.

This recent development was a surprise for the young Korean Canadians, especially when recalling their childhood during which they could not even speak Korean in front of their peers. Indeed, young Korean Canadians interviewed in an early phase of this book project (the mid-2010s) often noted the stigmatization of K-pop and K-pop fans. For example, 17-year-old Victoria, who grew up in predominately White-populated Kelowna, recalled in a 2015 interview her peers' reception of the "Gangnam Style" phenomenon that emerged a few years earlier: "At first, everyone thought he [Psy] was from North Korea, I was like, 'No! No!' They don't even know South and North Korea, so, I said, 'if you don't know North and South [Korea], don't say [he's from] North or South.'" 22-year-old Ava in Toronto described how the global hit of Psy's "Gangnam Style" made her "come out" as Korean in public places.

⁴ Along with the release of BTS's new single "Butter" in Spring 2021, McDonald's launched a new combo item in 50 countries—the BTS-endorsed BTS meal. The meal's specifics had variations depending on the country, and thus, international fans shared pictures of BTS meals available in their neighborhood (Cannon 2021).

When Psy’s “Gangnam Style” was in hype, I saw, not in Koreatown... it was around the Yonge and Eglinton area [a district in downtown Toronto]. I’ve seen Caucasian ladies just dancing and singing it. I’ve seen a lot of them. When I was just passing, people recognized that I was Korean, just random people would talk to me about “Gangnam Style” and stuff.

In most of the interviewees’ recollections, due to such misrecognition and stereotyping of K-pop and other Korean media genres, cultural tastes for Hallyu often entailed stigmatization. Indeed, as empirical studies have shown, Hallyu and its fans have been racialized (Jung 2013; Won et al. 2020; Yoon 2019). Due to the White-dominant peer culture, some interviewees (especially those interviewed earlier in the mid-2010s) tried not to reveal their interest in Korean media when among their peers.

Circumstances have changed with the arrival of the recent phase of Hallyu, in which K-pop groups such as BTS have had record-breaking hits on major Western music charts and major Hallyu content and artists have attracted exceptional global attention in the late 2010s (see Chapter 1). However, whether positive or negative, the stereotyping of Korean media and its audiences appears to still remain. Henry, a 23-year-old 1.5 generation professional in Toronto, expressed his uncomfortable feelings about White people’s assumptions about K-pop and Korean Canadians. “Caucasian people come up to me and say ‘Oh, you’re Korean! I love K-pop.’ (...) It’s like me going up to a White person and saying ‘Oh, I love Coldplay. Your culture’s so rich and beautiful. It’s just the worst.’” In this manner, some interviewees refused to be identified with Hallyu media by others (especially White people) as they did not want to be pigeonholed only as an ethnic audience member naturally tied to Hallyu as a cultural trend that inevitably signifies its Korean origin.

Distancing from the Koreaboo

While Hallyu reaches to wider populations, beyond diasporic Asian youth, in Canada, the ways in which Korean pop cultural items are consumed in mainstream Western media and by White fans are not fully free of the Orientalist discourse of fetishizing and consuming the exotic other (Jin et al. 2021; Jung 2013). As addressed above, some Korean Canadian fans recognized the probable risk of cultural appropriation by White fans. Oh’s (2017) analysis of White YouTubers’ reaction videos on K-pop music showed that White audience members may assume a privileged position

from which non-Western cultural forms are conveniently exploited to reproduce the existing racial order. However, given the recent development of K-pop fandom and its contribution to social justice campaigns since the late 2010s, the Orientalist gaze on the “K” in K-pop may be challenged by alternative voices with which this non-Western media genre is considered as “subcultural capital” (Thornton 1996) for imagining post-national and cosmopolitan worlds. K-pop may not be recognizable cultural capital among general publics and youth, but it may be increasingly adopted as a particular cultural currency among transnational subcultural groups and thus acquired (Jin et al. 2021).

While Hallyu has rapidly become a recognizable cultural genre among young people (including those of non-Korean or non-Asian background), this does not necessarily mean that the old Orientalist stereotyping of Asian culture no longer exists in Western audiences’ consumption of Hallyu media. On the contrary, the stereotyping of K-pop has been reported in empirical studies (e.g., Min 2021; Yoon 2019). Stereotypes about Korean media are not only pervasive in mainstream media and audiences but also among fans of non-Korean backgrounds, who essentialize and romanticize Hallyu. In particular, some White fans of Hallyu media, including those who are often disapprovingly called “Koreaboo”⁵ in K-pop fan communities and Western media, are considered by several interviewees as “weird,” “immature,” or “aggressive.” 21-year-old K-pop fan Rebecca commented on extreme K-pop fans.

There’s a new term coined for people who are overly obsessed with like Korean people, Koreaboos. It’s gotten to the point where on YouTube or

⁵ The Koreaboo usually means an obsessed non-Korean fan of Korea and Korean culture. It is believed that the term may have originated from a previously used term Weeaboo, referring to non-Japanese fans obsessed about Japanese culture (Won et al. 2020). Among Hallyu fans, the term has a very negative connotation as the Koreaboo is considered to fetishize not only their favorite Korean stars but the entire Korean culture and Koreans. Oli London, a British man in his early thirties, might be a widely known and extreme example of the Koreaboo. He underwent numerous plastic surgeries, which allegedly cost over USD100,000, to make his appearance look like a K-pop star. As a YouTuber and influencer, he even released the song and music video “Koreaboo” in 2021, which was temporarily listed on the iTunes K-pop chart. He has been a target of K-pop fans’ harsh criticism because of his fetishization and misunderstanding of Korean culture and K-pop idols. Won et al. (2020) argued that the Koreaboo may be a discursive construction through which the dominant Western society marginalizes those who are fascinated about Asian culture.

on Facebook people are sharing cringy Koreaboo compilations. Sometimes you see that and I kind of wish that I wasn't associated with those people. (...) They're I guess ignorant towards the actual culture of Korea. Not just its pop culture. There's like a barrier between a real understanding of what Korea is all.

Kimberly, a 16-year-old high school student who grew up in the White-dominant city of Kelowna, was “the only Asian girl” in her school for a few years, and she critically noted the “fox-eye makeup fad” [i.e., a beauty trend that imitates the typical Asian eye shape through makeup and/or surgery] among White young women, which is undeniably influenced by the recent popularity of K-pop and other Asian stars.

They say it, in the media, “The Fox Eye.” The eye shape. Even though they made fun of me for having that eye shape a while ago, but now that has become a trend. They all want that. Now a lot of girls are doing makeup to have their eyes to look more pointed as Asian eyes. They may follow the trend but they really don't know where it's from and they made fun of me for looking like that years ago, but now they wanna look like that. So I just think it's stupid of them.

Several interviewees noted that K-pop fans in their school excessively imitated their favorite K-pop idols' styles and fashion and thus circulated stereotypes of K-pop and its fans at school. That is, K-pop fans—especially those of non-Korean background—were described as (sometimes excessively) subcultural; those fans were described as being “weird,” “unique,” and “not popular.” In response, some Korean Canadians who were frequent listeners or fans of K-pop tried to distance themselves from the Koreaboos in their schools (or in online forums). 18-year-old high school student Mia, who is herself a K-pop fan, spoke about the Koreaboo-type fans in her school and the online fan forums she often visited.

It's not like they do anything terrible but it's like an annoying thing, like they would constantly talk about it [K-pop] and quite a few of them actually went to school with a whole BTS outfit or something. I think that really makes them stand out and a target to everyone.

Mia and several other interviewees were critical of White K-pop fans who easily fantasize about Korea and Korean people. 16-year-old Kimberly also

expressed a similar concern about Canadian K-pop fans of non-Korean backgrounds.

They only see this shiny pop music side of Korea and they don't actually see the real culture and then they just fantasize about it. Some kids even want to become idols and they're not even Korean, and some people even fantasize about having a Korean or even Asian boyfriend, which I think is kind of terrible because something that is supposedly put out there for people to enjoy and respect all of their [idols'] hard work has been kind of turned into a fetish.

Due to the White fetishization of Korea observed among these K-pop fans, some young Korean Canadians expressed their mixed feelings about the rise of Hallyu in Canada and were hesitant in overtly exhibiting their cultural tastes for K-pop among their peers. While for Mia White K-pop fans were somewhat “embarrassing” and “annoying” in her own words, 19-year-old Cody considered their styles and attitudes as “weird” and “unique” (implying their subcultural nature).

They are weird. That's not because they like K-pop. ... They are really unique. How they wear, how they do their makeup. Unique people can't fit in to normal, regular, non-unique people, I think it's really hard to get in the (regular) community. So they try to find their way out of where they belong to.

In this manner, several interviewees who self-identified as K-pop fans distinguished themselves from White Koreaboo fans who seemed to have a “unique” subculture—a subculture that can engage with alternative cultural tastes but may not be free of existing stereotyping of Korean culture in a homogeneously and fetishized way, albeit positively. The Korean Canadians' concerns imply that Western K-pop fan culture can be dominated by these White Koreaboo fans and thus increase the risk of cultural appropriation and commodification of Korean culture. This book's findings resonate with those of recent studies that have examined how non-Korean or non-Asian fans of K-pop in North American, Europe, and Latin American contexts reproduce fetishism of Asian culture, which might be a new version of Orientalism (Hong 2013; Min 2021; Oh 2017).

According to the interviewees, the wave of Korean media seemed to contribute to enhancing cultural recognition of Korean and Asian

Canadians; however, the rapid rise of Hallyu that has interested many non-Korean fans may involve a risk of reproducing the Western gaze that essentializes and fetishizes Korean culture. As shown in some interviewees' criticism of White Koreaboo fans, diasporic young people's engagement with Hallyu involves certain ambivalent feelings. While acknowledging Hallyu media's role in facilitating ethnic identification for diasporic Koreans (to be further discussed in Chapter 3), the young Korean Canadians were also worried about Western appropriation of Korean media that may reproduce the Orientalist, Western gaze.

CONCLUSION

Diasporic Korean youth grow up realizing their difference, which adversely affects their self-identity and restricts their sense of belonging to the community. Their difference (and their own awareness of difference) limits the scope of their possible lives. As shown by numerous empirical studies conducted in North America, the racialization of people of color and immigrants systematically persists and restricts their career development on a social level (e.g., Oreopoulos 2011), while increasing their negative self-images as the other of "normal" Whites on a personal level (D. Y. Kim 2014). Growing up in "multicultural" Canada, young Korean Canadians go through moments of confusion and frustration owing to their difference. They feel that they are subject to (and have to be validated by) the dominant cultural norms of White Anglo groups, at least for a period in their childhood and/or adolescence. Yet, they gradually figure out how to negotiate the racial landscape to which they are forced to assimilate or otherwise remain stereotyped as the other. In doing so, they try to explore and negotiate their ethnic options and what it means to be Korean *and* Canadian (or to be in between Korean and Canadian), without necessarily sacrificing one for the other.

The recent global circulation of Korean media and popular culture may offer diasporic Korean youth resources for exploring who they are in between ethnic, Canadian, and multicultural identities. The increasing availability and recognition of Korean media in the global mediascape have allowed the diasporic Korean youth to openly engage with non-White Anglo cultural texts without self-monitoring or embarrassment. Young Korean Canadians are early adopters and reflexive consumers of the transnational cultural texts of Hallyu. Some engage with Hallyu as ethnic "ambassadors" who may have "authentic" feelings and knowledge about

the texts, while others critically utilize the texts for reimagining their sense of belonging and bicultural or multicultural identities. Transnational cultural flows, such as Hallyu, offer a new cultural space in which diasporic youth can “maneuver at relative ease to create new opportunities for cultural production and expression” (Zhou and Lee 2004, p. 20). Transnational Korean media is utilized by diasporic Korean youth as a cultural resource for ethnic identification and connection. However, as addressed in this chapter, diasporic Korean Canadians also have ambivalent feelings about Hallyu, and with the recent global attention to Korean pop culture, some question the cultural appropriation of Hallyu by people of non-Korean backgrounds.

In the time of Hallyu, Korean Canadian entrepreneur Hanmin Yang’s childhood identity question cited at the beginning of this chapter—“How do others see me?” (i.e., a question that implies visible minorities’ precarious sense of identity in the White-dominant culture)—may be replaced with a more self-exploratory, self-assuring question for the forthcoming generations of diasporic youth in the time of the Korean Wave: “how do *we* see us through different lenses and different languages?”

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