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Acculturation of Korean New Zealander Youth Re-Ethnicization of the Newer Generation

Changzoo Song

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Acculturation of Korean New Zealander Youth

“Dr. Changzoo Song offers a compelling exploration of how young Korean migrants in New Zealand navigate identity, adaptation, and belonging. Moving beyond traditional models of assimilation, this study highlights how youth actively redefine what it means to be Korean and New Zealander through complex processes of acculturation and re-ethnicization. Centering their voices, Song reveals the subtle negotiations of bicultural identity in a multicultural society. This timely work offers valuable insights into immigrant identity formation and makes a significant contribution to migration, diaspora, and second-generation studies.”

—Min Zhou *Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Asian American Studies,
University of California, Los Angeles, USA*

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*To all immigrant youth in Aotearoa: your struggles, resilience, and
dreams shape the future of Aotearoa and inspire the world*

PREFACE

Migration is more than a movement of people across borders; it is a journey of identity, adaptation, and transformation. This book was born from a desire to explore the evolving experiences of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders—those who have grown up at the intersection of two cultures. Through their stories, we uncover the intricate layers involved in bicultural identity, navigating the dual processes of acculturation and re-ethnicization. The significance of this study extends beyond the Korean New Zealand community, offering valuable insights into the broader dynamics of immigrant identity formation in multicultural societies worldwide.

This book highlights Korean New Zealanders' diverse and evolving acculturation strategies. It moves beyond traditional narratives of assimilation and ethnic retention, illustrating how young migrants engage in complex negotiations of culture, language, and selfhood. By centering their voices, this study highlights how these youth challenge, redefine, and reconstruct their identities in response to both personal experiences and structural realities.

The narratives presented here highlight the complex interplay between cultural adaptation and heritage preservation. Many newer-generation Korean New Zealanders initially sought to assimilate into Kiwi society, often suppressing their ethnic identity to fit in. Yet, for most, adolescence and young adulthood sparked a renewed connection with their Korean roots, facilitated by transnational ties, digital connectivity, the growing prominence of Korean culture on the global stage, all within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand's growing multiculturalism. This phenomenon

challenges conventional notions of assimilation and highlights the resilience of cultural identity in an era of increasing globalization. And so, as we embark on this exploration, readers are invited to reflect on the broader implications of these stories.

This book is both a scholarly inquiry and a tribute to the resilience, adaptability, and cultural pride of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. May their stories inspire further dialog on identity, migration, and the evolving meaning of belonging in our increasingly interconnected world.

Acknowledgments¹ The creation of this book has been a collaborative journey, made possible through the generosity, insights, and support of many individuals and institutions. I am deeply grateful to everyone who contributed their time, knowledge, and encouragement throughout this process.

First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the individuals who graciously agreed to be interviewed. Their willingness to share their experiences, challenges, and reflections provided invaluable depth to this work. Without their voices, this book would not have been possible. Each interviewee brought a unique perspective, and their candid insights into identity, struggle, and belonging breathed life into the research, making it both deeply authentic and meaningful.

I am also profoundly grateful to Drs. Lynne Park and Justine Park, who worked alongside me from the beginning of this project. As outstanding researchers in their own right, their contributions to recruiting participants, conducting interviews, and analyzing data were essential to the completion of this book. Their dedication, insight, and unwavering support have been both enriching and rewarding. Although I invited them to be co-authors, they humbly declined, believing they had not been sufficiently involved in the writing process—something I regret and take full responsibility for. However, as we agreed, we will collaborate again to expand on this research and explore new perspectives together.

A special note of gratitude goes to the editors and reviewers, whose thoughtful feedback and constructive criticism have strengthened this book in countless ways. Their keen attention to detail, clarity, and

¹ This work was supported by the Strategic Research Institute Program for Korean Studies of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Studies Promotion Service at the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2022-SRI-2200001).

coherence has helped refine my ideas and ensure this work reaches its full potential.

I would also like to express my deep appreciation to Professors Min Zhou (UCLA), Takeyuki Gaku Tsuda (Arizona State University), and Pyong Gap Min (Queens College, CUNY) for their pioneering scholarship and generous intellectual influence. Their work on migration, ethnic identity, and diasporic communities has profoundly shaped the theoretical framing and comparative dimensions of this book.

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Lastly, I sincerely thank my colleagues, friends, and family. Their unwavering encouragement, patience, and belief in the significance of this work have been a constant source of motivation. Their support, whether through thoughtful conversations, critical feedback, or quiet reassurance, has sustained me throughout this journey.

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CHAPTER 1

The Newer-Generation Korean Kiwis

Abstract This chapter introduces newer-generation Korean New Zealanders—1.5- and second-generation youth who grew up in New Zealand from the 1990s—as part of the global “new second generation.” It situates their experiences within New Zealand’s shifting immigration policies, emerging multiculturalism, and enduring biculturalism in a Pākehā-dominated society. After outlining Korean migration history and first-generation adaptation, the chapter explores the identity journeys of their children, who often seek assimilation but later reconnect with Korean heritage through re-ethnicization. Influenced by digital media, transnational ties, and Korean pop culture (*Hallyu*), this shift challenges linear assimilation models. The chapter presents four guiding research questions on identity, agency, racism, and acculturation, establishing the analytical foundation for understanding how these youth navigate belonging in a diverse yet hierarchical society.

Keywords Korean New Zealanders · New second generation · Multiculturalism in New Zealand · Biculturalism · Acculturation

INTRODUCTION

Korean immigration to New Zealand has steadily grown over the past three decades (1990s–2010s), contributing to the country’s growing economy and cultural diversity. The newer generation of Korean New Zealanders—comprising both 1.5-generation and second-generation youth—represents a unique cohort navigating bicultural identities shaped by their Korean heritage and Kiwi (New Zealander)¹ upbringing. Central to their experiences are the intertwined acculturation processes—how they adapt to and integrate into Kiwi society—and re-ethnicization, where they rediscover and re-engage with their Korean cultural roots after periods of assimilation. These two processes serve as key analytical lenses throughout this book, offering insight into the complex negotiations of cultural identity in a multicultural environment.

The migration experiences of Korean families in New Zealand have evolved significantly across generations. While the first-generation immigrants focused on economic stability and preserving cultural traditions, their children—the newer generation—face different social, cultural, and emotional challenges. They grow up within the contrasting environments of Korean households and New Zealand schools, navigating linguistic, cultural, and social expectations from both spaces. During their formative years, the 1.5- and second-generation Korean New Zealander children experienced strong assimilation pressures in school, striving to fit into dominant Kiwi social and cultural norms while suppressing aspects of their Korean culture and identity. However, a notable phenomenon emerged as they reached adolescence and early adulthood: many began to rediscover their Korean heritage, forming co-ethnic friendships, reconnecting with cultural traditions, and regaining confidence in their ethnic identity. We identified this shift as re-ethnicization, a process that parallels their integration into New Zealand society.

This book examines the unique acculturation pathways of Korean New Zealander youth, exploring how early assimilation experiences often give way to a later phenomenon of re-ethnicization. Acculturation describes how these individuals adapt linguistically, socially, and culturally to New Zealand society, while re-ethnicization captures their reconnection with Korean social, cultural, and linguistic practices, often during their high

¹ “Why are New Zealanders called Kiwis?” <https://www.newzealand.com/int/feature/new-zealand-people/>.

school and university years. By analyzing these two interconnected processes, this book provides a better understanding of how our participants—1.5- and second-generation Korean New Zealander youth, who began their school life in New Zealand—navigate the dual pressures of cultural integration and heritage preservation.

The research for this book began in 2019, motivated by the observation that many newer-generation Korean New Zealanders were undergoing an intriguing revival of ethnicity during their high school and university years—a phenomenon that disrupted assumptions of their relatively smooth assimilation into Kiwi society. Instead, their experiences revealed a dynamic interplay between the pressures of assimilation in childhood (acculturation) and the rediscovery of cultural heritage in later years (re-ethnicization). These findings challenged both societal assumptions and immigrant parents' expectations, highlighting the complexity of bicultural identity formation.

This chapter sets the stage by introducing the historical, social, and demographic context of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. It begins by examining migration trends, settlement patterns, and the socio-cultural dynamics that shape their everyday lives. It also briefly outlines the core themes of acculturation and re-ethnicization, which will guide the analysis in subsequent chapters, offering key insights into how participants navigate their dual identities.

Chapter 2 turns to the theoretical frameworks of assimilation, acculturation, integration, and ethnicity, highlighting their relevance to the experiences of this cohort. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach adopted in the study. Chapter 4 explores participants' early acculturation experiences during their formative school years, while Chap. 5 delves into the phenomenon of re-ethnicization and the cultural revival taking place within this generation. Chapter 6 addresses the diversity and complexity of identity negotiation among participants. Chapter 7 examines their seemingly successful integration into New Zealand society, often achieved without a corresponding deep sense of belonging. The final chapter revisits the central research questions and offers a critical reflection on the extent to which existing theories resonate with—or fall short of fully capturing—the lived realities of the newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth.

NEW ZEALAND IN THE 1990s–2010s: NEW IMMIGRATION POLICY AND GROWTH OF MULTICULTURALISM

Historical Foundations of Immigration Policy

New Zealand was founded on the principle of British-Māori partnership with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 between the British Crown and Māori chiefs. The treaty recognized Māori as Aotearoa New Zealand's indigenous people, guaranteeing their land, resources, and cultural preservation rights. As Treaty partners, Māori and the British Crown were meant to collaborate in governing and shaping the nation. However, in practice, New Zealand has been predominantly European-dominated, reflecting a history where the promises of the Treaty were often sidelined or breached. This European dominance was entrenched in the country's immigration policy, which historically favored British and other European migrants, aiming to maintain a perceived cultural and ethnic homogeneity of "White New Zealand" (Beaglehole, 2005a). Consequently, New Zealand developed a deep-seated history of prejudice against immigrants from non-European backgrounds, including Asians.

Although non-European immigrants were restricted from entering New Zealand before the 1990s, some Asian migrants did arrive in the early and mid-nineteenth century. The first wave included Indians, who had a historical connection to British colonialism and the British Empire (Swarbrick, 2005). Additionally, Chinese gold miners arrived in the late 1860s. Unfortunately, these early Indian and Chinese settlers had to endure racism, discrimination, and marginalization. The 1870s, in particular, witnessed the rise of anti-Chinese sentiment as European settlers began to perceive Chinese migrants as economic competitors. In anticipation of this competition, the Chinese Immigrants Act of 1881 was enacted, imposing a poll tax on Chinese immigrants and tightly limiting their entry into the country. This policy significantly curtailed Chinese immigration by the 1890s. Asians were virtually stopped after the 1890s until the 1970s, and the small Asian immigrant communities in New Zealand largely remained socially segregated from the dominant society (Ip & Pang, 2006).

Shift in Immigration Policy (1970s–1990s)

The new global political and economic changes, as well as the domestic economic and social situation of New Zealand in the late twentieth century, forced the country to change its old Europe-oriented immigration policy. First, far fewer Europeans were willing to migrate to other countries outside of Europe as Europe's economic situation had continuously improved since the 1950s. In addition, the United Kingdom, with which New Zealand had a special political and economic relationship, could not continue its favorable trade practices with New Zealand due to its commitment to the European Union (Butcher et al., 2015). Furthermore, the aging population and economic slowdown in New Zealand demanded more immigrants, pushing the country to find new markets and source countries for immigrants. For example, New Zealand recruited many Pacific Islanders in the 1960s and early 1970s as the agricultural sector suffered from a labor shortage (Fraenkel, 2012).

The late 1970s and 1980s witnessed a relaxation of restrictions on immigration, opening doors to non-European immigrants, primarily driven by labor shortages and humanitarian concerns. These changes gradually dismantled the old racially discriminatory “White New Zealand” policy, leading to more diverse immigration from the 1970s (Phillips, 2005). The establishment of the Human Rights Commission in 1977 ushered in multiculturalism in New Zealand, ending the earlier emphasis on assimilation policy, and celebrating diverse cultures and ethnicities. Then, the late 1980s (with the 1987 Immigration Act) and early 1990s saw even more significant changes as the New Zealand government adopted a new policy to bring people with skills, education, and capital (Beaglehole, 2005b). Implementing this new immigration policy in New Zealand significantly transformed the country's demographic landscape. Preferring migrants with expertise and capital, the new policy facilitated the entry of more skilled Asian migrants with capital, contributing to the country's economic growth (Bedford & Ho, 2008).

Emergence of Multiculturalism (1990s–2010s)

As the 1990s and 2000s unfolded, New Zealand underwent profound social changes, transitioning into an increasingly multicultural society thanks to the surge in immigrants with various ethnic backgrounds. This cultural diversity has shaped modern-day New

Zealand, positioning the country as one of the most multicultural nations in the world. According to data from Statistics New Zealand (Stats NZ) in 2019, approximately 27.4% of the country's population was born overseas, reflecting the profound impact of the post-1990s immigration policy changes.

This diversity is widely endorsed by the people of New Zealand (Ward & Masgoret, 2008), revealing that most New Zealanders view cultural diversity as a positive force that enriches the nation's fabric. While New Zealand is recognized as a bicultural country, acknowledging the special status of Māori, this recognition has evolved over time. Increasing recognition of Māori rights and biculturalism, driven by Treaty settlements and societal shifts, has begun to influence broader patterns of recognition and inclusion in New Zealand society. This evolving bicultural framework could potentially impact the experiences of all migrants, offering a unique dimension not present in other countries (Spoonley & Macpherson, 2004).

This has been the general atmosphere of New Zealand society in which the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth has grown up over the last three decades.

KOREAN IMMIGRANTS IN NEW ZEALAND

Korean migration to New Zealand is a relatively recent phenomenon compared to other immigrant groups, such as Indians and Chinese. The 1970s and 1980s marked the tiny initial trickle of Korean migrants, but it was not until the early 1990s, with the effect of the Immigration Act of 1987, that migration from Korea began to increase significantly. This policy reform replaced racially biased immigration criteria with a merit-based points system, focusing on skills, education, and financial capital.

Although the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998 initially led to a slowdown, it ultimately spurred increased migration, as economic uncertainty pushed many middle-class Korean families to seek better opportunities abroad. Koreans were particularly attracted to New Zealand's high-quality education system, safe living conditions, and perceived work-life balance. Cities such as Auckland, Christchurch, and Hamilton became key settlement hubs, offering both economic opportunities and access to reputable schools.

Push and Pull Factors Behind Korean Migration

The motivations for Korean migration to New Zealand can be understood through the lens of push and pull factors. On the push-factor side, intense competition in South Korea's education system, long working hours, and economic instability during the late 1990s compelled many middle-class families to consider overseas relocation. Parents, in particular, sought to escape the pressure-cooker educational environment of South Korea, hoping to provide their children with a more balanced and fulfilling upbringing (Lee et al., 2010; Park et al., 2014).

On the pull factor side, New Zealand offered accessible, high-quality education, a relaxed lifestyle, and a clean natural environment (Dixon et al., 2010). Additionally, New Zealand is an English-speaking nation offering comparatively more affordable education costs compared to countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, which act as further incentives for Korean and other Asian migrants. Beyond the allure of quality education, first-generation Koreans also prized the newfound prospects and optimism they encountered in New Zealand. These included a more open future for their children and themselves, marked by a cleaner environment and adventurous lifestyles (Butcher & Wieland, 2013; Kitchen, 2014). The immigration system's emphasis on skilled migration and investor visas further attracted middle-class Korean families with financial resources and professional expertise.

However, the migration journey was not without challenges. Language barriers, unfamiliar social norms, and subtle discrimination often created hurdles for Korean migrants as they navigated their new environment.

Settlement Patterns and Community Formation

The settlement strategies of Korean immigrants in New Zealand reveal a diverse array of adaptation approaches. Many families gravitated toward areas with established Korean communities, such as Auckland's North Shore, where access to good school zones, ethnic grocery stores, Korean churches, and community centers offered a sense of familiarity and support (Chang et al., 2006; Koo, 2010). Churches, in particular, played a central role in community building, serving not only as places of worship but also as social hubs where newcomers could seek advice, make friends, and build

support networks. Similarly, weekend schools and cultural associations provided spaces for children to maintain their Korean language skills and cultural practices.

Interestingly, some Korean families deliberately chose environments with few or no other Koreans, hoping to accelerate their children's English language acquisition and cultural integration. While this strategy aimed to prevent social isolation within ethnic enclaves, it sometimes led to feelings of cultural disconnection among second-generation Korean New Zealanders.

Despite these varied strategies, a common thread among Korean migrants was their strong focus on education. Many families made significant sacrifices to secure access to quality schooling for their children, viewing education as a pathway to success and stability in their adopted country.

Challenges and Adaptation

Korean migrants, like many other immigrant communities, faced multiple challenges during their settlement process in Aotearoa New Zealand. Language barriers often posed difficulties in securing employment and forming social connections with locals. Many skilled professionals found themselves working in jobs below their qualifications due to credential recognition issues and limited English proficiency. Subtle—and sometimes overt—forms of discrimination and stereotyping also surfaced in workplaces, schools, and social settings. Participants frequently shared experiences of being perceived as perpetual outsiders, despite their contributions to New Zealand society.

At the same time, the resilience and adaptability of Korean migrants were evident in their strategies for overcoming these barriers. Many turned to ethnic networks, digital communication tools, and community organizations to rebuild their social and economic lives. Over time, these strategies fostered stronger ethnic communities and helped create spaces for cultural expression and collective support.

Korean immigrants' migration and settlement experiences in New Zealand reflect a complex interplay of push and pull factors, shaped by educational pressures, economic instability, and the promise of better opportunities abroad. While settlement patterns show both clustering in ethnic communities and deliberate avoidance of Korean-dense neighborhoods, they also reveal a strong commitment to education, cultural preservation, and adaptation to local norms.

These foundational migration and settlement patterns set the stage for the newer generation of Korean New Zealanders, who would grow up negotiating dual cultural identities in a society defined by both bicultural and multicultural dynamics. In the following section, we will examine the social and cultural environments that shaped the identity experiences of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders, exploring how they navigated these inherited migration legacies in their daily lives.

THE NEWER GENERATION OF KOREAN NEW ZEALANDER YOUTH AS “NEW SECOND GENERATION”

Reflecting the educational motivation of Korean migrants in New Zealand, many Korean families in the country consist of parents with school-aged children. Among the 35,664 Koreans living in New Zealand in 2018 (Statistics New Zealand, 2018), 2426 were born in New Zealand (second-generation), while the rest were either first-generation or 1.5-generation (the latter being those who arrived in the country at a young age, following their parents). Those 1.5-generation children, who arrived in New Zealand between the 1990s and early 2000s, are now in the middle or early stages of their social careers. The others who arrived after the mid-2000s or were born in New Zealand are still in school or at an early stage of their professional careers.

In terms of generation breakdowns, these newer-generation Korean New Zealanders are the so-called millennials—born between the early 1980s and 2000 (Howe & Strauss, 2000)—and Generation Z—born after the late 1990s (Dimock, 2019)—and they reached their adolescence stage in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

These newer generations of Korean New Zealander youth are a part of the “new second-generation,” who form a large and important population in the United States today² and in other immigration-receiving countries (Portes, 2001; Bankston & Zhou, 2016). In the United States, the term “new second generation” refers to the children born to immigrants who arrived after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which opened the country to a larger and more diverse influx of migrants. This cohort came of age around the turn of the twenty-first

² About 27% of children in the United States today are from immigrant families (Migration Policy Institute, 2022. “Children in U.S. Immigrant Families” <https://immigrationinitiative.harvard.edu/topic/first-and-second-generation/>).

century (Farley & Alba, 2002; Portes & Zhou, 1993) and has attracted significant academic attention since the 1990s.

The reasons why this “new second generation” emerged as a key topic of focus in academic discourse were due to their not following the conventional pattern of linear assimilation of the “old second generation.” Instead, they displayed more divergent acculturation patterns. This is mainly because of the numerous social, economic, and political changes in the receiving societies, such as the United States, after the mid-1960s. These changes include the rise of ethnic/racial minority rights, thanks to the civil rights movements in the 1960s; the adoption of more liberal immigration policies in liberal democracies; and the decline of conventional manufacturing industries in advanced economies, which used to offer essential social mobility opportunities to the earlier generations of immigrants (Bankston & Zhou, 2016; Kibria, 2002; Perlmann & Waldinger, 1997; Waters, 1994).

On the global level, the era of the 1990s–2010s witnessed accelerated globalization, marked by increasing international trade, investment, cultural flows, and migration. The influence of neoliberalism on a global scale continued to grow, though with a growing recognition of its limitations and challenges, especially after the regional and global financial crises in 1997–1998 and 2007–2008. A more revolutionary change in the same era was the rapid development of new technologies, particularly digital communication technology, which reshaped the ways people connect and share information. For New Zealand, among the many important social and cultural changes, the era was marked by its evolution into an increasingly multicultural society (Ward & Masgoret, 2008; Ward & Mak, 2016). For South Korea, the ethnic homeland of the Korean New Zealander cohort, this era brought the global ascent of its popular culture.

The 1.5- and second-generation Korean New Zealander youth, as descendants of the first-generation Korean immigrants who entered New Zealand after the 1990s, are equivalent to the “new second generation” of the United States and other Western immigrant-receiving countries. They were mostly born after the 1990s and came of age after the 2010s (about two or three decades later than their counterparts in the United States). As a part of this global “new second generation,” the newer-generation Korean New Zealander cohort also shows a clear deviation from the “old second generation” in many aspects, including acculturation patterns.

In addition, the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth, born and raised during a time when digital communication technology was rapidly developing, are so-called digital natives (Prensky, 2001). Unlike the previous generation, this new generation is far more familiar with the new modes of flexible and versatile means of communication. The new communication technology facilitated the newer generation in staying connected with their dispersed co-ethnics and also with their ethnic homeland, which, in turn, made it easier for them to maintain their ethnic language and culture better than the earlier generations. In New Zealand, it was reported that Korean New Zealander youth in the early 2000s were actively using new digital information technology, such as Cyworld,³ and maintained their ethnic language better than other groups, including their counterparts in the United States, by communicating with their friends back in Korea (Epstein, 2006).

Indeed, socially and culturally, Korean New Zealanders tend to be more “ethnic” than other ethnic groups in New Zealand. For example, among all major immigrant groups in New Zealand, Korean New Zealanders rank the highest in ethnic language retention rates. According to official 2004 and 2013 surveys in New Zealand, Korean New Zealanders showed the highest level of ethnic language retention rates among all ethnic groups in the country (Fig. 1.1).

For the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth, there are also some unique contextual factors that influence their acculturation and ethnic development. For example, the growing economic power of their ethnic homeland has a significant impact on the Korean New Zealander cohort. As a country, South Korea went through rapid development in the 1970s and 1980s, and by the time these new generations were born after the 1980s, the country held a relatively high status within the hierarchy of the global political economy. This means a lot to those children and adolescents growing up not in their own native land but in a host country, where they are an ethnic minority. In addition, their strong and growing transnational connections with their ethnic homeland, facilitated by the availability and active use of digital communication technology, help them better maintain their ethnicity and heritage. In particular, the rising *Hallyu* (Korean Wave) not only gives the cohort pride in their ethnicity

³ Cyworld, a South Korean social network service, was first launched in 1999 in South Korea (<http://cyworld.com>). Today, the dominant social network service in South Korea is KakaoTalk.

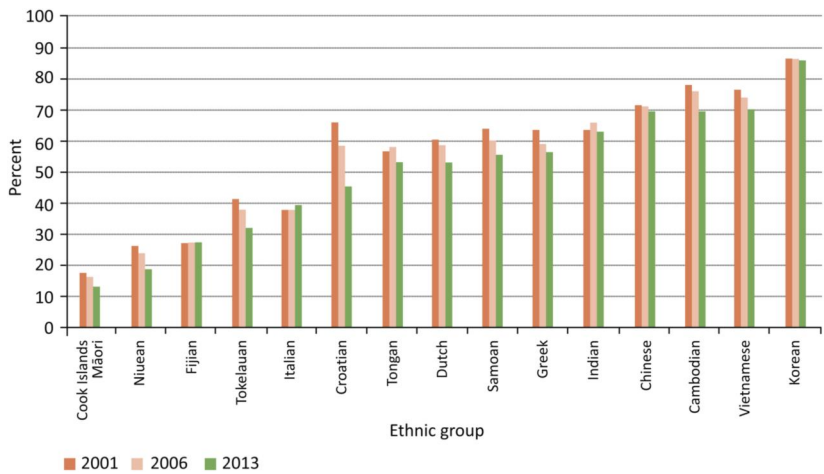


Fig. 1.1 Proportion of people who could speak the first language of their ethnic group in 2001, 2006, and 2013. *Note* figure from The Social Report 2016 (Ministry of Social Development, 2016)

but also facilitates a positive change in the reception of the host society toward Korean immigrants in New Zealand.

This sounds all positive to the newer generation of Korean New Zealanders, and members of this group seem to be privileged people. In addition, there is a popular perception that New Zealand, being a country of natural beauty, peace, democracy, and multiculturalism, is a “paradise” for children and young people. This is particularly a widely accepted perception in Asian countries, including Korea, and Koreans living in New Zealand are generally envied by their co-ethnics in Korea. The great majority of Korean New Zealanders, including the newer generation, also consider that living and growing up in New Zealand is beneficial, especially because the country’s educational, social, and natural environments are far better than those of their ethnic homeland. Nevertheless, this is not the whole story. We often hear different stories, not only from young Korean New Zealanders but also sometimes from their parents.

As in any typical Western immigration country, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth in New Zealand also face various challenges and confusion living in a foreign land. As phenotypically distinctive “Asians” in a

country dominated by the majority white Europeans, Korean New Zealanders inevitably feel a social and cultural distance between themselves and the dominant white population (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008, p. 68). No doubt, as immigrant children and children of immigrants, the newer generation of Korean New Zealanders are not free from discrimination, prejudice, and racism in their host society, which has various negative impacts on their well-being, mental health, identity development, and social mobility of the newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. Members of this cohort also face the complexities of having a dual cultural identity and difficulties in developing their sense of belonging in their host society.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Growing up as Asian ethnic minorities in New Zealand within an evolving societal landscape, the newer-generation Korean New Zealanders are part of the global “new second generation” (Farley & Alba, 2002; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997; Zhou & Bankston, 2016), who undergo distinct acculturation and ethnicity development experiences. As previously mentioned, many of them experience a revival of their ethnicity during their high school or university years, a phenomenon that deviates from the conventional assimilationist perspective. However, others experience different acculturation paths, such as “separation” or “assimilation,” if we borrow the terms from Berry (1997), revealing the dynamic and intricate nature of the acculturation process within the “new second generation.” These experiences of the newer-generation Korean New Zealander cohort raise numerous intriguing questions.

While each chapter focuses on specific stages or expressions of ethnic identity and acculturation, several key themes—such as the influence of *Hallyu* and transnational media, the role of individual agency in navigating identity, and the impact of New Zealand’s evolving multicultural context—cut across multiple chapters. These themes emerge in Chap. 4’s exploration of early assimilation experiences but continue to inform the re-ethnicization process (Chap. 5), diverse acculturation strategies (Chap. 6), and ongoing tensions around belonging (Chap. 7). The questions related to these themes are therefore not limited to one chapter but provide a thread that weaves through the entire book.

The initial question explores how this cohort navigates the transition from home to school at the start of their educational journey in New

Zealand, which is addressed in Chap. 4, “Growing as ‘Kiwis’: Journey of Acculturation.” Raised in Korean-speaking households by first-generation Korean New Zealander parents, these children often face significant challenges upon entering the school system. This moment marks their first—and often disorienting—exposure to a new linguistic, cultural, and social environment. As they work hard to learn English and adapt to the norms of the dominant group, many undergo, or actively seek, assimilation. What specific difficulties do they encounter during this early stage, and how do they respond to the unfamiliar expectations of school life in New Zealand?

The next set of questions emerges from the cohort’s re-ethnicization experiences during their high school and university years, a period when many begin to rediscover their ethnic identity and cultural heritage. This process is examined in Chap. 5. The central question here concerns how re-ethnicization unfolds and what factors contribute to it—particularly as their social networks shift from being cross-cultural in earlier schooling to becoming more ethnically oriented. To what extent does the reception they receive from the host society—especially experiences of covert and overt discrimination, prejudice, and racism in everyday life—influence this process? And how do these challenges affect their integration and their sense of belonging in New Zealand as they negotiate a dual cultural identity?

The Influence of Hallyu: In addition, we consider the influence of broader contextual factors such as digital communication technologies, transnational connectivity to the ethnic homeland, and the global rise of *Hallyu* (the Korean Wave) in facilitating the preservation and strengthening of ethnic language and culture among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. To what extent does this transnational connectivity, enabled by digital media, contribute to the development of ethnic confidence and a strong sense of Korean identity among these young people? Furthermore, how does it shape their attitudes toward their ethnic heritage and cultural traditions?

Agency: While immigrants’ assimilation and integration patterns, as well as ethnicity development, often depend on the host society’s reception, they also reflect the choices of the migrants themselves. Many researchers have demonstrated the agency of immigrants in actively constructing their identities rather than passively conforming to the assimilation path imposed by the dominant host group (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Handlin, 1951). To what extent has the re-ethnicization among the newer generation of Korean New Zealanders been driven by the active

agency of this cohort? Furthermore, what coping mechanisms and support systems do they employ in response to challenges such as discrimination and racism?

Multicultural NZ: Another intriguing facet of this re-ethnization phenomenon among the newer-generation Korean New Zealander cohort is that it unfolds within a host society that has grown increasingly multicultural. As mentioned earlier, New Zealand has experienced a rapid influx of immigrants with diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds since the 1990s, establishing itself as one of the world's most multicultural countries (Stats NZ, 2019). Amid these changes, New Zealanders have become more appreciative of cultural diversity, perceiving it as a positive attribute for the nation (Ward & Masgoret, 2008). This context raises the next question: How has the existence of biculturalism and the growing multiculturalism in New Zealand in the last three decades influenced the acculturation and ethnic identity development of the newer generation of Korean New Zealanders? Is the re-ethnization phenomenon among these youths a natural and positive consequence of New Zealand's growing multiculturalism? Do the Korean New Zealander youth (as well as other Asian New Zealander youths) feel more comfortable expressing their ethnicity within their host society's multicultural atmosphere?

If re-ethnization represents one pattern of acculturation within the cohort, we should consider other acculturation patterns, too. Indeed, some people take other acculturation paths that differ from those of their re-ethnized co-ethnics. First of all, some individuals align more with an "assimilation" pattern, often derogatorily referred to as "white-washed" by re-ethnized members of the cohort. Others maintain their ethnicity without significant interaction with the host society ("separation") and are often labeled as "FOB Koreans" by re-ethnized members of the cohort. How and why do these individuals adopt such divergent acculturation strategies, and how do they perceive—and are perceived by—their re-ethnized co-ethnics? Chapter 6 will deal with these questions.

The last set of questions is related to the somewhat imbalanced integration of the cohort, which appears successful but lacks a strong sense of belonging to New Zealand. Almost all of our participants state that New Zealand is their home, and they are generally satisfied with their life in New Zealand. At the same time, however, they also say that they still feel a cultural distance from the dominant society, and it is hard to develop a strong sense of belonging. What are the factors that create this discrepancy between seemingly successful integration and a sense of belonging? In

what areas of Kiwi life does the cohort not feel comfortable? What are the implications of this discrepancy in terms of New Zealand's cherished multiculturalism? These questions will be addressed in Chap. 7.

Importance of the Research

This “re-ethnicization” phenomenon among the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth, not to mention the newer generation of Asian youths in other Western immigration countries in general, has been scarcely documented. This book addresses this gap in the academic literature on the acculturation patterns of the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth, offering insights into their formative experiences. The research questions outlined above aim to provide valuable insights into the acculturation, ethnic identity development, and integration processes of the “new second generation” in general. In particular, exploring the experiences of the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth in a predominantly bicultural New Zealand environment contributes to our understanding of the identity issues faced by Asian immigrant children in contemporary Western host societies. Additionally, given our limited understanding of the impacts of digital communication technology on the acculturation and identity negotiations of the “new second generation,” we hope this study will also make a meaningful contribution to this area.

This chapter has provided an overview of the historical, social, and demographic context shaping the lives of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. In doing so, it has also identified four key research questions that guide this study, particularly concerning the acculturation experiences of 1.5- and second-generation Korean New Zealander youth as they navigate their identities within a society that is increasingly multicultural, yet still structured around a dominant bicultural framework and Pākehā-centric norms. These questions were raised within the context of broader structural dynamics, as well as the individual-level experiences of growing up as ethnic Asian minorities in New Zealand.

By introducing central themes such as acculturation, re-ethnicization, and the interplay between structure and agency, this chapter sets the stage for a deeper, more nuanced exploration of the identity formation and cultural negotiation processes among Korean New Zealand youth. These themes are revisited and developed further in the empirical chapters that

follow, each highlighting different trajectories, responses, and social meanings attributed to cultural difference and belonging.

The focus will now shift to establishing the theoretical framework that underpins this analysis. Chapter 2 explores key concepts and debates in the literature on the acculturation of the “new second generation” and considers how these frameworks help illuminate the complex cultural and emotional journeys of Korean New Zealander youth. This theoretical grounding will provide essential tools for interpreting the diverse patterns of adaptation, resistance, and identity construction discussed in later chapters.

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CHAPTER 2

Acculturation of the New Second-Generation and Understanding Korean New Zealander Youth

Abstract This chapter critically reviews theories of assimilation, acculturation, integration, and ethnicity in relation to newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. It traces shifts from classical assimilation to segmented assimilation and pluralist models, highlighting their limitations in capturing the complex identity negotiations of migrant youth. To address these gaps, the chapter proposes an interdisciplinary framework combining neo-assimilation theory, transnationalism, and cultural hybridity. It considers both structural factors—such as multicultural policy, racial hierarchies, and biculturalism—and agential ones, including identity negotiation and re-ethnicization influenced by transnational ties and Korean pop culture (Hallyu). Analyzing how these forces interact, the chapter provides a theoretical lens for understanding the diverse acculturation experiences of Korean New Zealander youth and offers a more nuanced view of identity and belonging in multicultural New Zealand.

Keywords New second generation · Re-ethnicization · Transnationalism · Ethnic identity · Affective belonging

INTRODUCTION

As stated in the previous chapter, we question how the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth, as part of the new second-generation immigrants of the contemporary world, navigate the cultural and racial terrain in the increasingly multicultural New Zealand society over the last three decades, spanning the early 1990s to the early 2020s. In this chapter, we critically review existing research and scholarship related to assimilation/acculturation, ethnicity, integration, and the sense of belonging of the new second generation. This literature review provides a foundation for exploring diverse disciplinary fields, including sociology, social psychology, anthropology, and ethnic studies, drawing insights from key concepts and theories across disciplines. We will cover classical assimilation theory, the racial/ethnic disadvantage (or “reactive ethnicity”) model, and neo-assimilation theories, including segmented assimilation theory, the acculturation model, and the pluralistic model (“ethnic option”). While the review will be comprehensive in its scope, it will remain succinct and critical in the context of the lived experiences of the newer generation of the Korean New Zealander cohort.

While reviewing the selected theoretical perspectives, we will identify some challenges and gaps in the existing theories, which may not fully capture the unique acculturation and integration experiences of the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth. In doing so, we will highlight some unique experiences and challenges that Korean New Zealander youth face in New Zealand. Then, we will build our theoretical framework by combining various insights from neo-assimilation theories and transnationalism theory, which are highly relevant to our observations, context, and research questions. This theoretical framework will guide us in exploring and understanding the particular acculturation and integration processes and paths of the newer-generation Korean New Zealander cohort.

Terminologies

Before we explore the theoretical developments of assimilation, acculturation, ethnicity, integration, and sense of belonging among the new second-generation immigrant youths, we need to clarify some of the terminologies that are widely used by researchers in different disciplines, sometimes interchangeably or with varying meanings. For example, terms such as “acculturation,” “assimilation,” and “integration” tend to be used

interchangeably or differently by sociologists, social psychologists, anthropologists, migration studies scholars, and ethnic studies researchers.

This is partly because researchers in different disciplines, while sharing the same terms, tend to focus on intricately different processes in immigrants' experiences and the structures that influence them. For example, sociological studies explore factors like socioeconomic status, social networks, and discrimination in shaping integration outcomes (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Anthropological work tends to be concerned with cultural practices, traditions, and rituals as markers of identity and belonging within immigrant communities, exploring the role of these practices in constructing and transmitting cultural heritage across generations and national boundaries (Brettell, 2003). Sociopsychological research examines topics such as acculturation strategies, acculturative stress, and mental health outcomes among immigrant youth (Berry, 2006). Meanwhile, ethnic studies provide insights into the specific experiences of diverse immigrant groups, highlighting the role of racism, historical context, and power dynamics in shaping their journeys (Ogbu, 2003).

Two of the most frequently used terms regarding immigrants' integration experiences are "assimilation" and "acculturation," and they tend to be used differently and interchangeably depending on the context and discipline. For sociologists, "assimilation" is generally used to describe the process by which individuals or groups from a minority or immigrant culture gradually adopt the norms, values, and practices of the dominant or host society to the extent that they become indistinguishable from the majority culture. Therefore, it often implies a one-way process where individuals or groups become more like the dominant culture, potentially losing aspects of their original culture (e.g., Gordon, 1964).

In social psychology, on the other hand, the term "acculturation" is used more commonly than "assimilation," indicating the process by which individuals or groups encounter and interact with a new culture. It encompasses a broader range of cultural exchanges, including both host and original cultures (Berry, 1980). In this context, "acculturation" recognizes that individuals or groups can adopt elements of the host culture while maintaining aspects of their original culture (Berry, 1980). For Berry, "assimilation" is one of the four modes of acculturation strategies, in which the immigrant adopts the receiving culture and discards the heritage culture.

Another term used differently in different disciplines is "integration," which encompasses social, economic, and political inclusion, highlighting

the societal context within which individuals navigate belonging (Alba & Nee, 2003). From a sociological perspective, “integration” denotes the extent to which individuals or groups are incorporated into or actively participate in the host society’s economic, social, and political life while preserving their ethnic identity. Here, “integration” predominantly focuses on the social aspects of becoming part of the host society while acknowledging the importance of cultural preservation. In social psychology, “integration” has a narrower and more individual-focused meaning, referring to how an individual feels a sense of belonging and how well an individual can balance their cultural identity with their identity in a new social context, such as during acculturation or when navigating different social roles (Berry, 2001).

Several other examples of terms are popularly used without being clearly defined, e.g., adaptation and acculturation, and we use them following general practices among researchers in broader social science. Where possible, we will use them context-specifically, contingent upon the specific context or situation in which they are considered.

STUDIES ON ASSIMILATION/ACCULTURATION, INTEGRATION, ETHNICITY, AND BELONGING OF THE NEW SECOND GENERATION

As explained earlier, the emergence of the “new second generation” in the United States around the 2000s raised fascinating academic interest in their integration patterns and ethnicity development, particularly in the increasingly diverse and multicultural American society. This section reviews the major theoretical perspectives and models on the new second generation’s assimilation/acculturation and integration patterns, encompassing the classical and neo-assimilation theories, racial/ethnic disadvantage theory, segmented assimilation theory, Berry’s acculturation model, and pluralistic perspective. In doing so, we will discuss the challenges and gaps in the extant theories concerning the integration patterns and ethnicity development of the newer Korean New Zealander youth, including their prominent “re-ethnicization” phenomenon. In the end, we will discuss the pluralist perspective within neo-assimilation theories (“ethnicity retention” or “ethnic identification” model) and transnationalism for our theoretical framework, which will allow us to consider both structural and agential factors in the acculturation and integration experiences of the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth.

Classical Assimilation Theory

As one of the oldest and most influential theoretical frameworks in the field of migration studies, conventional assimilation theory was first developed in the early twentieth century by sociologists Robert Park and Ernest Burgess as a way to understand the process of immigrant integration into American society (Park & Burgess, 1969 [1921]). Known as “straight-line assimilation” or “linear” assimilation, the classical assimilation theory posits that immigrants would gradually assimilate into the host society as they live longer in the host society. The theory was later refined by another sociologist, Milton Gordon, who assumed that migrants and their descendants would adopt the language, values, and culture of the host society and eventually achieve socioeconomic status in the host society, identifying themselves with the host society in their assimilation process (Gordon, 1964). Based mainly on the experiences of white European immigrants of their time, proponents of this theory believed that immigrants would undertake a one-way process of assimilation.

This classic assimilation theory was the predominant perspective on immigrant integration throughout the twentieth century. However, after the 1965 Immigration Act (Hart–Celler Act), when new immigrants with divergent racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds started to arrive in the U.S., the classical assimilation theory was challenged by the new patterns of assimilation that the post-1965 immigrants exhibited. In addition, the Civil Rights Movement in the US (1950s–1960s) also ignited decades of backlash that highlighted racial disadvantage and the persistence of racial and ethnic identities (Brown & Bean, 2006). Thus, through the 1960s and 1970s, sociologists such as (Glazer & Moynihan, 1963, 1970) argued that the classical assimilation theory failed to consider the persistence of ethnic and racial identities among immigrant and minority groups. They proposed alternative models, such as “ethnic pluralism,” which emphasized the value of cultural diversity and the importance of preserving ethnic and racial identities.

This classical assimilation theory can be applied to this book’s first research question—how immigrant children, particularly newer-generation Korean New Zealanders, assimilate into the dominant language and culture when entering school in New Zealand (Chap. 4, “Becoming Kiwis”).

Assimilation Pressures in Early Schooling

One of the earliest and most formative sites of cultural adaptation for immigrant children is the school. As classical assimilation theory (Park & Burgess, 1969 [1921]; Gordon, 1964) assumed, when children enter educational institutions in the host society, they gradually adopt the dominant group's language, values, and behaviors through a linear and unidirectional process. For most 1.5- and second-generation Korean New Zealanders, this moment—often their first prolonged contact with the host society—marks a critical stage where assimilation is not only encouraged but often perceived as necessary for survival and social integration. Berry's (1997) acculturation model reinforces this understanding by identifying “assimilation” as one of the key strategies immigrants may adopt, particularly when institutional environments fail to support multiculturalism or heritage retention. In New Zealand schools—especially during the 1990s and early 2000s—language acquisition and cultural conformity were often rewarded, while ethnic distinctiveness could invite social exclusion or invisibility. Drawing from Bourdieu's (1977) notion of cultural capital, these schools privilege the linguistic and behavioral norms of the dominant Pākehā culture, marginalizing the home-based cultural resources of immigrant children. As such, early schooling often becomes a site of identity suppression, where Korean New Zealand children and youth feel pressure to “fit in” by distancing themselves from their ethnic background—a dynamic that sets the stage for later re-ethnicization processes.

The following sets of theories—Reactive Ethnicity, Neo-Assimilation Theories, Segmented Assimilation Theory, Berry's Acculturation Model, Pluralists/Multiculturalists Model, and Ethnic Options—are all related to the various acculturation issues of Chaps. 5, 6, and 7.

Racial/Ethnic Disadvantage Model (Reactive Ethnicity)

Until the 1960s, under the influence of the old “linear” model, people tended to assume that assimilation was a relatively easy process for most immigrant and minority groups. However, critics pointed out that structural factors, such as discrimination and inequality, make assimilation much harder. Against this backdrop, proponents of the newer “racial-ethnic disadvantage” model insisted that even if immigrants or members of minority groups learn the language and culture of the host society, successful assimilation and integration are not guaranteed. For example, many researchers emphasized the impact of structural factors

on racial and ethnic communities, shedding light on the dynamics of disadvantage and how communities react to these challenges (Wilson, 1987). They claimed that these structural barriers could stall true integration for many disadvantaged groups, arguing that when the newer generations perceive such a pessimistic prospect regarding their assimilation prospects, they would develop a firmer racial/ethnic consciousness, which is a “reactive” ethnicity (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rex, 1986; Rumbaut, 2008).

Thus, building a reactive ethnicity in the face of perceived hostility, discrimination, and exclusion is a mode of ethnic identity formation among some of the new second-generation immigrants (Portes, 1984; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut, 2005). For example, some Cuban and Mexican immigrants and their descendants in the United States tended to strengthen their ethnic identity and reconstitute ethnic culture when they experienced rejection from the dominant society while attempting to assimilate into the dominant culture and society (Portes & Bach, 1985). In this regard, reactive ethnicity is a defense mechanism that protects immigrants and their children from the harmful effects of discrimination and exclusion (Çelik, 2015; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut, 2005). Similar studies on disadvantaged groups in other host countries, such as Turkish youth in Germany, also report that racism and discrimination tend to raise ethnic identity among immigrant youths (Skrobanek, 2009).

However, this ethnic/racial disadvantage model has been critiqued for its over-emphasis on racial barriers without clear evidence of their impact on social mobility (Brown & Bean, 2006). Indeed, while racial discrimination undoubtedly exists, this model often neglects to account for other important factors, such as human capital (e.g., education, skills), social networks, and individual agency, which can also significantly influence social mobility and integration. Different subgroups within a larger racial or ethnic category (e.g., different socioeconomic statuses, educational backgrounds, or immigrant generations) may experience very different levels of disadvantage and mobility, which the ethnic/racial disadvantage model does not adequately capture. In addition, this model tends to underestimate the impact of structural changes in society, such as changes in immigration policies, economic opportunities, and educational systems that have created new pathways for social mobility for some minority groups. Regardless of such critiques of the ethnic/racial disadvantage model, its challenge against the assumptions of the classical assimilation

theory has been an important contribution to the study of immigrant ethnicity and integration.

In the context of the re-ethnicization phenomenon that we observed among the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth in their acculturation process in New Zealand, this ethnic/racial disadvantage model has some relevance. At a glance, the re-ethnicization—or “ethnic revival”—of the Korean New Zealander cohort could also be a reaction to the discrimination and racism they experience as a phenotypically visible Asian minority in European-dominated New Zealand. Indeed, many of the newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth report that they have faced racism and discrimination, though mostly subtle in form, from the dominant group in their host society. It is imaginable that such harmful and stressful encounters with racism and discrimination would influence their evolving identities. However, more careful observation reveals that the re-ethnicization of the Korean New Zealander cohort differs from the cases of the relatively disadvantaged groups of the new second generation in the United States, on which the reactive ethnicity model has focused. We will discuss this in detail in Chap. 5.

Neo-Assimilation Theories

As stated above, the conventional assimilation theory has faced various criticisms regarding its view of the linear process of assimilation since the mid-1960s, and it has undergone several modifications. Herbert Gans put forth one of the most notable critiques of the classical assimilation theory in the early 1980s. In his book *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (Hans, 1982), Gans argued that assimilation was not a linear process but rather a complex and multifaceted one that involved both the preservation of cultural traditions and the adoption of new cultural values. Other scholars have critiqued the classic assimilation model’s oversimplification of the experiences of immigrants and its ignorance of structural factors such as power and inequality in shaping the assimilation process (Bean & Lee, 2004; Cox, 1948; Hirschman et al., 1999; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rex, 1986).

In response to these critiques, many researchers have proposed alternative models of assimilation that consider the complex social and economic factors influencing the integration of immigrants into the host society. These “neo-assimilation” theorists emphasize the importance of understanding how immigrants and their descendants negotiate multiple

identities and cultural influences, and how they adapt to changing social and economic conditions over time. They also recognize that the context in which immigrants settle plays a critical role in shaping assimilation outcomes. For example, factors such as the presence of a supportive community, the availability of social services, and the level of discrimination and prejudice can significantly influence the assimilation experiences of different groups. Researchers have refined and expanded upon assimilation theory in recent years, considering factors such as globalization, transnationalism, and the intersection of race, class, and gender. Many of these neo-assimilationists optimistically predict that as racialized structures disappear in Western societies, non-European racialized groups will gain more equality, resulting in the latter's improved social and economic status (Alba & Nee, 1997, 2003).

One of the many benefits of the neo-assimilation theory is its claim that assimilation should be viewed as a multidimensional process, including economic and structural assimilation (e.g., education, employment, and housing) as well as cultural and identity dimensions. In this view, assimilation is a negotiation between the immigrant and the host society that involves a balance between adopting certain host culture elements and maintaining aspects of the original culture (*cf.* Alba & Nee, 2003; Brubaker, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Waters & Jiménez, 2005). In the context of the newer-generation Korean New Zealander cohort and their experiences, neo-assimilation theories offer helpful insights into their intriguing re-ethnicization and the complex and diverse acculturation and integration patterns.

Among the various offspring of the neo-assimilation theories, below, we discuss the three most important—and also most relevant to our research questions and the newer-generation Korean New Zealander cohort—theoretical perspectives: segmented assimilation theory, Berry's acculturation model, and cultural pluralism (or “ethnic option”).

Segmented Assimilation Theory

The post-1965 immigration policy in the United States brought an increasing number of immigrants from Asia and Africa. In addition, the economic changes in the United States in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, when the manufacturing sector declined and the service sector expanded due to ongoing globalization, worsened the lives of poor people. Unlike the previous generation of immigrants, the new immigrants did not have

access to manufacturing jobs, which used to be a means to grow into the middle class. Impoverished new immigrants and local African Americans, thus, did not follow the conventional prediction of assimilation (Zhou & Bankston, 2016). Meanwhile, migration from Latin America surged despite, rather than because of, the new policy (Massey & Pren, 2012). Prior to 1965, there were no numerical limits on immigration from the Western Hemisphere, but the 1965 Act curbed immigration from the region to 120,000 annually. The change led many US employers, who were accustomed to flexible sources of labor, to view undocumented migration as their only source of cheap labor, which meant an increase in illegal immigrants from Latin America. In addition, development and globalization in both sending and receiving countries created vastly different contexts of exit and reception for newcomers and their children, leading to the greater racial and socioeconomic complexity of the United States.

Although some scholars argue that structural changes in US society have created smoother and more diverse paths to assimilation for contemporary immigrants than their counterparts at the turn of the twentieth century (Alba, 2016; Perlmann, 2005), others suggest that structural barriers have delayed the incorporation process of certain immigrant groups (Bean et al., 2015). Still, others argue that many of the structural barriers—persistent discrimination, harsh immigration policies, and labor exploitation—translate into long-term disadvantages, locking some groups into a permanent underclass.

Reflecting the changed social, economic, and political environment, which deepened the stratification of

US society and its impacts on the new second-generation immigrants in the United States, (Portes & Zhou, 1993) proposed the new “segmented assimilation” model. Coming from a critical review of both the classical assimilation model and the racial/ethnic disadvantage model, this segmented assimilation theory emphasizes the interaction between the contexts of exit and reception in affecting divergent rather than convergent outcomes of socioeconomic integration (Lee & Zhou, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 2009).

The context of exit pertains to a set of individual and group characteristics, such as social class status already attained by immigrants in their homelands, tangible resources (money, education, language proficiency, and job skills) brought with them to the new country, and intangible resources (cultural knowledge, values, and

practices, as well as social ties). The context of reception includes a set of contextual factors in the host society, including group position in the host society's social stratification, public attitudes and government policies toward the group, and the strength of the pre-existing ethnic community. Identifying such structural factors is important, particularly for second-generation immigrants, because they are in the very early stage of assimilation, and for them, structural barriers can cause severe disturbance or obstruct their smooth assimilation from the beginning (Rumbaut, 2005).

By incorporating aspects of the classical assimilation model and the racial/ethnic disadvantage model, the segmented assimilation thesis imagines three possible assimilation outcomes: (1) positive assimilation, in which the new second-generation immigrants achieve both cultural and socioeconomic achievement as in the classical assimilation model; (2) downward assimilation, in which they assimilate to the lower-class people of the host society; and (3) selective assimilation, in which the new second generation and their parents strategically maintain certain aspects of their traditional values to achieve upward mobility and incorporation within the mainstream society.

As seen above, considering both perspectives of the classical form of assimilation and the racial/ethnic disadvantage model together is a major contribution of the segmented assimilation thesis to our understanding of the new second generation. The segmented assimilation model allows us to consider the divergent assimilation results of the new second generation and provides a broader perspective in which structural factors of both exit and reception are considered contextually.

The three possible outcomes of immigrant assimilation reviewed above have some relevance to the re-ethnicization phenomenon we observed among the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth in New Zealand. For example, there are a few cases that look similar to the "linear" assimilation, even though they are only a small minority among the cohort. The "selective assimilation" model of the segmented assimilation theory is highly relevant to the re-ethnicization of our cohort, in which they tend to maintain certain aspects of their ethnic culture while accepting certain aspects of the mainstream culture. However, the model's instrumental emphasis may not fit the re-ethnicization phenomenon too well.

Berry's Acculturation Model

The acculturation theory gained popularity in the 1980s and was significantly influenced by (Berry, 1997, 1980). Although Berry's contributions helped shape the contemporary understanding of acculturation, the concept itself predates him. Sociologist Robert E. Park discussed the acculturation process in the context of immigrant communities in the United States, emphasizing how different ethnic groups adapt to each other and to the dominant culture (Park, 1928). Later, in the mid-twentieth century, the term "acculturation" gained prominence and was refined further by various researchers. Unlike the conventional assimilation theory's linear assimilation perspective, acculturation theory posits that when individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds come into contact with each other, both parties may experience changes in their attitudes, values, behaviors, and identities. Acculturation theory emphasizes the importance of cultural identity and intercultural competence in the acculturation process, and it recognizes that there are different ways of acculturating.

Focusing on the psychological and cultural changes that occur when individuals from one culture come into contact with another, Berry developed the concept of "acculturation strategies" to understand how immigrants adapt to the host society (Berry, 1980). By doing so, Berry suggests that immigrants can maintain their cultural identity while still integrating into the mainstream culture. Later, his "fourfold model" of acculturation strategies became influential in the field: assimilation (where individuals adopt the values and practices of the dominant culture); separation (where individuals maintain their own culture and reject the dominant culture); integration (where individuals adopt some aspects of the dominant culture while maintaining their own culture); and marginalization (where individuals do not adopt any cultural identity and feel disconnected from both cultures) (Berry, 1997). For the proponents of this theory, integration is seen as the most desirable outcome, where immigrants can maintain their cultural identity while also adopting the values and behaviors of the dominant culture.

Berry's bidimensional model and the fourfold model of acculturation strategies, which distinguish between cultural maintenance and cultural adoption, provide insights into how the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth navigate their dual cultural identities. Our observation suggests that many members of the Korean New Zealander cohort tend to

experience a strengthening of their ethnicity as they grow up, which may indicate a preference for cultural maintenance over assimilation.

Pluralists/Multiculturalists Model and Ethnic Options

As seen above, proponents of neo-assimilation theories, including segmented assimilationists and acculturation theory, suggest that immigrants and their descendants may choose to maintain and celebrate elements of their original culture while still participating in and contributing to the host society. Another trend in neo-assimilation theories is acknowledging the importance of cultural pluralism and preserving ethnic and cultural identities. Called “cultural pluralists” (or “multiculturalists”), proponents of such a perspective perceive that American society is composed of a fluid and heterogeneous collection of ethnic and racial minority groups and the dominant majority group of European Americans (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Handlin, 1973). This multiculturalist perspective offers an alternative way of viewing the host society, treating members of ethnic minority groups as a part of the American population rather than as foreigners or outsiders and presenting ethnic or immigrant cultures as integral segments of American society (Hazard & Stent, 1973).

The background of such pluralism was the observation that the lives of Blacks did not improve as expected, regardless of the improvements in legal treatment in the post-1960s era. In addition, it was becoming increasingly clear that many white European groups continued to manifest aspects of ethnic distinctiveness despite their substantial structural incorporation (Alba, 1990; Gans, 1979; Waters, 1990). Both trends contributed to the development of an ethnic pluralist perspective of incorporation, predicated on the idea that cultural incorporation was neither inevitable nor necessary for structural incorporation (Greeley, 1974).

Directly rejecting the core logic of the classical assimilationists, cultural pluralists emphasize the agency of immigrants and argue that immigrants actively shape their own lives rather than exist passively as beneficiaries or victims of “ineluctable modernizing and Americanizing forces” (Conzen, 1991, p. 10). Thus, the multiculturalist view allows ethnicity as an agency of immigrants. From a social constructionist perspective, meanings of ethnicity are shaped through interactions with others and are actively negotiated, challenged, and resisted in relation to multiple salient identities such as gender and nationality. Similarly, Gans (1979) and Waters (1994) argue

that ethnicity is more voluntary in nature, with individuals exercising their “ethnic options” by personalizing ethnic attachments to their own needs.

Thus, for multiculturalists, ethnicity can be an asset rather than a liability. This idea provides a means of understanding how ethnicity may be utilized as a distinct form of social capital (including such cultural endowments as obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms) that contribute to adaptation (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Handlin, 1973). They believe that societies that value cultural pluralism expect and believe in the integration of members rather than anticipating their assimilation (Hazard & Stent, 1973). In a pluralist society, minority groups not only maintain their particular cultural identities but also the wider society accepts the values and practices of the minorities as far as they are consistent with the laws and values of the wider society. For such a society, pluralism is a reality and a goal to pursue (Conzen, 1991).

While this pluralist/multiculturalist model offers important insights into the preservation of ethnic identity and cultural diversity, critics argue that this perspective underestimates the structural constraints, such as racism, discrimination, and socioeconomic conditions, that may limit these choices for many ethnic minorities (*cf.* Waters, 1990). They also suggest that the pluralist model may implicitly assume a level playing field where all cultural identities are equally valued and respected, which is not necessarily true. Others argue that by emphasizing cultural pluralism and the preservation of distinct ethnic identities, the multiculturalist model may unintentionally contribute to social segregation (Gitlin, 1995). The model has also been criticized for potentially promoting cultural essentialism, where ethnic identities are seen as fixed and unchanging rather than fluid and dynamic, ignoring the internal diversity and complexity within those groups (Phillips, 2007).

Nevertheless, this “ethnic options thesis” provides an insight into the re-ethnicization phenomenon of the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth. In the face of subtle (or vivid) racism, members of the cohort, instead of assimilating to the dominant mainstream culture, opt for “Korean” identification and seek the comfort and coziness of their co-ethnic social networks and heritage culture. This is supported by their social capital (ethnic Korean community, schools, and churches) and their culturally and economically powerful ethnic homeland. In addition, their host society, New Zealand, has become more tolerant toward diversity and multiculturalism in the last few decades. In this regard, the case of the “re-ethnicized” newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth is based on their exerting their agency and the positive changes in the reception of their host society.

Migrant Belonging and Affective Citizenship

As the experiences of second-generation migrants increasingly show, acculturation is not merely a matter of structural integration into education, employment, or civic institutions. Rather, it also involves deep questions of emotional attachment, symbolic recognition, and narrative inclusion—dimensions captured in the growing literature on affective belonging and emotional citizenship. These concepts challenge the assumption that legal status or behavioral assimilation alone ensure a sense of national identification or psychological rootedness.

Yuval-Davis (2011) draws an important distinction between practical integration and affective belonging. While practical integration refers to participation in societal structures, affective belonging concerns the emotional and symbolic dimensions of inclusion—whether one feels accepted as “one of us” and finds resonance in the dominant narratives, symbols, and histories of the nation-state. This distinction is crucial for understanding the complex and sometimes ambivalent relationships that migrants and their children have with their host countries.

Building on this, Bloemraad (2006) introduces the notion of emotional citizenship, highlighting that formal inclusion through citizenship or residency does not necessarily generate a strong emotional tie to the nation. She shows how institutional settings, public narratives, and social recognition shape whether immigrants come to feel a genuine sense of belonging. For racialized and visible minorities, such as Korean New Zealanders, affective citizenship can remain partial or fragile, even when structural integration appears successful.

Fortier (2020) adds a further layer by emphasizing that belonging is not just legal or cognitive but also embodied, remembered, and spatial. Through everyday practices, cultural rituals, and memories, migrants may develop attachments to multiple places and communities, often spanning national borders. These affective ties can be shaped by family histories, language, diasporic networks, and media consumption, resulting in forms of belonging that are hybrid, multisited, or even conflicting.

In this framework, national history itself becomes an emotionally charged site of belonging or alienation. The degree to which migrants and their children identify with or feel invested in the history, heroes, and collective memory of the host nation can strongly influence their emotional inclusion. Affective dissonance may arise when individuals feel a stronger emotional pull toward ancestral or ethnic histories than those

taught or celebrated in their country of residence. Such emotional tensions—between the expectations of national loyalty and the reality of transnational attachments—underscore the limits of assimilationist assumptions about identity formation.

Berry's (1997) acculturation model helps conceptualize these dynamics by distinguishing between different psychological strategies—assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Yet, even in cases where individuals exhibit “integration” in Berry's terms, this may not entail a deep emotional connection to the host nation. What these theoretical perspectives collectively emphasize is that belonging is not merely about what one does or achieves in society, but about how one feels and whether one is recognized and reflected in the cultural and symbolic landscape of the nation.

These insights provide a crucial lens for interpreting the patterns of cultural identification, ambivalence, and hybrid belonging among Korean New Zealander youth. In particular, they lay the groundwork for Chap. 7, which examines how these affective dimensions—often invisible in conventional models of integration—shape migrants' evolving senses of identity, loyalty, and home.

CHALLENGES, GAPS, AND THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE KOREAN NEW ZEALANDERS' ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCES

In the above section, tracing the evolution of classical assimilation theory to neo-assimilation theories, we reviewed the reactive ethnicity model, segmented assimilation, acculturation model, and pluralist perspective (or “ethnic option” model). While each theoretical perspective offers some helpful insights for understanding acculturation, ethnicity, and integration patterns revealed in the lived experiences of the newer-generation Korean New Zealander cohort, some challenges and gaps still remain.

One challenge is that the existing theoretical perspectives do not fully capture the diversity of experiences of newer-generation immigrant populations, overlooking the nuanced realities of different ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, while providing some insights into the assimilation/acculturation experiences of some members of the Korean New Zealander cohort, the “straight-line” assimilation and reactive ethnicity models cannot explain the observed re-ethnicization

phenomenon within the cohort. For instance, while the reactive ethnicity model seems to explain the “re-ethnicization” phenomenon of the Korean New Zealander cohort to a certain degree, it is attributed mainly to negative forces that strengthen the ethnic identities of challenged groups. As stated earlier, the Korean New Zealander cohort is primarily from a middle-class background due to New Zealand’s new immigration policy implemented at the end of the 1980s. The re-ethnicization of this cohort is based on a particular ethnic pride, which stems from the economic and cultural rise of their ethnic homeland, particularly the *Hallyu* (“Korean Wave”) phenomenon. In this regard, the reactive ethnicity model reveals its limitations in exploring the re-ethnicization of groups such as the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth.

Another challenge is related to the relative neglect of structural forces, such as government policies, social hierarchies, and socioeconomic inequalities, in shaping immigrant children’s acculturation experiences, while overly emphasizing individual agency in some theoretical frameworks (Zhou, 2015). In the context of the new second-generation immigrant children, the acculturation model and pluralistic perspective (“ethnic option”) reveal such limitations. For example, while Berry’s fourfold acculturation strategies can neatly classify the diverse acculturation cases of Korean New Zealander youth, it does not adequately consider the complex sociopolitical processes involved in the actual acculturation experiences of the cohort. There are cases in which two different acculturation strategies seem to be combined. In addition, in some cases, their strategies change relatively quickly, e.g., from “assimilation” to “integration,” which the acculturation model does not explain.

Another challenge is the relative weakness of the contextual perspective in some theoretical models. For example, some theories do not consider contextual factors such as new telecommunication technologies and transnational connectivity regarding the acculturation and integration experiences of newer-generation immigrants. However, as we will discuss soon, these are particularly relevant to our Korean New Zealander cohort’s lived experiences of acculturation in New Zealand during the 1990s–2010s.

Considering these challenges, we need to adopt a more contextualized assimilation/acculturation perspective through which we can consider both structural and agential factors in a more balanced manner. For

a more nuanced approach to studying the assimilation/acculturation and integration experiences of the Korean New Zealander cohort, we will consider the complex social, economic, cultural, political, technological, and transnational factors that shape their acculturation and integration into their host society.

Therefore, we will build our theoretical framework based on various insights from the neo-assimilation theories, including segmented assimilation (particularly “selective” assimilation among the three possible outcomes), the pluralist perspective (“ethnic options”), and transnationalism theory. Even though transnationalism is usually not considered a part of assimilation/acculturation theories, it is widely accepted that issues like transnational connectivity and hybrid identities have become increasingly relevant to the acculturation experiences of the new second generation (Glick Schiller, 1992, 1997; Ong, 1999).

Below, we will discuss the consideration of structural and agential factors in the social sciences and transnationalism as our theoretical framework for exploring the lived experiences of the newer generation of Korean New Zealand youth.

Structural and Agential Factors

As stated above, for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex and diverse assimilation/acculturation and integration experiences of the Korean New Zealander cohort, we will consider both structural and agential factors. Considering both structural and agential factors is a well-established tradition in social science. Known as the “dualism” of structure and agency, this concept has been developed by social scientists such as Bourdieu (1977), Giddens (1984), Alexander (1982–1983), and Sewell (1992).

In the context of the experiences of the newer-generation Korean New Zealand cohort, then, what structural factors should we consider? First, they include the reception of the dominant group that the Korean New Zealander cohort experiences in their acculturation process. We also need to heed the changes in the host society in recent decades, which conventional assimilation theory did not consider much. As Crul (2018) argues, the extant assimilation theory is inadequate as it tends to neglect the changes in the dominant society (e.g., which becomes a minority in many large cities of Western immigration countries). In addition, as more Western democracies have adopted multicultural policies in the last

few decades, this has impacted the identity negotiation of the new second generation (Zhou & Bankston, 1994). This is particularly relevant to New Zealand, which has become much more diverse in its ethnic/racial composition and visibly more multicultural.

We must look at some agential and subjective factors, such as the Korean New Zealander cohort's growing sense of ethnic pride, both as "Kiwis" and "Koreans." This is related to the economic and cultural rise of their ethnic homeland, particularly with the global *Hallyu* boom, which not only contributed to the growth of ethnic pride among the Korean New Zealander cohort but also brought some positive changes in the reception of the host society toward Koreans. Undoubtedly, such a transnational force impacts the cohort's acculturation process, boosting the agential power that helps them opt for their ethnicity, including the unique "Korean Kiwi" identity. Thus, we need to heed the transnational connections prevalent among the new second generation in the twenty-first century.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism, developed by researchers such as Glick Schiller (1997), Glick Schiller et al. (1992) and Ong (1999), focuses on the social and cultural connections maintained by migrants with their home countries. Highlighting how immigrants maintain ties with their home country while also adapting to the culture and society of their host country, the transnational framework challenges traditional notions of migration and integration, which assume that individuals leave their home countries and fully integrate into their new host societies. Instead, transnationalism empowers migrants and acknowledges their ability to shape their experiences. Transnationalism's emphasis on individual agency and the active construction of transnational lives offers a valuable counterpoint to structurally deterministic accounts of migration (Glick Schiller, 1997).

In doing so, the theory of transnationalism offers valuable frameworks for understanding the acculturation experiences of newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth. As a part of the "new second generation," the newer generation of Korean New Zealanders are different from the previous generations regarding their stronger connection to their ethnic homeland and tradition (*cf.* Levitt & Waters, 2002). This transnational connectivity may help them to maintain stronger ties to their home countries, thanks to the advancements in communication technology,

which allow them to remain connected to their culture of origin (Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2022).

In particular, the popular cultural flow from their homeland, such as the *Hallyu*, is especially important for the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth, whose use of digital platforms contributes to their sense of shared cultural identity and unity among other Korean diasporic youth (Oh, 2020). Social media also facilitates connections between Korean youth across national borders, fostering transnational communities and influencing identity formation (Lee, 2018). Thus, analyzing the emergence and role of transnational Korean communities in New Zealand can offer insights into how these young people build co-ethnic solidarity, share resources, and navigate their cultural identities within a broader network.

By utilizing these theoretical frameworks, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth and shed light on their acculturation patterns, ethnicity, sense of belonging, and integration into mainstream society, which deviate from classical assimilation patterns. In particular, this framework will guide us in exploring the process and causes of their re-ethnicization, their sense of belonging between their Korean ethnicity and New Zealand nationality, and their integration into mainstream society. It will also help with our analysis and interpretation of the in-depth interview data to provide insights into the unique experiences of this cohort and contribute to the existing literature on assimilation, acculturation, ethnicity, and identity among immigrant youth in multicultural societies.

Integration Without Sense of Belonging

The issue of the newer generation of immigrant youths, including Korean New Zealanders, is dealt with in this book. These youths are seemingly integrated but lack a strong sense of belonging, which is the topic of the last Chap. 7. Numerous scholars and theoretical perspectives have been working on this issue. In fact, a growing body of literature has challenged the assumption that structural integration—through education, employment, and citizenship—automatically leads to a deep sense of national belonging. Yuval-Davis (2011) offers a critical distinction between practical integration and affective belonging, emphasizing that while immigrants may participate fully in societal structures, they may still lack emotional and symbolic inclusion within the national community. This

framework is particularly relevant in multicultural democracies like New Zealand, where legal inclusion does not always equate to cultural recognition.

Kymlicka's (1995) theory of multicultural citizenship similarly critiques surface-level multiculturalism, arguing that liberal democracies must go beyond mere tolerance and actively recognize the unique identities and histories of minority groups to foster genuine belonging. However, many visible minorities continue to experience what Tuan (1998) and Lee and Kye (2016) describe as the "perpetual foreigner" stereotype, whereby Asian-descended individuals are perceived as outsiders regardless of their fluency, education, or generational depth. These experiences of symbolic exclusion often lead to a disjuncture between identification and recognition. At the same time, theories of transnationalism and simultaneity (Levitt & Schiller, 2004; Vertovec, 2009) highlight how migrants and their descendants maintain emotional and cultural ties to their heritage homelands, further complicating national affiliation and reinforcing hybrid or nonexclusive senses of belonging.

This chapter critically examines key theories on assimilation, acculturation, integration, and ethnicity to build a comprehensive framework for understanding the diverse identity trajectories of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. Drawing on classical and neo-assimilation theories, Berry's acculturation model, the reactive ethnicity perspective, cultural pluralism, and transnationalism, we explore how structural and agential factors intersect in shaping acculturation outcomes. By highlighting both the limitations and contributions of existing models, this chapter establishes a nuanced theoretical lens through which we can interpret the lived experiences of the Korean New Zealander cohort. These conceptual insights will inform the empirical analysis of identity formation, re-ethnicization, and belonging presented in the chapters that follow.

The next chapter outlines the methodological approach used in this study, including participant recruitment, interview design, and data analysis. It introduces the thirty Korean New Zealander youth whose narratives form the foundation of the book's empirical chapters and explains how their voices were collected and interpreted through the lens of the theoretical framework established here.

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CHAPTER 3

Participants, Interviews, and Data Analysis

Abstract This chapter outlines the research methodology used to explore the lived experiences of newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth, focusing on ethnic relations, identity negotiation, re-ethnicization, and integration. Using semi-structured interviews, we recruited 30 1.5- and second-generation participants who grew up in New Zealand between the early 1990s and 2020s. Ten were born in New Zealand, while 20 migrated during early childhood. Interviews, conducted in 2019–2020 both online and in person, captured rich personal narratives shaped by the COVID-19 context. Data were analyzed through the interdisciplinary framework developed in the previous chapter, identifying diverse acculturation patterns. The chapter also reflects on researcher positionality and ethical practices, laying the foundation for subsequent empirical analysis.

Keywords Korean New Zealanders · 1.5- and second-generation · Identity negotiation · Acculturation pathways · Qualitative interviews · Sense of belonging · Multicultural New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

As explained in the previous chapters, we aim to explore the cohort's journey of acculturation, ethnic identity development, integration, and sense of belonging in New Zealand through their lived experiences of growing up in New Zealand. More specifically, we pursue the following questions: (1) How do members of the Korean New Zealander cohort navigate the cultural landscape of the host society, negotiating between their Korean ethnic identity and New Zealand national identity? (2) How and why do many of them experience strengthened ethnicity ("re-ethnicization") in their adolescence and young adulthood? (3) What other patterns of acculturation and integration strategies are shown (other than re-ethnicization) among the members of the cohort? and (4) What sense of belonging do they develop, and what are its implications for the evolving multiculturalism of New Zealand and also their ethnic homeland?

The acculturation and integration pathways and patterns of the newer-generation Asian/Korean New Zealander youth have been rarely explored areas of study, even though New Zealand has seen a rapidly growing number of newer-generation Asian immigrant youth since the early 1990s. There is a significant gap in our understanding of this critical population's acculturation strategies and integration patterns. In particular, we do not have a clear understanding of the kinds of experiences they have had while growing up in New Zealand as a phenotypically distinguishable ethnic minority with a migration background.

The popularly perceived notion of New Zealand as a highly multicultural and democratic society, and its reputation as a "paradise" for children and adolescents, might be true for many. Nevertheless, we often hear different stories from young people and their parents. It is these contrasting narratives that served as the starting point of this study, prompting us to closely examine the experiences of the 1.5- and second-generation Korean New Zealander adolescents and youths, especially in terms of their experiences in inter-racial/ethnic relationships and their identity development. To better understand these experiences, we must first discuss how we approached our research. Thus, this chapter outlines our research design, methods, and procedures employed in the study.

TARGET POPULATION

Our main target is the newer generation of Korean New Zealanders, who grew up in New Zealand between the early 1990s and early 2020s. They are an important part of the Korean New Zealander population, which has grown rapidly since the 1990s alongside other Asian New Zealander communities, following the country's new immigration policy (Bedford & Ho, 2008; Ho, 2015). In the 1986 Census, the country's population comprised a European majority (85.1%) with much smaller numbers of Māori (12.4%), Pacific Islanders (4%), and Asians (1.7%). Although Europeans were still the largest group (70.2%) in the most recent census of 2023, the non-European population grew visibly: Māori (17.8%), Pacific peoples (8.9%), and Asians (17.3%). Particularly remarkable was the drastic growth of the Asian population, which grew almost thirteen-fold between 1986 and 2018 (Statistics New Zealand, 2020), and experienced further growth of nearly 22% between 2018 and 2023. The number of Korean immigrants in New Zealand also grew sharply in the same period of 1986–2018, from merely 441 to 35,664—a growth of more than 80 times—making them the fourth-largest Asian group after the Chinese, Indians, and Filipinos (Statistics New Zealand, 2019).

For our research, we adopted a qualitative method based on semi-structured interviews with ethnic Korean adolescents and youth (aged 18 and above) who have first-hand experiences of racial and ethnic relations in New Zealand. We chose those who had attended at least a few years of primary school in New Zealand. This is because schools are the primary venues where Korean New Zealander children, raised by their first-generation parents, encounter the mainstream culture of New Zealand. Such a purposive sampling strategy (Marshall, 1996) was designed to fulfill the scope and focus of the research, which was to gather rich and contextualized data on the lived experiences of the newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth. Our selection criteria included the following: they should be either 1.5- or second-generation Korean New Zealander youth (over 18 years of age), should have attended primary schools in New Zealand, and should currently reside in New Zealand.

RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

In recruiting our interview participants, we relied on both conventional mediums—community newspaper advertisements—and online media channels—Facebook and Korean social media such as Kakao Talk. Many researchers have found that recruitment via social media can be a useful method to engage potential participants who are hard to reach (Palys & Atchison, 2012; Seltzer et al., 2014; Sikkens et al., 2017). These methods helped recruit diverse participants, including those who are difficult to reach beyond the geographical and network boundaries of the researchers. We found more than 40 potentially eligible participants within a two-day advertisement period.

After each potential participant was successfully screened for eligibility, we focused on choosing participants from diverse settlement periods while finding balanced generation and gender ratios. The reason for focusing on diverse settlement years was our interest in their diverse acculturation experiences based on different settlement periods and their impacts on their acculturation pathways and ethnic identity development. Reflecting the history of Korean migration to New Zealand, most settled in New Zealand between the early 1990s and the late 2000s.

Ultimately, we selected 30 participants: 20 1.5-generation and 10 second-generation Korean New Zealander youth. Among the 30 interviewees, 27 were recruited through social media, and the other 3 were individuals whom we had met during our field trip to Christchurch in 2019. After providing the participation information sheet, we contacted each participant to confirm their agreement to participate in this study. Once they agreed to participate, we negotiated and scheduled a date and place for an in-depth individual interview session. We offered standard vouchers to those who participated in the interviews, which are accepted in many major shopping malls in New Zealand.

The age of interview participants ranged between 17 and 45. Most 1.5-generation participants were in their twenties or early thirties, while most second-generation participants were in their early to mid-twenties. In terms of gender, there were 15 females and 15 males, among whom were 10 1.5-generation and 5 second-generation participants, respectively. The settlement year of interview participants ranged between the mid-1980s and the late 2000s. The earliest settler among all participants was a 1.5-generation male in his mid-forties who migrated to New Zealand at the age of 10 in 1985. The latest settler was a 1.5-generation

Table 3.1 List of participants (pseudonyms)

<i>Case no.</i>	<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Generation</i>	<i>School year or age at arrival</i>	<i>Age at interview</i>
1	Reed	Male	2	2-year-old	25
2	Herman	Male	1.5	Year 6	28
3	Hawthorn	Male	1.5	Year 6	35
4	Canyon	Male	1.5	Year 5	28
5	River	Male	1.5	Year 5	45
6	Bay	Male	2	1-year-old	17
7	Hazel	Female	1.5	Year 5	32
8	Willow	Female	1.5	Year 6	28
9	Lily	Female	1.5	Year 4	31
10	Fern	Female	1.5	Year 4	32
11	Sherlie	Female	2	3-year-old	23
12	Cedar	Male	1.5	Year 4	32
13	Ash	Male	1.5	Year 1	26
14	Meadow	Female	2	3-year-old	19
15	Daisy	Female	1.5	Year 4	32
16	Sage	Female	1.5	Year 1	24
17	Oak	Male	2	3-year-old	25
18	Jo	Male	1.5	Year 5	28
19	Shea	Female	2	0-year-old	20
20	Spruce	Male	2	0-year-old	17
21	Stone	Male	2	4-year-old	23
22	Suzy	Female	2	0-year-old	23
23	Flora	Female	1.5	Year 5	30
24	Petal	Female	2	3-year-old	25
25	Elm	Male	1.5	Year 2	27
26	Ivy	Female	1.5	Year 3	22
27	Aspen	Male	1.5	Year 4	34
28	Pine	Male	1.5	Year 13	20
29	Rose	Female	1.5	0-year-old, Year 7	22
30	Olive	Female	1.5	Year 5	28

Source Author

male in his early twenties who migrated at the age of 8 in 2009. Five out of 10 second-generation participants migrated to this country at an early age, before the age of 5, while the others were born in New Zealand. The former's settlement ranged between 1995 and 2002, and the latter were born between 1998 and 2003. Most of the participants had lived in New Zealand for between 10 and 25 years. Only one participant, who settled in

the mid-1980s, had lived in New Zealand for more than 30 years. Finally, reflecting the generally high concentration of the Korean New Zealand population in the greater Auckland region (slightly over 70% in the 2018 census), 24 participants were living in the greater Auckland region, 3 in Christchurch, 2 in Dunedin, and 1 in Hamilton.

Table 3.1 shows the research participants' pseudonyms, birth year, year of migration, years at primary school in New Zealand, age at the time of the interview, generation, and occupation.

INTERVIEWS

We conducted the interviews in the first half of 2020 amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Although all the interviews were initially planned to be held in person, most of them had to be conducted online in March and April, when the entire country was locked down. In May and June, however, a limited number of interviews (five cases) were carried out in person at the office of one of the three researchers when such contacts and meetings were allowed.

The participants were given the choice of having the interview either in Korean or English. Our initial assumption was that many of them, particularly, the second-generation Korean New Zealanders, would choose English over Korean. To our surprise, however, most interviewees chose Korean (while using English expressions sporadically during their interviews). Only three interviews—two second-generation participants and one 1.5-generation participant—chose English. The researchers were impressed with the Korean language capacity of the newer generation of Korean New Zealander participants.

The interviews were conducted with a semi-structured interview guide to ensure consistency in the areas of questions given to each interviewee and to maintain the pace throughout the entire interview procedure (Kvale, 1996; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). In addition, we took a life-history approach to gain a holistic perspective on their acculturation pathways and identity negotiations (Haglund, 2004).

In these interviews, the participants were asked to talk about: their family's socioeconomic background in Korea; the reasons and process for their immigration to New Zealand; their experiences of school life in New Zealand; their experience of the multiracial and multicultural environment of school and community; exposure to cultural shocks and clashes; experiences of racism and discrimination; their relationships with co-ethnic friends, peers, and adults in the ethnic Korean community in

New Zealand; their sense of belonging to their adopted homeland of New Zealand; and transnational ties and connectivity with their ethnic homeland. In open-ended conversations, our participants also shared their lived experiences of growing up in New Zealand as “Korean Kiwis” and their perceptions of the changing reception through time.

As the interviews were conducted by three members of the research team, the sequence of the questions was predetermined, though the actual sequence depended on the interviewee’s responses and how the interviews unfolded. Some interviewees continued their response to one simple question, such as “How did your family move to New Zealand?” and simultaneously moved to another area of questioning, such as their experiences at school while for some interviewees, such a question could only generate one single answer: “Oh, it was my parents’ decision.” We had to go back and forth through the sequence of questions depending on the way the interviewee responded. However, we ensured that a set of topics was covered by every interview participant.

To the pleasure of the researchers, the interviewees were very enthusiastic and eager to share their stories. Many of them confessed that they seldom had such opportunities to talk about their experiences of growing up in New Zealand (and sharing them with others), and some expressed their gratitude to the researchers for giving them such opportunities. Often, the interviews went over two hours, even though they were designed to be about 90 minutes in length. The enthusiasm of the interviewees revealed the affective and emotional side of their lives in New Zealand as 1.5- and second-generation Korean New Zealanders. Such enthusiasm gave the researchers almost a sense of moral responsibility to let their voices be heard in the broader society.

Although there are some skepticisms about traditional interview methods that might not fully capture the complexities and nuances of subjective experiences, particularly in terms of emotion, identity formation, and belonging (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Seidman, 2013), we believe our participants expressed their opinions on their identity issues and sense of belonging rather well. In any regard, we collected these rich and highly valuable narratives through the interviews, and they help us to grasp the deeper meanings of their identities and nuanced insights into the participants’ lived experiences, cultural practices, negotiation between ethnic and national identities, sense of belonging, and integration into the host society. We hope this book will convey the experiences of young Korean New Zealanders as vividly as possible.

DATA ANALYSIS

As explained, our primary data consist of personal narratives collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 newer-generation ethnic Korean New Zealanders in 2020. These rich personal narratives from the newer generation of Korean New Zealanders are valuable resources that reveal their acculturation journeys in New Zealand as ethnic Koreans and their sense of belonging. These interview data, together with other archival resources such as media reports and other research on acculturation and identity issues of the new second-generation Asians in other countries, constitute the primary data for this research.

Our interpretations and findings were informed by the theoretical framework developed in Chap. 2 and were triangulated with other data sources, such as observations and field notes. Considering the character of the research questions we are dealing with in this book, we adopt interdisciplinary methods in tackling the questions of the acculturation pathways and identity negotiations of the cohort and in analyzing and interpreting these data. In addition, we embrace a broader holistic approach to explore other factors beyond the exit, reception, and other structural and psychological factors that contribute to the cohort's rather peculiar acculturation pathways and identity development. This includes the forces of *Hallyu* ("Korean Wave") that not only provided a source of pride to this cohort but also brought positive changes in the host society's reception. In addition, the cohort's active use of digital communication technology helped them connect better with each other, which resulted in the growth of ethnic capital.

Our data analysis involved an integrative process of coding and categorizing the data into themes and patterns. We used a combination of inductive and deductive approaches to identify and analyze the themes and patterns in the data.

To ensure the credibility and rigor of our study, we followed ethical guidelines, obtained informed consent from the participants, and ensured anonymity and confidentiality. We also conducted member-checking to verify the accuracy and authenticity of our interpretations and findings.

Overall, our methodology allowed us to gain a deep and nuanced understanding of the acculturation experiences of the Korean New Zealanders in our study. Our approach was sensitive to the complexities of the participants' experiences and ensured that their voices were represented in our analysis and findings.

LIMITATIONS

Regardless of our careful approach in methodology, like most research, there are some limitations to this study. We know that long-term studies are crucial for understanding the dynamic nature of acculturation processes and how identities evolve (Portes & Zhou, 1993). More longitudinal research is needed to track the trajectories of newer-generation immigrants and the factors influencing their long-term integration and sense of belonging in host societies. We plan to conduct such research in the future.

In addition, studies of the members of the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youths may not allow us to understand everything about their challenges and problems, as they are in the stage where full assimilation may not have been completed (cf. Brown & Bean, 2006). Nevertheless, we believe that our study can still be helpful for policymakers to address some of their issues.

As the focus of this study is Korean New Zealander youths, whose socioeconomic status, ethnic capital, and transnational connectivity might differ from some of the other ethnic groups in New Zealand, some may question whether this can be applicable to other groups. We recognize that achieving integration in the inclusion dimension, in relation to a sense of belonging to their ethnic community and/or to New Zealand, is particularly important for members of all ethnic minority groups—not just for aggregated Asian communities but also for Māori, Pacific, Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African groups. Nevertheless, understanding the acculturation and inclusion experiences of Korean New Zealander youth would provide some helpful references for other ethnic minority youth group members in New Zealand and elsewhere.

In the next chapters, we present the findings from our interviews with the newer generation of Korean New Zealander youth. We thematically organize these chapters based on our research questions: acculturation, re-ethnicization, integration, sense of belonging, and other complex and diverse acculturation paths of the cohort, which include the cases of “white-washed” (assimilation) and “FOB” (separation). Then, we interpret our findings and discuss the implications of these findings in the context of the Korean New Zealander cohort’s mode of integration into the multiculturalism of their host society. In doing so, we quote and use anecdotes from the interviews to illustrate the lived experiences of the Korean New Zealander cohort.

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CHAPTER 4

Growing as “Kiwis”: Journey of Acculturation

Abstract This chapter explores the early acculturation experiences of newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth as they transitioned from Korean-speaking households into New Zealand’s school system. Raised with Korean language and customs, these 1.5- and second-generation children faced linguistic and cultural challenges, racism, and pressure to assimilate. Many suppressed their ethnic identity to gain social acceptance, with symbols like Korean-style lunch boxes highlighting their struggles with cultural exclusion. Participants often described a gradual distancing from Korean practices in response to peer pressure and societal norms. These early experiences shaped a complex form of acculturation driven more by necessity than by choice. By examining how these youth navigated their dual identities in a predominantly Western environment, the chapter provides insight into the formative stages of their identity and sense of belonging.

Keywords Early acculturation · Assimilation pressures ·
Heritage language retention · Internalized racism ·
Multicultural education

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the acculturation experiences of newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth during their early school years in New Zealand, focusing on their adaptation to a new school environment. These youths navigated a transition from growing up as “Koreans” at home—immersed in the language, customs, and values of their first-generation immigrant parents—to integrating into a multicultural, yet predominantly Western, school environment. This journey reflects the dual challenge of becoming “Kiwis” while striving to retain their Korean identity.

Participants primarily identified as “Korean” at home through practices such as speaking Korean, consuming Korean media, and adhering to cultural traditions. Entering school introduced them to linguistic hurdles and cultural differences that tested their confidence and adaptability. While New Zealand schools became more multicultural after the 1990s due to immigration reforms, participants often encountered social rejection and subtle or overt racism.

Despite these challenges, some participants found support from empathetic teachers and peers who facilitated their transition. Others endured ridicule for cultural markers, such as their Korean-style lunch boxes, symbolizing broader struggles with acceptance and identity. These experiences frequently led to assimilation strategies, with participants distancing themselves from their Korean heritage in an effort to fit in.

This chapter explores three key questions: (1) How did Korean New Zealanders cultivate their Korean identity at home? (2) How did they negotiate their identity between home and school? (3) How did school pressures influence their assimilation into the dominant culture?

Through these narratives, the chapter sheds light on the intricate processes of cultural preservation, adaptation, and the resilience required to navigate the tensions between the two worlds.

AT HOME: GROWING AS “KOREAN”

Immigrant parents often act as cultural gatekeepers, transmitting their heritage to their children through language, media, and daily practices (Inman et al., 2007). This process, often termed “heritage language socialization,” is crucial for maintaining cultural continuity across generations (Wiley, 2005). For Korean New Zealanders, this process was

pivotal to their early identity formation. Researchers have noted that retaining heritage language is a key indicator of cultural identity, as language acts as a medium through which cultural values and collective memories are transmitted (Fishman, 1991). Immigrant families who emphasize heritage language use at home often foster stronger cultural ties and a clearer sense of ethnic identity in their children (Zhou, 1997). Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory underscores the family’s role as a microsystem, shielding children from broader societal norms and allowing them to cultivate their cultural identity within a protected environment.

Most Korean parents consciously teach their children Korean through deliberate efforts, such as enrolling them in weekend Korean schools available in Korean communities. In particular, Korean parents in New Zealand seem to be more successful than other ethnic groups in keeping their children fluent in Korean. Participants stated that their parents emphasized the importance of maintaining their Korean language. Speaking Korean at home or engaging in everyday activities like making their children keep journals in Korean, giving them regular dictation tests, and reading Korean books to their children transmitted the language and culture. This environment ensured that children absorbed their ethnic identity during their formative years.

Most participants also said their parents sent them to weekend Korean schools. The Korean community in New Zealand began to establish weekend Korean schools in Auckland in the late 1990s. Today, there are four large weekend schools in Auckland, and a few Korean schools run by Korean churches in Auckland, Christchurch, Whangarei, and other locations. As noted in the previous chapter, Korean New Zealanders have the highest rates of heritage language retention among the ethnic groups in New Zealand (The Social Report, 2016), and the number of Korean schools throughout the country might explain this.

The home continued to be a stronghold of Korean culture even after participants started attending New Zealand schools. Many participants described how they consumed Korean media—TV programs, movies, and music—together with their parents and siblings. These shared experiences reinforced their language skills and connected them to Korean traditions and values. Interestingly, some participants noted that watching Korean TV programs with their parents significantly improved their Korean language capacity. As such, these programs served as both entertainment and a means of

cultural education, illustrating the role of family in nurturing cultural continuity. Occasional homeland visits also helped them improve their Korean.

Daisy, a 1.5-generation female who grew up in Auckland in the mid-1990s and the 2000s, recalls her father's strict emphasis on the Korean language, including daily journal writing and attendance at weekend Korean school:

[My dad emphasized the importance of the Korean language.] He always said it would be embarrassing for a Korean person not to know Korean. From a young age, if we spoke English at home, we'd get scolded. I had to write a diary in Korean every day and get it signed. We even had spelling tests, and I attended Korean language school every weekend starting from primary school So, I kept attending [the weekend Korean school] all the way until I graduated My dad would even pick up all the neighborhood Korean kids every Saturday and take us to the [Korean] school [Daisy, Case 15].

Most participants also mentioned that watching Korean TV shows and dramas at home with their parents helped them learn and improve their Korean language and culture. Bay, a second-generation individual born in 2002, states how he learned the Korean language at home and through homeland visits:

The ways I've learned Korean are mainly through communicating with my parents at home, using Korean media, and spending time in Korea. We spoke a lot of Korean at home, and that really helped me improve my Korean My parents watch a lot of Korean TV, and I learned a lot from that. We watched shows like *Running Man* together a lot. I picked up a lot of new vocabulary from there, and when I didn't understand something, I'd ask my parents and learn that way. . . . Last year, when I went to Korea, my Korean improved a lot—especially my reading and writing [Bay, Case 6].

The participants' parents also learned Korean culture and history from their own parents. Bay also told us how he learned about Korean history from his mother, who used to read Korean books, including history books, to him when he was a child:

I learned about Korean history when I was younger, mainly through books I read with my mom I learned a lot about [Korean] history through

books. My mom used to read a lot of books to me, and that’s how I learned a lot [about Korean history] [Bay, Case 6].

In such a manner, the newer generation of Korean New Zealander children grew up as “Korean” at home, learning Korean and culture from their first-generation immigrant family. When they enter primary school in New Zealand, they face a totally different world, where they begin to learn English and the culture of their host society.

There were interesting deviation cases in which two participants grew up thinking that they were “Kiwis.” They are River and Oak. They grew up in small towns distant from the big urban centers, such as Auckland, isolated from other Korean immigrants. Growing up with local children of Pākehā Europeans and Māori, both of them considered themselves “Kiwi” and not particularly Korean until they moved to Auckland as a high school student (Oak) and a university student (River). It was only in both cases that this changed later when they moved to Auckland for higher education: Oak for high school and River for university.

River moved to New Zealand in 1985 when he was 10 years old, following his first-generation parents. The family settled in a small suburb of Tauranga, which is about 220 km away from Auckland. It was before the change in New Zealand immigration policy, and he and his family were the only Asians. Mingling with local kids of Pākehā Europeans and Māori, River always thought he was a “Kiwi” and did not distinguish himself from other local kids. This was despite his “Korean” life and culture at home, where he spoke with his parents in Korean and watched Korean TV dramas on videotape.

When I entered the University of Auckland, I still thought of myself as a New Zealander. All my friends were Pākehā, Māori, or local New Zealanders, so I didn’t feel the need to hang out with Koreans [at the university]. It wasn’t something I was used to. I didn’t have any reason to interact with Koreans my age, and in my hometown, there weren’t many around anyway. I never thought about marrying a Korean or dating a Korean girlfriend either. I just naturally mixed with Kiwi kids, so I didn’t really see myself as Korean. My identity was rooted in being a New Zealander, and I mostly spoke English with my Kiwi friends. At home, though, I spoke Korean with my family [River, Case 5].

Another case is Oak, born in mid-1995 and settled in New Zealand when he was three years old. He grew up in a small town in Northland, where there were very few Asians.

I never thought [that I was a Korean]. Back then, when I was a kid, I would even tell my parents, “I’m going to marry a Kiwi girl.” The idea of being a Korean didn’t even cross my mind. So, when I thought about marriage as a kid, I only imagined marrying someone Pākehā. . . . I thought of myself as a Kiwi. I’d come home and eat rice, kimchi stew, and other Korean food, but at school, I just saw myself as a Kiwi [Oak, Case 17].

However, as they say, they also spoke Korean and ate Korean food at home, just like other participants.

For Korean New Zealanders, the home environment served as a critical foundation for cultural preservation. Parents’ deliberate efforts to teach language, maintain traditions, and create shared cultural experiences fostered a strong Korean identity in their children. Even in cases of geographic or social isolation, the influence of home life ensured that participants retained aspects of their Korean heritage. However, the protective environment of home contrasted sharply with the realities of the school setting, where participants faced new challenges that tested their cultural identity and adaptability.

ENTERING THE NEW ZEALAND SCHOOL SYSTEM: CHALLENGES OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL ADAPTATION

As young migrants, our participants’ experiences align with Bartley’s (2010) observation that schools are the primary institutions through which young migrants integrate into their new society. As such, the transition into New Zealand schools marked a significant turning point in the lives of 1.5- and second-generation Korean New Zealanders. For our participants, learning English was a particularly daunting hurdle during their early school years, often taking several months to years to overcome. Beyond language, participants had to navigate unfamiliar school practices, social norms, and cultural expectations, which differed from their Korean upbringing and practices. This was a time when New Zealand schools were becoming increasingly multicultural, but for our participants, adapting to a new linguistic and cultural environment

presented substantial challenges. This section examines their efforts to acquire English and adapt to the foreign setting.

Once they began their journey in New Zealand schools, our participants were fully exposed to the multiracial and multicultural environment of New Zealand schools. During the period when our participants attended schools, the New Zealand school system was undergoing serious changes in terms of its demography and culture after the early 1990s. As stated in the previous chapters, New Zealand society was changing rapidly, particularly with the influx of many Asians after the 1990s.

Multicultural Contexts of New Zealand Schools

The transition to New Zealand schools marked a pivotal moment for 1.5- and second-generation Korean New Zealanders. Learning English posed a particularly daunting challenge for these participants, often requiring months or years to achieve proficiency. Beyond linguistic barriers, students had to navigate unfamiliar school practices, social norms, and cultural expectations, which contrasted sharply with their Korean upbringing.

New Zealand's schools underwent significant changes between the 1990s and 2010s, transforming from a formally bicultural society focused on the coexistence of Māori and Pākehā (European New Zealanders) into a more multicultural one. This shift was primarily driven by immigration policy reforms, such as the Immigration Act of 1987, which removed racial and national biases, emphasizing skills and talents instead. The introduction of a points-based system in 1991 further facilitated immigration from Asia, notably from South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. By 2017, the proportion of Asian students in New Zealand schools had risen significantly, particularly in urban centers like Auckland.¹ While this growing diversity necessitated inclusive teaching practices, challenges such as racist bullying persisted, as nearly a third of students reported that schools failed to address such incidents adequately.

¹ By 2017, the proportion of Asian students had increased by a third since 2009, rising from 9.1% to 11.8% of the school roll. Concurrently, the share of New Zealand Pākehā students declined from 55.9% in 2009 to 50.3% in 2017 (Education Review Office [ERO], 2019). This growing diversity was especially pronounced in urban areas. In Auckland, for instance, projections indicated that by 2043, more than two in five learners would identify as Asian (ERO, 2018).

This was the changing trend in New Zealand schools after the late 1990s. In such an environment, the newer generation of Korean New Zealanders was struggling to learn English and adapt to the new cultural environment.

*Transitioning to the New Zealand School System: Challenges
of English Acquisition and Cultural Adaptation*

For many Korean New Zealanders, schools became their primary site of acculturation. Participants frequently expressed mixed emotions about their early school experiences. While some formed friendships with peers from diverse ethnic backgrounds, others encountered significant struggles.

The case of Spruce, a second-generation participant born in the early 2000s in Auckland, describes how the transition from a Korean-speaking kindergarten to a predominantly white primary school was harsh:

I went to a Korean kindergarten. I was with a bunch of Korean friends. Then, I was sent to a white-dominated primary school. It was a massive change. It was from a fully Korean-based community to a fully European community... My parents wanted me to make friends with a lot of white people... It's because they wanted me to make friends outside of a Korean community, outside of an Asian community, so when I grow up, I wouldn't keep seeking for Asian people, I guess... That's why they sent me there, but didn't really work out until way later... I don't know, just going to for the first few years was really hard for me... There's a lot of bullying and all that stuff... In years one, two, and three, bullying around there. I just got bullied by a bunch of white people. They would often mock my accent. Back in the day... my English was really bad, so they would mock it over and over [Spruce, Case 20].

The adjustment period varied among participants, often taking between six months and three years to achieve English fluency. During this time, many felt isolated due to limited language proficiency. Pine, a 1.5-generation boy who was born in Korea in the early 2000s and arrived in New Zealand at age seven, recalled:

For the first two or three years, I couldn't speak English, of course. Moreover, since there weren't many Koreans in the western suburbs, I have many memories of being alone... [Pine, Case 28].

Parental Strategies for English Acquisition

Understanding the importance of English proficiency, many first-generation Korean parents adopted strategies to support their children’s linguistic and cultural adaptation. Some families intentionally avoided settling in areas with large Korean communities to encourage English immersion.² Aspen, a 1.5-generation male born in the late 1980s who grew up in New Zealand from the mid-1990s, reflected on this approach:

At that time, my parents decided that since we already decided to live overseas, we should live somewhere without a Korean community. That’s why, even though Auckland was still in its early days of having a Korean community, we moved to a place [Hamilton] with even fewer Koreans. As a result, I grew up in an environment with almost no Koreans around . . . Looking back, both locals and other Korean immigrants, including 1.5-generation Koreans like me, often say that my English sounds very local—not just my accent but also my speaking style. Thinking about it, I believe living in Hamilton at that time helped with that. Since I didn’t speak Korean much, I ended up speaking English at home too. I have an older sister three years older than me, and after about a year, we mostly spoke to each other in English at home [Aspen, Case 27].

Sage, a female university student who moved to Auckland at the age of six, states how her family chose a school where there were fewer Korean students:

When we first arrived here, we bought a house near where my aunt lived. Near my home, there were two schools I could attend. One had more Korean students than the other. My mom told me that it would be better for me to learn English if I attended a school where there were fewer Korean students. That’s how we chose the school, and I think it was a good decision. I might have used less English if I had gone to a school where there were more Koreans [Sage, Case 16].

These deliberate choices highlight the proactive role of parents in shaping their children’s acculturation journey.

² In some cases, this was combined with other motivations such as to avoid competition in business.

Positive Influences: Supportive Teachers and Peers

Despite challenges, many participants recounted kindness and support from teachers and classmates. Ivy, a 1.5-generation female who started as a Year 3 student in a primary school in New Zealand, expressed gratitude for her teachers:

Even if you include primary, middle, high school, and university, no teachers were better than my primary school teachers. When I struggled to learn English, my teachers went out of their way to help me. In this country, teachers usually go outside to have their lunch, but my teachers would bring books over while I was eating and read to me while having lunch together. There were many teachers like that. They also taught me about local culture—things like the party culture, birthday parties, and trends, as well as places kids often went. They even shared this with my dad, and I ended up hosting a birthday party at one of those places. There were a lot of moments like that [Ivy, Case 26].

Similarly, Hawthorn, who arrived in Christchurch in 1996 as a 1.5-generation immigrant, recalled the generosity of his peers and teachers:

At first, it was really hard because I didn't understand the culture or what people were saying. But there were some [Kiwī] friends who helped me a lot... [They] were a small group since it was a small school. There were about three or four who actively supported me, and I followed them around as I adjusted... The teachers were also very kind and helped me a lot... When they explained something, they would take the time to go over it slowly and carefully, even using gestures to make it easier for me to understand... They really cared and put in the effort to help me [Hawthorn, Case 3].

Such positive experiences eased the transition for many participants, fostering a sense of belonging and connection. Nevertheless, despite having such extraordinary teachers and students, most of our participants also mentioned their experiences of racism and discrimination in their school life, as we will address below.

Entering the New Zealand school system was both a challenging and transformative experience for Korean New Zealanders. While the multi-cultural environment offered opportunities for integration, participants faced significant hurdles, including language barriers, cultural adaptation, and instances of racism. The proactive strategies of parents and the support

of empathetic teachers and peers played crucial roles in their acculturation journey. These experiences not only shaped their linguistic and social development but also laid the groundwork for their evolving identities as Korean New Zealanders.

EXPERIENCES OF RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

While most participants reported few instances of overt discrimination, their narratives reveal widespread experiences of subtle racism and social rejection during their school years. In fact, the great majority of our interviewees revealed that they had experienced various forms of subtle discrimination and racism while growing up in New Zealand. Despite New Zealand’s reputation as a multicultural society, many participants described feeling a strong, implicit pressure to assimilate into the dominant culture.

Accounts of Subtle Racism, Discrimination, and Social Rejection

Sage, who started school in the early 2000s when she was seven years old, recounted her encounters with subtle racism:

Racism . . . not much by teachers, but there were some incidents with kids my age. They would do things like pull their eyes back to mimic slanted eyes or make “ching chong” noises. But other than that, there were many nice kids too, so I didn’t let it bother me too much, though it did happen . . . Back then, [when they pulled their eyes back or made “ching chong” noises], I thought ignoring it was the best way to deal with it. I would just pretend I didn’t see it and walk away. I didn’t know what to say, and while it made me feel bad, I thought avoiding confrontation and ignoring them was the best approach at the time [Sage, Case 16].

The same participant, Sage, also remembers an occasion of racism at school, even though earlier she said that there was not much racism from teachers.³ It was an incident when her teacher excluded her from

³ Reports indicated that learners from ethnic communities experienced widespread racist bullying, with one in five encountering such incidents in the past month. Additionally, nearly a third of these learners felt their schools did not take racist bullying seriously (ERO, 2018).

participating in a Māori dance event, which she speculated may have been racially motivated:

It was a [Māori dance] event at school, and students would dance with poi.⁴ Though I repeatedly appealed to the teacher that I wished to join the dance, somehow, she selected only white girls . . . Not sure if she did so on purpose, but I thought that it might have been because I was an Asian . . . and because the audience would be parents . . . It remains in my memory [Sage, Case 16].

Elm, who grew up in New Zealand in the late 1990s and early 2000s, says that a few times he experienced subtle forms of racism and discrimination, even though he did not realize it clearly at the time.

Sometimes, while walking down the street, I'd hear things like "f***ing Asian" out of nowhere. It wasn't because I was Korean, but because I was Asian. But, those instances were very rare. During the COVID pandemic, though, it was the first time in a long while that I experienced things like that again. Cars would drive by with the windows down, and people would shout insults or things like "China." It felt a bit unpleasant, but I didn't take it too seriously. I just think that people who say or think things like that must have their own issues or wounds they're dealing with . . . Looking back, when I was younger, those kinds of things happened occasionally, and I think I was more offended by them back then. But I don't think I ever confronted anyone about it or had any sort of confrontation [Elm, Case 25].

Reed, a second-generation participant born in the mid-1990s, reflected on the societal pressure to conform:

There exist systemic oppressions, which make us internalize [racism], and we feel that we are stupid instead of just being different [from the members of the dominant group]. So, even though it is said that New Zealand is a bi-cultural society, becoming a multicultural one, I cannot agree with that. I think that there still exists strong pressure for assimilation and assimilation politics, and we feel such pressures continuously [Reed, Case 1].

⁴Two small, lightweight balls attached to cords or strings, traditionally used in Māori dance. They are twirled in rhythmic patterns to create mesmerizing movements, often performed to music.

Korean lunch boxes: A marker of cultural difference

One of the most recurring themes in participants' experiences of discrimination involved their lunch boxes. For many, the contents of their lunch boxes became a symbol of cultural differences that elicited negative reactions from classmates. Pine, a 1.5-generation participant who arrived in New Zealand in 2009 at the age of seven, recalled the time when he brought Korean *kimbap* to school:

One time, I brought kimbap to school . . . Back then, foreigners didn't know well what seaweed was, and I remember them saying it was disgusting. That memory still sticks with me . . . It was my first time to realize people [in different cultures] can have different perceptions about food [Pine, Case 28].

Hazel, a 1.5-Gen female who came to New Zealand at the age of 12 and attended school in the early 2000s accounts her experience:

When I was in primary school, I ate lunch by myself. I didn't want to show my lunchbox . . . Some kids would make fun of it. If my mom made kimbap or packed leftover Korean food for my lunch, the other kids would see it when I opened my lunchbox, and it was unfamiliar to them. It looked very different from the lunches they brought. They'd say things like, "It smells bad," or "Get rid of it." I don't know if kids still act like that these days, but that's what happened back then [Hazel, Case 7].

Similarly, Lily, who is a 1.5-generation female, described her experience at Epsom Girls' Grammar School⁵ in the early 2000s, where she struggled to fit into a predominantly Pākehā environment:

Lunch box was a frequent problem at school. Not just me but for other Koreans as well. The smelly Korean lunch box frequently caused conflicts. Lot of similar stories from other Koreans . . .

My mom made a Korean-style lunch box every day, and it was a problem for me. As soon as I open my lunch box (bulgogi and rice) some Kiwi girls would let me know they didn't like the smell. It was very embarrassing and I felt ashamed of my being a Korean and complained to my mom. My mom eventually made "western style" sandwich for me but it was a Korean-style

⁵ A famous public school located in a wealthy suburb in Auckland.

sandwich with cabbage and some meat and it still smelled badly . . . So, there were times when I just didn't eat and left my lunch in my bag untouched. Once, I even ate in the bathroom . . . [Lily, Case 9].

Lily continues that such a problem was common among the Korean New Zealanders of her age:

This kind of experience is actually very common among people around my age. Especially the older women I work with at school, some of whom are a little older than me—born around 1984—they also grew up with very similar experiences. It's not just me [Lily, Case 9].

For some, the negative reactions to their food led to long-term changes in eating habits. Ivy, who is a 1.5-generation female, stated:

I never took Korean food to school. Starting from primary school, I avoided it because kimchi has a strong smell. Kiwi kids had never smelled anything like that before, and I hated the attention of being the only one who was different, so I stopped eating it. I only ate Korean food at home for dinner. During the day, I stuck to bread and cereal—sandwiches for lunch—and in the evening, I'd have things like kimchi fried rice or soybean paste stew. For breakfast and lunch, I completely avoided anything with garlic and kept it simple, like salad [Ivy, Case 26].

Lunch box experiences became a poignant marker of cultural difference. As Michèle Lamont's concept of "symbolic boundaries" explains, food often delineates social inclusion or exclusion, reinforcing hierarchies in multicultural societies (Lamont et al., 2015). Cultural differences in food preferences often reinforce social hierarchies, as seen in the rejection of ethnic foods by mainstream peers. Claude Fischler's notion of food as a metaphor for identity further emphasizes how eating practices reflect deeper cultural and personal identities. For many participants, being teased about their food marked a painful point in their acculturation journey, compelling them to adopt Western-style lunches to fit in.

These lunchbox experiences reflect not only personal discomfort but also a broader sociocultural dynamic that sociologist Paul Spoonley (2015) and colleagues have described as tolerant racism—a form of racialized exclusion that is subtle, polite, and cloaked in liberal discourses of acceptance. While overt hostility is often avoided, non-Pākehā ethnic groups are still subject to unspoken rules about how to behave, look,

and eat in public spaces. Within this context, children of immigrants quickly learn the limits of “acceptable” difference and internalize the message that conformity to dominant norms is the price of inclusion. Korean lunch boxes, often labeled “smelly” or “weird,” served as everyday symbols of symbolic boundaries (Lamont et al., 2015) that excluded Korean children from full belonging in the school environment, even as they were encouraged to see New Zealand as a multicultural society.

New Zealand’s celebrated multiculturalism, while more inclusive than some Western societies, is still often described as “friendly but exclusionary” (Ward & Liu, 2012). The expectation is that minorities participate in Kiwi society on terms defined by the dominant group. This means that diversity is welcome—but only when it is nondisruptive, esthetically appealing, or commercially palatable (e.g., Korean pop culture but not kimchi in the classroom). As a result, cultural practices that visibly or sensorially differ from white, middle-class norms are often marginalized. The symbolic rejection of Korean food is thus not a trivial matter; it reinforces hierarchies of taste and belonging, subtly encouraging ethnic minority youth to minimize their cultural distinctiveness.

Oak, a second-generation individual, shared the emotional impact of these experiences:

When I was little, . . . I remember the kids would ask, “What’s this?” and when I told them it was kimbap, they’d go, “Eww!” I still remember that clearly. Back then, if my mom packed Korean food for my lunch, I would secretly throw it in the trash because the other kids teased me. Then, I’d go home and tell my mom, “Can you pack me sandwiches like the other kids?” Eventually, she mostly packed sandwiches for me. Thinking about it now makes me really sad—how my mom must have felt, hearing that her child was teased because of the food she made. I think it left a kind of trauma for both of us [Oak, Case 17].

Broader Implications for Identity and Confidence

These experiences of subtle discrimination and rejection often had profound effects on participants’ self-esteem and cultural identity. Many felt compelled to suppress aspects of their Korean heritage to fit in, which led to feelings of internalized racism and a desire to assimilate. Lily summarized this tension:

I wanted to belong to the mainstream group at my high school, but it wasn't easy. The racism I faced made me feel alienated and less confident [Lily, Case 9].

Such experiences also influenced participants' social interactions. While some distanced themselves from other Koreans to avoid further marginalization, others found solace in co-ethnic friendships during high school and beyond. Over time, many participants regained pride in their Korean identity, especially as they matured and encountered more inclusive environments.

Experiences of racism and discrimination shaped the acculturation journey of Korean New Zealanders, leaving lasting impressions on their cultural identity and self-esteem. From enduring subtle acts of exclusion to grappling with the symbolism of their lunch boxes, these stories highlight the challenges of navigating a multicultural society that often imposes assimilationist pressures. Despite these obstacles, many participants found ways to reclaim their heritage and embrace their dual identities, reflecting resilience and adaptability in adversity.

IDENTITY STRUGGLES: SELF-REJECTION AND ASSIMILATION

As participants transitioned through New Zealand's educational system, many faced significant challenges to their ethnic and cultural identities. Racism and cultural discrimination, whether overt or covert, eroded their confidence in being Korean and fostered feelings of shame or rejection toward their heritage. Suffering emotionally and socially, many of them internalized racism or adopted defensive assimilation.

Losing Confidence in Ethnicity and Culture

The negative experiences of racism and discrimination in the class challenged many of our participants in terms of their ethnicity and culture.

Suzy, above, whose first language was Korean until her early primary school days and who kept associating with other Korean kids at school but was discouraged from mingling mainly with other Koreans, said that she soon developed a negative image of Korean culture. Suzy wanted to belong to the mainstream group at school, and she thought that her being Korean was something that needed to be suppressed. She believed that her Koreanness distinguished her from other classmates.

I had such negative associations with being Korean because it was different . . . There were a lot of conflicts when I was growing up. I think it was, in a sense, because . . . I didn't look like everyone, to start with, so that was really confusing. The food we ate was different, and I think I kind of got to a point where I really, really disliked being Korean because there'd be the occasional remarks just from people because you're Asian or stuff that . . . I just disliked a lot of that, and I was very unsure because I didn't fit perfectly into this idea of being Korean, but I wasn't a Kiwi either . . . [Suzy, Case 22].

Some of the participants said that they were ashamed of being Korean (or Asian) when they were children. Rose is a female who arrived in New Zealand in 2006 at the age of five and attended a semi-private Christian school quite far from Auckland, with only a few other Korean students. Her mother had a negative perception of Korean students and discouraged Rose from associating with them. Rose had a sense of shame about being Korean (Asian) when she was younger, and she tried to hide her Korean identity. Like many participants, Rose also asked her mother to pack a sandwich instead of a Korean-style lunch box.

When I was younger, being Korean, or being Asian, was something I felt ashamed of. Especially back in Year 9, I remember one of my Korean friends who confessed her feelings to a guy, but she was rejected just because she was Asian [Rose, Case 29].

She also talks about her mother's critical opinion of Korean students in general:

My mom's personal opinion is that when Koreans stick together, go to the City Centre, hang out at pool halls, and drink or smoke, she thinks a lot of those Koreans aren't the best influence. Mom prefers a more innocent way of having fun. Honestly, though, I think foreigners are the same—they party and do similar things. But my mom . . . I don't know. She told me not to hang out with Koreans like that [Rose, Case 29].

For many participants, shame about their ethnicity translated into deliberate avoidance of anything culturally Korean. Suzy recounted:

I tried to not speak Korean as much. I would ask mom to pack me sandwiches instead of kimbap and stuff like that, which I regret now . . . The education system [in the intermediate] tries to celebrate diversity, and it's all

about inclusivity, but I think there were definitely downfalls in that because I remember the intermediate, like really disliking my Korean identity or my Korean culture because, to me, at that point, it just made me different [from her Pākehā friends] . . . I think it just made me really dislike that because I felt like I didn't fit in or belong anywhere That's why I try to be as Kiwi as I can so I can get as close to fitting in [Suzy, Case 22].

Another case of a 1.5-generation male, Ash, who migrated to New Zealand in 2001 at the age of 8, says that he did not like Korean culture, including music, and even distanced himself from other Korean kids.

Back then, I think I leaned heavily towards the Kiwi side. I really disliked Korean music—thought it was all love songs and not cool at all. I was into Eminem and listened to rap. I think I didn't like Korean culture much at the time and distanced myself from it. In some ways, I also distanced myself from Korean friends [Ash, Case 13].

Internalized Racism

Participants often internalized societal messages of inferiority, leading to self-doubt and a desire to assimilate into the dominant culture. Fern, who moved to New Zealand in 1996 at the age of eight, reflected on how her early experiences with discrimination shaped her desire to conform:

I had an expectation that I would be a half-foreigner [in New Zealand.] As I had such an expectation, I wanted to remove my Korean identity from myself . . . I tried hard to get rid of it. It was that time that I don't fit to the other Koreans who stuck to Korean culture I hated the word of "culture," which seemed to keep me inside a box [Fern, Case 10].

This desire to conform was reinforced by negative experiences with both non-Koreans and co-ethnics. Fern recounted:

When I first came to New Zealand and couldn't speak English yet, I had an experience that really scared me. I was walking home from school, and these two local kids from the same neighborhood started following me. They were behind me, pulling their eyes back and pointing at me. I didn't understand what they were saying, but I felt really threatened . . . They kept speeding up as I walked faster, and it felt like they were chasing me. I could hear them saying bad things, and from the way they were acting, it seemed like they

were mocking how I looked . . . I panicked and just ran all the way home. Later, I talked to my mom about it, and she explained that what I experienced was racism . . . [Fern, Case 10]

Even within the Korean community, Fern's family's Buddhist faith set them apart from the predominantly Christian Korean immigrants. Her mother was a devoted Buddhist, and most Koreans around them were Christians. Those Christian Koreans saw her mother and her family members as “poor souls that must be saved” and not as equal people. Because of this, Fern was targeted by other Korean students at school, which further alienated her:

Those Korean students [from other class] came to get me in my classroom, shouting “You think you're a foreigner? You're a Korean!” My non-Korean classmates even took me to toilet to protect me. After the incident, I really kept my distance from Koreans [Fern, Case 10].

The racism participants experienced played a central role in shaping their internal struggles. Many internalized the negative stereotypes and prejudices directed at them, which reinforced feelings of inadequacy and a need to conform to dominant cultural norms. This internalized racism often manifested in attempts to distance themselves from their Korean heritage and adopt behaviors, attitudes, and appearances that aligned with the dominant group. Fern's story exemplifies this dynamic:

I thought that I wouldn't be racially discriminated if I do my best to try to fit [to the dominant culture]. Probably that's why I frequently dyed my hair [Fern, Case 10].

Negotiating Identity: From “Koreans” to “Kiwis”

The participants' efforts to navigate their identities reflected a broader struggle between assimilation and cultural preservation. Internalized racism or defensive assimilation often manifested in adopting Western fashion, speaking only English, and minimizing visible markers of their Korean identity. For Suzy, this meant rejecting traditional Korean foods and suppressing her first language:

At school, I wanted to fit in as much as possible, and anything that marked me as different—like my lunch or speaking Korean—felt like a target [Suzy, Case 22].

Ash turned to Western pop culture, rejecting Korean music and distancing himself from co-ethnic peers:

I leaned heavily toward the Kiwi side. I really disliked Korean music—thought it was all love songs and not cool at all. I was into Eminem and rap . . . I distanced myself from Korean friends [Ash, Case 13].

However, this process was not static. Over time, many participants began to reconcile their dual identities. The growing global popularity of Korean culture through the Korean Wave—including K-pop, dramas, and cuisine—allowed them to reconnect with their heritage. As societal attitudes evolved, participants found new ways to integrate their Korean and Kiwi identities, embracing their backgrounds with renewed pride.

This dynamic reflects the fluid nature of identity and highlights the resilience of Korean New Zealanders as they navigate the pressures of assimilation and cultural preservation. Their ability to adapt and reclaim their heritage demonstrates the ongoing negotiation required to balance dual cultural identities.

CONCLUSION

The acculturation journey of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders reveals a complex interplay between cultural preservation and adaptation. These youths grew up in Korean cultural environments shaped by their first-generation immigrant parents, learning the language, traditions, and values of their heritage. However, entering school marked a significant turning point, as they faced linguistic and cultural challenges, often navigating a predominantly Western environment that tested their confidence and identity.

While some participants adapted well and built meaningful relationships, their school experiences were frequently punctuated by instances of racism and cultural rejection. Subtle and overt forms of discrimination pressured many to conform to dominant societal norms, leading to internalized racism and defensive assimilation. Participants often suppressed their ethnic identity, rejecting cultural markers such as Korean-style

lunches or co-ethnic friendships to fit into the dominant culture. These experiences illustrate the tension between belonging and self-preservation that characterized their early years.

However, the participants' identity journeys did not end with assimilation. Over time, many began to reclaim their Korean heritage, spurred by factors such as connecting with co-ethnic peers in high school or university and the growing global visibility of Korean culture through the Korean Wave. This re-engagement with their roots enabled them to reconcile their dual identities, embracing both their Korean and Kiwi selves with newfound pride and confidence. Their stories highlight the fluid and dynamic nature of identity, showcasing resilience and adaptability in the face of systemic pressures.

These findings underscore the need for inclusive educational practices that address systemic racism and support cultural preservation. By fostering environments that value diversity beyond superficial ideals, schools can play a pivotal role in nurturing the cultural identities of minority students. Such efforts are essential for creating a genuinely multicultural society where individuals are empowered to navigate dual identities without compromising their sense of self. These findings highlight the importance of equipping educators, school counselors, and parents with culturally responsive tools and training to support ethnic minority youth in navigating identity tensions and combating subtle forms of discrimination.

While this chapter has focused on the early acculturation struggles of 1.5- and second-generation Korean New Zealander youth, often marked by cultural suppression and pressure to conform, the story does not end with assimilation. As many participants move into adolescence and early adulthood, they begin to reclaim their Korean identity through co-ethnic friendships, cultural engagement, and ethnic language. The next chapter explores this complex process of re-ethnicization, examining how these young people rediscover and redefine their sense of self in a multicultural but still racially stratified society.

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Becoming More “Korean”: Re-Ethnicization

Abstract This chapter explores the re-ethnicization process among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders, who reconnect with their Korean identity after early assimilation as “Kiwis.” This shift often begins in high school or university, driven by co-ethnic friendships, experiences of racism, and increased cultural confidence. Online platforms and the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) also strengthen ethnic pride and foster connection to heritage. While re-ethnicization is partly shaped by social exclusion, it increasingly reflects a positive assertion of identity in a multicultural environment. Participants actively negotiate their Korean and Kiwi identities, drawing strength from shared experiences and evolving cultural landscapes. This chapter reveals how immigrant youth navigate identity formation not as a linear path but as a dynamic, relational, and emotionally grounded journey.

Keywords Re-ethnicization · Co-ethnic friendship · Ethnic identity development · Segmented assimilation · Emotional belonging (*jeong*) · *Hallyu* (Korean Wave)

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, we examined the acculturation journey of newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth, focusing on their early experiences navigating the New Zealand school system during their primary and intermediate years. This period was marked by significant challenges, including English language acquisition, cultural adaptation, and encounters with subtle racism and cultural rejection. Many participants reported suppressing or downplaying their Korean identity in an effort to assimilate into the dominant “Kiwi” culture and gain peer acceptance.

However, a noticeable shift occurred as participants transitioned into high school and university—a process we term re-ethnicization. This phase is characterized by participants rediscovering and embracing their Korean ethnic identity, often catalyzed by the formation of friendships with co-ethnic peers who shared similar migration experiences. These relationships provided emotional warmth (*jeong*), cultural familiarity, and mutual understanding that were often absent in earlier friendships with non-Korean peers. Through these interactions, participants engaged more deeply with the Korean language and cultural practices, marking a critical turn in their identity development.

This chapter proposes a multistage analytical model of re-ethnicization, which highlights the interplay between causal factors (e.g., societal exclusion, microaggressions), intermediate mechanisms (e.g., co-ethnic friendships, digital media, engagement with *Hallyu*), and identity outcomes (e.g., increased cultural confidence, bicultural integration). Rather than a linear or uniform process, re-ethnicization unfolds dynamically, driven by both reactive responses to exclusion and proactive efforts to reclaim ethnic identity. This framework not only guides the chapter’s structure but also illuminates the agency and resilience of Korean New Zealander youth in navigating dual cultural worlds.

The chapter proceeds in five sections. First, it introduces the theoretical foundations of re-ethnicization and situates them within the broader literature on assimilation and ethnic identity development. Next, it explores the formation of co-ethnic friendships and their emotional and cultural significance. We then examine how participants’ cultural and language literacy develop as a marker of re-ethnicization. This is followed by an analysis of key contextual drivers—such as societal exclusion, digital connectivity, the influence of the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*), and New Zealand’s evolving multicultural environment. Finally, the chapter reflects

on the broader implications of re-ethnicization for participants’ identity development, emotional well-being, and integration within New Zealand society.

By tracing this multifaceted process, the chapter aims to offer a nuanced understanding of how newer-generation Korean New Zealanders reclaim and reshape their ethnic identity in an increasingly multicultural, yet still racially stratified, social landscape.

Mapping the Re-Ethnicization Process

To guide the analysis presented in this chapter, this section outlines an analytical model of the re-ethnicization process experienced by newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. Re-ethnicization is conceptualized here as a dynamic, multistage process shaped by the interplay of causal triggers, intermediate mechanisms, and identity outcomes. This model allows us to move beyond a descriptive account and systematically examine how and why this identity shift unfolds during adolescence and early adulthood.

The process typically begins with a causal stage, rooted in participants’ experiences of social exclusion, cultural marginalization, and everyday racism encountered during their early schooling years. These experiences, while often subtle, generate a sense of cultural alienation and a growing awareness of being perceived as ethnically “other.” In response, many participants initially suppressed their Korean identity in favor of assimilation. However, these early exclusions planted the seeds for later reflection and identity re-evaluation.

The second stage involves a set of intermediate mechanisms that facilitate re-engagement with ethnic identity. Chief among these is the formation of co-ethnic friendships, which offer emotional warmth (*jeong*), mutual understanding, and validation of shared cultural experiences. Digital technologies and social media platforms—particularly those tailored to Korean users, such as KakaoTalk—serve as additional vehicles for maintaining linguistic and cultural connections. The global popularity of Korean popular culture (*Hallyu*) also acts as a powerful source of ethnic pride and collective identification, normalizing Korean identity in ways that were previously less accessible. These intermediate factors function both independently and interactively, reinforcing participants’ renewed engagement with their heritage.

Table 5.1 Re-ethnicization process of newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Key drivers/mechanisms</i>	<i>Emergent changes/identity transformation</i>
Causal factors	Subtle racism, peer marginalization, and cultural dissonance	Internal questioning of identity, desire for belonging
Intermediate mechanisms	Co-ethnic friendships, Korean digital networks, Korean Wave, multicultural events	Re-engagement with Korean culture, language, and community
Identity outcomes		Ethnic pride, bicultural competence, “Korean Kiwi” hybrid identity

Source Author

The final stage of the model focuses on the identity outcomes of re-ethnicization. These include the enhancement of cultural and language literacy, a stronger sense of ethnic confidence, and the development of bicultural competence. While some participants expressed concern about being perceived as “too Korean” or “not Korean enough,” most ultimately embraced a hybrid identity that allowed them to balance both Korean and Kiwi cultural norms. Re-ethnicization thus emerges as not merely a reactive response to exclusion but also a proactive process of cultural reclamation, integration, and self-empowerment.

This analytical model provides a framework for the rest of the chapter, organizing the empirical data into a coherent narrative of identity transformation among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. Table 5.1 outlines the re-ethnicization process, highlighting its key driving factors and resulting identity outcomes.

RE-ETHNICIZATION: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Ethnic identity is a subjective sense of attachment to an ethnic group, shaped by cultural heritage, social connections, and societal perceptions. Immigrant groups often undergo varying degrees of assimilation, where they may suppress or minimize their cultural identity in favor of adopting the dominant norms of their host society. In the previous chapter, we observed how newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth often

leaned toward cultural assimilation to reduce social dissonance and gain peer acceptance during their primary and intermediate school years.

In contrast, re-ethnicization refers to the process through which individuals from immigrant or ethnic minority backgrounds rediscover, reassert, and embrace their ethnic identity after an initial phase of assimilation or suppression. This phenomenon often emerges during adolescence or young adulthood, driven by a combination of personal agency, social connections, and structural opportunities. While assimilation may represent an attempt to adapt to societal pressures, re-ethnicization signifies a reflective return to one’s cultural roots, motivated by both external factors, such as societal exclusion, and internal factors, such as emotional connections and cultural pride.

For Korean New Zealander youth, re-ethnicization often begins in high school or university, where participants encounter co-ethnic peers, often engage with Korean cultural media, and develop emotional bonds rooted in shared cultural experiences. Importantly, this process is not solely reactive; it reflects proactive choices to embrace cultural pride, linguistic connection, and a renewed sense of identity.

Reactive Ethnicity

Portes and Rumbaut’s (2001) concept of reactive ethnicity highlights how experiences of social exclusion, racism, and cultural marginalization can prompt minority youth to reassert their ethnic identity. Faced with societal barriers to full acceptance, immigrant youth often respond by embracing their cultural heritage as an act of resilience and self-preservation.

For Korean New Zealander youth, subtle racism—whether through mockery of their lunchboxes, language barriers, or cultural stereotypes—acts as a trigger for re-ethnicization. However, while reactive ethnicity helps explain some aspects of this process, it does not fully capture the proactive elements observed among participants. Alongside exclusion, participants also cited positive drivers, including the emotional warmth of co-ethnic friendships and the influence of Korean cultural media.

Segmented Assimilation Theory

Segmented assimilation theory (Portes & Zhou, 1993) suggests that immigrant youth may follow one of three pathways: (1) full assimilation into the

dominant culture, (2) downward assimilation into marginalized communities, or (3) selective assimilation, where individuals adopt aspects of the host culture while maintaining strong connections to their ethnic heritage.

The experiences of Korean New Zealander youth align most closely with selective assimilation. During primary school, many participants leaned toward assimilation, often suppressing their Korean identity. However, in high school and university, participants began reconnecting with their Korean roots through co-ethnic friendships, cultural engagement, and exposure to Korean media. This selective approach allowed participants to balance both aspects of their identity.

Ethnic Identity Development

Phinney's (1990) three-stage model of ethnic identity development provides a developmental perspective on re-ethnicization: (1) unexamined ethnic identity, where cultural identity is not actively considered; (2) ethnic identity search, often triggered by experiences of marginalization or cultural exposure; and (3) ethnic identity achievement, characterized by a secure and confident sense of ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990).

For Korean New Zealander youth, early schooling years align with the unexamined ethnic identity stage, marked by efforts to assimilate. The transition to high school often triggers the ethnic identity search stage, with participants forming co-ethnic friendships and engaging more actively with their cultural heritage. Many ultimately reach the ethnic identity achievement stage, finding a balance between their Korean and Kiwi identities.

The experiences of Korean New Zealander youth reflect an interplay of reactive ethnicity, segmented assimilation, and ethnic identity development. While societal exclusion acts as a trigger, co-ethnic friendships, Korean cultural media, and New Zealand's multicultural environment act as facilitators. Re-ethnicization emerges as both a reactive response and a proactive choice, underscoring the agency and resilience of the cohort.

CO-ETHNIC FRIENDSHIPS

Co-ethnic friendships are pivotal in the re-ethnicization process of newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth. While primary and intermediate school years were often characterized by participants' strong desire to

assimilate into Kiwi culture, high school and university provided opportunities to form deeper connections with co-ethnic peers. These friendships were not simply social—they carried profound emotional, cultural, and identity-shaping significance.

Unlike friendships with non-Korean peers, which often required participants to suppress or explain aspects of their cultural background, co-ethnic friendships offered safe spaces for mutual understanding, cultural validation, and emotional support. Through these relationships, participants experienced a renewed appreciation for their Korean identity, cultural practices, and shared histories.

This section explores how co-ethnic friendships were formed, their role in providing emotional support, and how shared experiences of being a minority in New Zealand strengthened these bonds. It concludes with an exploration of the Korean cultural concept of *jeong*—a unique form of emotional connection—that became a defining feature of these relationships.

Forming Co-Ethnic Friendships

Most participants had limited or no co-ethnic classmates in primary and intermediate school. Even when other Korean peers were present, participants often prioritized learning English and assimilating into Kiwi culture over forming co-ethnic friendships. Some parents also discouraged their children from associating primarily with other Koreans, fearing it would hinder their English proficiency and integration into New Zealand society.

However, high school and university marked a turning point. With increased immigration from Korea and other Asian countries since the 1990s, participants encountered a larger number of co-ethnic peers. This demographic shift created an environment where co-ethnic friendships could naturally flourish.

Herman, a 1.5-generation migrant who arrived in New Zealand in the late 1990s, recounted his experience:

When I first started high school in Year 9, I noticed how Korean students tended to stick together and form their groups, especially as the number of international students grew. At the time, that didn't look good to me—maybe it was because I was young and naive—so I intentionally tried to hang out with Kiwi kids instead and avoided the Korean groups on purpose. But after about a semester, I found myself naturally gravitating toward them.

By the latter half of Year 9, I started spending time with the Korean group, and by Year 10, I was pretty much only hanging out with other Korean students [Herman, Case 2].

This experience aligns with observations that ethnic minority youth often gravitate toward co-ethnic peers when they encounter cultural boundaries or social isolation in mainstream environments (Abelmann, 2009; Graham & Cohen, 1997). Similar patterns have been noted among immigrant youth in Canada and the United States, where cultural alienation often pushes students toward co-ethnic networks (Lauer & Yan, 2021).

Participants also noticed a natural divergence in interests and priorities with their Kiwi peers as they matured. Sherlie shared:

When I first started [high school], I initially hung out with the Kiwi group friends I had from middle school. Then I also spent time with new Korean friends I met. I kept going back and forth between the two groups for a while. There were moments when both sides would ask, ‘Who are you going to hang out with today?’ and I felt like I was walking a tightrope between them. But in the end, I think I naturally gravitated more towards the Korean friends who made an effort to connect with me because we shared a common background [Sherlie, Case 11].

These friendships provided an immediate sense of belonging and reduced the need to constantly bridge cultural gaps—a task participants often found exhausting in their earlier years.

Emotional Support Through Co-Ethnic Friendships

Co-ethnic friendships served as emotional anchors for participants, providing validation, understanding, and solidarity. These relationships were not merely social—they became spaces where participants could process feelings of alienation, cultural dissonance, and the pressures of bicultural life. Hazel reflected on the emotional safety of these relationships:

With my Korean friends, I never had to explain why my parents were strict about school or why I felt embarrassed about my lunch in primary school. They just understood [Hazel, Case 7].

The emotional support provided by co-ethnic friendships extended beyond shared struggles. Participants also described these friendships as

spaces where they could celebrate their cultural identity openly, without fear of misunderstanding or judgment.

As participants transitioned from high school to university, the nature of emotional support within these friendships evolved. While high school friendships often focused on navigating immediate cultural struggles, university friendships allowed for deeper emotional bonds and mutual growth for many. Elm, a 1.5-generation male, shared:

At university, my Korean friends weren't just friends—they were my support network. We helped each other through tough times, celebrated our successes, and built something that felt like a second family [Elm, Case 25].

This emotional safety net became instrumental in participants' ability to embrace and express their Korean identity confidently.

Shared Culture and Experiences: Navigating Minority Identity

Shared cultural experiences were another cornerstone of co-ethnic friendships. Activities such as celebrating Korean holidays, sharing traditional meals, and engaging with Korean pop culture became significant bonding moments. Meadow, a second-generation female participant, described:

In high school, we'd cook Korean food together, celebrate Chuseok, and talk about K-dramas. These moments felt so natural and meaningful—it was like reclaiming a part of myself that I had forgotten [Meadow, Case 14].

These shared cultural experiences were not limited to traditional practices. Participants also bonded over contemporary Korean culture, including K-pop and Korean dramas, which served as common cultural touchpoints.

Through these shared moments, participants not only strengthened their friendships but also began to reinterpret their Korean identity as a source of pride rather than embarrassment.

The Culture of Jeong: A Sense of Belonging and Warmth

One of the most frequently mentioned aspects of co-ethnic friendships was the Korean cultural concept of *jeong*. Described as a deep emotional bond rooted in shared experiences and mutual care, *jeong* became a defining

feature of participants' friendships with co-ethnic peers. A second-generation male participant, Stone, reflected:

With my Korean friends, there was always this sense of *jeong*. Conversations flowed easily, and there was an emotional connection that felt deeper than with other friendships [Stone, Case 21].

For many participants, experiencing *jeong* within their friendships not only strengthened their emotional connections but also helped them better understand Korean cultural values. This emotional bond often transcended individual relationships and became a collective experience shared within their friendship groups. Meadow reflected:

With my Korean friends, there was always this sense of *jeong*. Conversations flowed easily, and there was an emotional connection that I didn't experience with my Kiwi friends [Meadow, Case 14].

Sage, a 1.5-generation female participant, narrates how the Korean *jeong* compelled her to work at a Korean restaurant, even though the wage there was lower than that of Western restaurants:

During university days, I used to work part-time at Korean restaurants. I'd heard that working at Korean restaurants often meant lower wages and harder work, but for me, it was actually more comforting. The people I worked with felt almost like family—there was a sense of *jeong*. During mealtimes, we'd all sit down together, eat, and chat. In contrast, at non-Korean workplaces, people would often order food individually or eat alone. I really enjoyed the communal atmosphere at the Korean restaurant [Sage, Case 16].

For many participants, *jeong* represented more than just an emotional connection—it symbolized a cultural value that transcended individual relationships and became a cornerstone of their sense of belonging. Petal, a second-generation female, says that the Korean culture of *jeong* made her feel connected to her Korean identity. She expresses:

Koreans . . . don't they have lot of *jeong*? That was really, really lovely to experience . . . It was a new experience, and then I said to myself, "Yes, I am Korean" [Petal, Case 24].

Co-ethnic friendships played a transformative role in the re-ethnicization process of our participants during their high school and university days. These friendships provided them with emotional support, shared cultural experiences, and a profound sense of *jeong*, which significantly shaped their identity journeys. While parental influence occasionally acted as a barrier or facilitator in forming these friendships, participants ultimately exercised agency in building relationships that provided cultural validation and emotional security. Through these bonds, they rediscovered pride in their Korean heritage and cultivated resilience in navigating their bicultural identities.

In the next section, we will explore how participants’ engagement with Korean language and cultural practices further contributed to their re-ethnicization journey.

ENHANCING ETHNIC AND CULTURAL LITERACY

This section addresses two interconnected aspects of ethnic and cultural literacy: improved Korean language proficiency and increased engagement with Korean cultural practices and traditions. Through these processes, participants enhanced their linguistic and cultural capabilities and redefined their ethnic identity and sense of belonging within both Korean and New Zealand cultural spheres.

Improving Korean Language Skills

Language serves as both a practical tool for communication and a symbolic marker of identity. For Korean New Zealander youth, proficiency in Korean becomes an essential part of their re-ethnicization journey. While many participants experience a decline in their Korean fluency during their primary and intermediate school years—often due to prioritizing English for social and academic integration—their high school and university years provide renewed opportunities to reconnect with their heritage language.

For most participants, peer networks played a crucial role in this linguistic revival. Co-ethnic friendships created spaces where participants felt comfortable speaking Korean without fear of judgment or embarrassment.

This trajectory began to shift in high school and university, where frequent and authentic interactions with Korean-speaking peers created opportunities for participants to rebuild their language skills.

Reed, a second-generation male participant, shared:

When I was younger, my Korean wasn't great because I spoke mostly English with my Kiwi friends. But in high school, I started hanging out with other Korean kids. Some of them were international students who spoke Korean fluently. It became natural to speak Korean with them, and I realized my vocabulary and fluency were improving day by day [Reed, Case 1].

Additionally, parents and family environments continued to play a significant role in maintaining Korean language use at home. While some participants admitted to resisting their parents' insistence on speaking Korean as children, they later recognized the value of these efforts as they reconnected with their cultural roots.

Improving Literacy in Korean Culture

Cultural literacy encompasses the knowledge, practices, and values that connect individuals to their cultural heritage. For Korean New Zealander youth, cultural literacy often manifests through food, traditions, celebrations, and media consumption. These cultural practices become vital touchpoints in their re-ethnicization journey, fostering a deeper sense of belonging within both their ethnic community and the broader multicultural landscape of New Zealand.

Participants described moments of cultural engagement, such as attending cultural and social events organized by the Korean Student Association, having Korean-style drinking parties, and celebrating Chuseok (Korean Thanksgiving). These activities were not merely social—they became affirmations of participants' cultural pride and a means of connecting with their ethnic identity.

Meadow, a second-generation female participant, shared:

In high school, celebrating Chuseok with my Korean friends felt so meaningful. It reminded me of the traditions my parents always talked about, and it felt like a bridge between my home life and my friendships [Meadow, Case 14].

Interestingly, participants often described these moments as balancing acts between their Korean and Kiwi identities. While engaging deeply with Korean cultural practices, they also navigated their place in New Zealand

society. For many, cultural literacy became not only a tool for preserving heritage but also a means of explaining and sharing their culture with non-Korean peers.

Language, Korean TV Dramas, and Digital Tools: A Powerful Interplay

The role of digital platforms in enhancing cultural and language literacy cannot be overstated. For many participants, messaging apps like KakaoTalk became vital spaces for them to practice their Korean language skills in real-time conversations. Texting, voice notes, and group chats allowed participants to use Korean in informal and low-pressure contexts, making language practice feel natural and engaging.

Hazel reflected:

I would text my friends on KakaoTalk in Korean, and it felt casual but still helped me practice. It was different from speaking Korean at home—it felt more like I was part of a community [Hazel, Case 7].

Additionally, watching Korean TV dramas, movies, and reality shows functioned as learning tools for the Korean language and culture, allowing them to experience Korean cultural norms, language nuances, and contemporary societal values. A second-generation male participant, Oak, shared his experience:

Watching Korean dramas wasn’t just entertainment—it felt like I was learning something deeper about my parents’ culture, about traditions I didn’t grow up with [Oak, Case 17].

Fostering Belonging Through Cultural Literacy

The development of ethnic and cultural literacy played a profound role in fostering a sense of belonging for participants—both within the Korean community and in the broader New Zealand multicultural society. Participants reported feeling more confident in their identity as they became more proficient in the Korean language and culture. This confidence, in turn, allowed them to navigate dual cultural spaces more seamlessly.

For example, participants described how cultural literacy enabled them to share their Korean heritage with Kiwi peers, fostering mutual respect and reducing feelings of alienation.

Suzy shared:

When my Kiwi friends asked about Korean culture, I felt proud to explain it. It wasn't something I wanted to hide anymore—it felt like something I could share confidently [Suzy, Case 22].

This ability to bridge cultural gaps highlights the transformative power of cultural literacy—not just in preserving heritage, but also in building cross-cultural connections.

The re-ethnicization journey of Korean New Zealander youth was deeply intertwined with their language and cultural literacy development. Whether through informal conversations with co-ethnic friends, celebrations of cultural traditions, or engagement with digital platforms, participants used these tools to reconnect with their ethnic roots and confidently express their Korean identity.

Cultural literacy did not isolate participants from the broader New Zealand society. On the contrary, it became a bridge for cross-cultural dialog, enabling participants to share their heritage with pride while fostering meaningful relationships across cultural lines.

In the next section, we will explore how external contextual factors—including societal exclusion, digital tools, Hallyu, and multicultural policies—shaped participants' re-ethnicization experiences.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

The re-ethnicization process of newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth cannot be fully understood without considering the broader societal, cultural, and technological contexts that shape their experiences. Re-ethnicization is not an isolated phenomenon occurring solely at the individual or family level—it is deeply intertwined with structural and environmental factors, including societal attitudes, technological advancements, cultural trends, and demographic shifts in New Zealand. These external influences act as both catalysts and facilitators in participants' journeys of rediscovering and embracing their ethnic identity.

Participants' re-ethnicization experiences were shaped by four key contextual factors. First, early experiences of societal exclusion and subtle

racism during their primary and intermediate school years often triggered reflections on their Korean identity. Second, advancements in digital communication technologies allowed participants to connect with co-ethnic peers, access cultural content, and maintain their heritage language. Third, the global cultural phenomenon known as the Korean Wave (Hallyu) became a powerful source of ethnic pride and a bridge for cultural exchange. Finally, New Zealand’s increasingly multicultural society offered a supportive backdrop for participants to confidently express their ethnic identity and navigate their dual identities.

These factors did not operate independently but interacted dynamically to shape participants’ re-ethnicization trajectories. While experiences of exclusion pushed participants to reconnect with their cultural heritage, digital tools and Hallyu served as pathways for re-engagement, and New Zealand’s multicultural ethos provided an enabling environment. In the following subsections, we will examine each of these factors in detail, analyzing their roles and interconnections in shaping participants’ identity and sense of belonging.

Societal Exclusion and Racism

For many participants, experiences of societal exclusion and subtle racism during their formative years served as critical triggers in their re-ethnicization journey. Although New Zealand is often celebrated for its multicultural ethos, participants frequently encountered cultural prejudice, stereotypes, and microaggressions, particularly during their primary and intermediate school years. These early experiences left emotional scars but also set the stage for participants’ later reconnection with their Korean identity.

Participants recounted being mocked for their Korean lunch boxes, accented English, or cultural practices. While these incidents initially caused embarrassment or shame, they later became points of reflection and motivation for reconnecting with their roots. Hazel described her experience:

In primary school, I felt embarrassed when other kids made fun of my lunch or the way I spoke English. However, as I grew older, I realized those experiences made me value my Korean identity even more. It became something I wanted to protect and embrace [Hazel, Case 7].

However, not all participants responded to exclusion in the same way. Some withdrew further into assimilationist behaviors, while others sought comfort and validation in co-ethnic friendships or through engagement with Korean cultural content.

As participants matured, societal exclusion began to intersect with their growing awareness of structural inequalities and cultural stereotypes. Many participants reported feeling a renewed sense of ethnic pride as they became more aware of the systemic factors behind their earlier exclusionary experiences. These findings highlight the dual nature of societal exclusion—it acted both as a source of early alienation and as a long-term driver for cultural rediscovery.

Digital Tools and Connectivity

The rise of digital communication platforms has played a transformative role in participants' re-ethnicization experiences. The participants, as part of the millennial and Generation Z cohorts, grew up as digital natives, equipped with the skills and adaptability to navigate rapidly evolving technologies. Korean digital platforms such as BuddyBuddy, Cyworld, and KakaoTalk have become essential tools for connecting with co-ethnic peers, maintaining cultural literacy, and fostering online communities.

Aspen, a 1.5-generation male participant, remembered how he, as a high school student, was connected to Korean popular culture in the late 1990s, long before the advent of the Korean Wave in New Zealand:

That was right around the time the internet became widely available. Back then, I felt like I was living a very dual life. Outside, I was a typical Asian Kiwi. But as soon as I got home, I'd dive into Korean pop culture. I was into H.O.T. and Sechs Kies¹, searching for their photos online, listening to Korean music, and keeping up with what was trendy in Korea at the time [Aspen, Case 27].

In particular, messaging platforms like KakaoTalk served as emotional and linguistic lifelines for participants. These apps enabled Korean New Zealander youth to communicate with family, friends, and even peers in South Korea. Beyond linguistic practice, these interactions reinforced participants' cultural connections in an informal and accessible environment.

¹ Both H.O.T. and Sechs Kies were boy groups popular in South Korea in the late 1990s.

Hazel shared:

KakaoTalk was more than just a messaging app. It was where I could speak freely in Korean without worrying about being judged [Hazel, Case 7].

Digital forums and social media platforms also became safe spaces for cultural exchange, where participants could share experiences, seek advice, and engage with Korean diasporic communities across the globe.

From K-dramas to K-pop performances, these platforms provided immersive experiences that went beyond simple entertainment. Participants described how consuming Korean media deepened their cultural knowledge, improved their language skills, and even influenced their interactions with Kiwi peers.

Oak explained:

Korean dramas weren't just about entertainment—they taught me about cultural traditions, family dynamics, and societal values that my parents often talked about but couldn't fully explain [Oak, Case 17].

The intersection between digital platforms and Hallyu cannot be overstated. For many participants, their initial exposure to Hallyu came through streaming platforms, sparking further interest in Korean culture and identity.

The Influence of the Korean Wave

The global phenomenon of Hallyu became a catalyst for re-ethnicization, reshaping participants' self-perceptions and influencing how others viewed Korean culture. From K-pop idols to blockbuster Korean films, Hallyu created an environment where Korean identity was not only normalized but also celebrated.

Hallyu as a Source of Pride

For many participants, Hallyu instilled a sense of ethnic pride that counteracted earlier feelings of cultural embarrassment or alienation. The global popularity of BTS, Blackpink, and Korean films such as *Parasite* made participants feel that their cultural background was admired rather than stigmatized. Spruce, a second-generation male participant, shared:

When BTS became global superstars, it felt like a win for all Koreans. People at school started asking me about Korean culture with genuine curiosity [Spruce, Case 20].

Bridging Cultural Gaps

Hallyu also acted as a cross-cultural bridge, allowing participants to share their Korean heritage with Kiwi peers. This phenomenon helped reshape classroom dynamics, as Korean culture became “cool” and mainstream. For participants who had once hidden their cultural identity, Hallyu provided newfound confidence to celebrate their Korean heritage openly.

The global rise of Hallyu emerged as a cultural force that reshaped participants’ ethnic pride and societal perceptions of Korean identity. The international popularity of K-pop, Korean dramas (K-dramas), and Korean cuisine transformed the global image of Korea, and its ripple effects were deeply felt by participants in New Zealand.

Spruce, a second-generation male student, reflected:

When I was in high school, K-pop became really popular. My classmates would ask me about Korean culture and music, and I felt proud to be Korean. It was the first time I felt like my culture was something others admired [Spruce, Case 20].

The visibility and popularity of Korean culture provided participants with a renewed sense of pride in their heritage. Beyond individual experiences, Hallyu also contributed to changing societal attitudes in New Zealand. Participants noticed increased curiosity and admiration for Korean culture among their non-Korean peers, which created opportunities for cultural dialog and mutual respect.

For many participants, Hallyu served as both a bridge and a cultural equalizer, allowing them to celebrate their Korean heritage openly while also sharing it with others.

Multiculturalism in New Zealand

New Zealand’s evolving multicultural landscape has provided an enabling backdrop for participants to confidently express their Korean identity. Over the last two decades, increasing immigration and multicultural policies have fostered greater acceptance of cultural diversity within society.

Institutional and Social Support

Many participants observed changes in school environments, such as multicultural festivals, ethnic student clubs, and greater visibility of minority cultures in school curricula. These platforms created opportunities for participants to express their dual identities without fear of marginalization. Suzy reflected:

When our school organized a multicultural day, I felt proud wearing a hanbok. It was a moment where I could represent my culture confidently [Suzy, Case 22].

Intersection With Other Minority Groups

Participants also described shared experiences with other minority groups, particularly Māori and Pasifika peers. These interactions fostered mutual respect and solidarity, creating spaces where cultural identities were celebrated collectively rather than in isolation.

The re-ethnicization journey of Korean New Zealander youth was deeply shaped by societal exclusion, digital platforms, the global influence of Hallyu, and New Zealand’s multicultural ethos. These factors did not operate in isolation but intersected dynamically, reinforcing one another in shaping participants’ experiences.

Societal exclusion acted as a catalyst, pushing participants to rediscover their roots. Digital tools provided platforms for connection and cultural engagement. Hallyu reshaped self-perceptions and cultural pride.

Multicultural policies offer spaces for confident self-expression.

Together, these factors created an environment where participants could navigate their dual identities with agency and resilience.

In the following section, we will examine the psychological, social, and cultural implications of re-ethnicization on participants’ well-being and identity development.

IMPLICATIONS OF RE-ETHNICIZATION

The re-ethnicization process of newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth extends beyond individual identity formation, influencing their psychological well-being, social relationships, and integration into both ethnic and national communities. This section examines three key dimensions of re-ethnicization: psychological and social benefits, the role of

ethnic community-building and cross-cultural understanding, and the challenges participants face while navigating dual identities.

While the process brought considerable emotional and social rewards, it was not without its complexities. Participants had to carefully balance their renewed engagement with their Korean identity against their place in New Zealand's multicultural society. These outcomes reveal that re-ethnicization is not a passive or one-dimensional phenomenon, but a dynamic and nuanced process shaped by internal and external forces.

Psychological and Social Benefits of Re-Ethnicization

The process of re-ethnicization brought significant psychological and social benefits to Korean New Zealander youth. Participants frequently described a renewed sense of emotional well-being, confidence, and self-esteem as they embraced their Korean identity during their high school and university years. Many participants highlighted the relief and sense of belonging they experienced through co-ethnic friendships and shared cultural practices. These relationships offered spaces of emotional safety, where participants felt accepted and validated without the need to constantly explain or justify their cultural practices.

Hazel reflected:

For the first time, I didn't feel like I had to hide parts of myself. With my Korean friends, everything felt so natural—I could speak Korean, share food, and just be myself without hesitation [Hazel, Case 7].

The psychological benefits extended beyond friendships and social circles. Participants described how reconnecting with their ethnic heritage improved their resilience against societal pressures and microaggressions. They gained a deeper sense of self-worth and cultural pride, which helped them better navigate the challenges of being a visible ethnic minority in New Zealand.

At the social level, participants became more comfortable navigating dual cultural spaces, developing strategies to balance Korean cultural expectations at home with the social norms of Kiwi society. These strategies included code-switching between languages, adapting behavior depending on social contexts, and strategically presenting aspects of their identity based on the situation.

A second-generation male participant, Reed described:

At home, I'd speak Korean and follow all the cultural traditions. But when I was out with my Kiwi friends, I'd switch to English and adapt to their way of doing things. Over time, it just became second nature [Reed, Case 1].

This ability to negotiate cultural expectations demonstrates participants' adaptability and resilience in maintaining both their Korean and Kiwi identities without feeling compelled to choose one over the other.

Building Stronger Ethnic Communities and Cross-Cultural Understanding

The process of re-ethnicization also contributed significantly to building stronger ethnic communities and fostering cross-cultural understanding among participants. Through shared experiences, cultural practices, and engagement with Korean cultural events, participants created informal support networks that extended beyond high school and university.

These ethnic communities became spaces for mentorship, cultural exchange, and collective identity affirmation. Participants described how they took active roles in organizing cultural events, supporting younger members of their community, and educating Kiwi peers about Korean culture.

Suzy shared:

When I joined our university's Korean Student Association, it felt like I became part of something bigger. We weren't just sharing our culture—we were building a community where everyone felt included [Suzy, Case 22].

Importantly, these ethnic networks did not lead to social isolation. Instead, participants described how their strengthened cultural identity allowed them to engage more confidently in cross-cultural interactions. They reported feeling proud to share their Korean heritage with Kiwi friends, fostering mutual respect and curiosity across cultural boundaries.

For example, a second-generation female participant, Petal, said that she learned the importance of remembering ancestry from her Māori friends, which connected her to Māori people and culture. She contemplates:

I am a Korean and our mother country is always going to be Korea. That's something that I've begun to acknowledge as my whakapapa, like Māori people do. I think there's that similarity between Māori culture and Korean cultures, that we should be proud of our ancestors and where we come from and acknowledge that [Petal, Case 24].

In addition, some participants became cultural ambassadors in their schools and communities, introducing peers to Korean food, music, and traditions. These interactions not only enriched participants' own cultural pride but also contributed to broader societal acceptance of Korean identity in New Zealand.

Challenges or Tensions in Navigating Dual Identities

While the benefits of re-ethnicization are clear, the process was not without its challenges. Some participants expressed concerns about becoming overly immersed in their Korean identity, fearing it might limit their engagement with non-Korean peers or hinder their broader cultural integration.

Elm, a 1.5-generation participant, shared:

At one point, I realized I was spending most of my time with Korean friends, and I started to wonder if I was losing touch with my Kiwi friends. I also noticed my English wasn't improving as much as it could have [Elm, Case 25].

These reflections highlight the delicate balance participants had to strike between embracing their Korean identity and maintaining meaningful connections with the broader Kiwi community. In this regard, it would be inaccurate to frame this process as a form of cultural "separation" (Berry, 1997). Participants overwhelmingly rejected ethnocentric or isolationist attitudes. Instead, their re-ethnicization can be better understood as a process of integration—one that allowed them to embrace their Korean heritage without rejecting New Zealand culture.

Participants also expressed discomfort with both extremes of cultural expression—those they referred to as "FOB" (Fresh Off the Boat) peers, who were seen as overly rooted in Korean traditions, and "white-washed"

peers, who had entirely assimilated into Kiwi culture. This nuanced approach underscores the participants’ active agency in navigating and defining their bicultural identities.

CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the process of re-ethnicization among newer-generation Korean New Zealander youth, highlighting how participants rediscovered and redefined their ethnic identity through social connections, cultural engagement, and broader contextual influences. This process was not merely reactive but also reflected participants’ agency and resilience in balancing their Korean heritage with their Kiwi upbringing.

Co-ethnic friendships emerged as a cornerstone of re-ethnicization, providing participants with emotional support, cultural validation, and spaces for authentic self-expression. Through these friendships, participants found warmth (*jeong*), shared experiences, and a renewed connection to their ethnic identity.

The chapter also highlighted the enhancement of cultural and language literacy as participants re-engaged with the Korean language and cultural traditions. This engagement was fostered by interactions with co-ethnic peers, Korean media consumption, and participation in community activities, contributing to a stronger sense of ethnic pride.

Contextual factors played a critical role in shaping re-ethnicization. Societal exclusion and subtle racism often acted as triggers, while digital tools like KakaoTalk enabled connection and cultural exchange. The Korean Wave (Hallyu) became a source of pride and a bridge for cross-cultural dialog, while New Zealand’s multicultural ethos provided an environment where participants could confidently express their dual identities.

The implications of re-ethnicization were significant, resulting in improved self-esteem, emotional resilience, and a balanced sense of identity. Participants also contributed to ethnic community-building and fostered cross-cultural understanding, challenging simplistic notions of assimilation or separation. However, re-ethnicization was not a universal experience. Some participants followed different pathways, including assimilation or separation, shaped by individual contexts and choices. In the next chapter, we will explore these alternative acculturation strategies, analyzing how participants who took different paths navigated their identities and relationships within New Zealand’s multicultural society.

In closing, the proposed model of re-ethnicization offers a coherent framework to understand the identity development of the newer generation of Korean New Zealanders. In the first stage, many young Koreans experienced structural and emotional dislocations, such as subtle racism, lack of cultural representation, or tensions within intergenerational family dynamics, which led them to question dominant Pākehā norms and the adequacy of a purely mainstream Kiwi identity. In the second stage, they actively re-engaged with Korean cultural resources, including K-pop, Korean language classes, church communities, and digital diasporic spaces, using them as tools to explore and reframe their sense of ethnic belonging. In the third stage, this process culminated in a more reflective and hybridized identity—one that embraces being both Korean and New Zealander, often with a strong sense of transnational connectedness and cultural agency. These stages reveal that re-ethnicization among Korean New Zealanders is not simply a reaction to marginalization, but a creative and strategic negotiation of identity within a multicultural and bicultural national context.

While this chapter has focused on the dominant pattern of re-ethnicization among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders, it is important to acknowledge that identity formation does not follow a singular path. Not all individuals embrace a hybrid or bicultural identity; instead, some actively distance themselves from Korean heritage, while others intensify their ethnic orientation with minimal engagement in mainstream society. These contrasting trajectories—often labeled “white-washed” and “FOB”—reveal the complexity and diversity of acculturation strategies within the same community. The next chapter turns to these lesser-represented yet equally significant subgroups, exploring how their distinct identity choices further illuminate the nuanced and contested terrain of belonging, authenticity, and cultural negotiation in multicultural New Zealand.

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Diverse and Complex Acculturation Strategies: “White-Washed” and “FOB” Koreans

Abstract This chapter explores diverse acculturation strategies among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders by focusing on two minority subgroups—assimilationists (“white-washed”) and separatists (“FOB Koreans”). Unlike early assimilation shaped by necessity, these later identity paths reflect conscious choices during high school and university. Assimilationists distance themselves from Korean culture to integrate into mainstream society, while separatists maintain strong ethnic ties and limit cross-cultural interaction. Positioned by the re-ethnicized majority as cultural outsiders, both subgroups complicate binary understandings of identity. Notably, many identify more with non-Korean Asian New Zealanders, suggesting that cultural orientation, not just ethnicity, defines belonging. This chapter highlights intra-ethnic diversity and the nuanced ways identity is negotiated across generational, social, and cultural contexts.

Keywords Assimilationists · Separatists · Acculturation strategies · Identity negotiation · Intra-ethnic diversity · Intra-ethnic othering · Cultural hybridity

DIVERSE ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES

The previous chapter examined the re-ethnicization phenomenon among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders, illustrating how most individuals rediscovered and embraced their Korean heritage after an initial period of assimilation during their early schooling years in New Zealand. While this may suggest a structured transition pattern from early assimilation to re-ethnicization, the reality is far more diverse and complex. Not all individuals follow this trajectory; instead, they adopt different acculturation pathways shaped by personal experiences, structural factors, and broader sociocultural contexts.

This chapter focuses on two minority subgroups that diverge from the re-ethnicization (or “integration” in Berry’s framework) trend: assimilationists and separatists. Unlike early-schooling assimilation, which often stems from necessity (as discussed in Chap. 4), the assimilationists in this chapter actively choose to align with the dominant culture in adulthood. These individuals distance themselves from Korean cultural practices and co-ethnic networks, often earning the label “white-washed” from their re-ethnicized peers. In contrast, separatists—sometimes referred to as “FOB Koreans” (or “Korean Koreans”)—maintain strong cultural and linguistic ties to their Korean heritage, limiting their engagement with mainstream New Zealand society. Within the New Zealand Korean community, separatists are primarily Korean international students, although some long-term Korean immigrants maintain similar patterns of ethnic retention.

Using Berry’s (1992) acculturation framework and Portes and Zhou’s (1993) segmented assimilation theory, this chapter examines these two subgroups’ adaptation strategies and their position within the broader Korean New Zealander community. Re-ethnicized individuals often distance themselves from both groups, critiquing assimilationists for abandoning their Korean identity and separatists for cultural insularity. However, rather than strictly aligning with either approach, the re-ethnicized majority seeks to integrate both Korean and New Zealand cultures, cultivating a hybrid identity as “Korean Kiwis” or “Asian Kiwis.” This demonstrates that social belonging and cultural orientation, rather than ethnicity alone, shape identity and group affiliations. Beyond categorizing these subgroups, this chapter also analyzes intra-group interactions, particularly how the re-ethnicized majority perceives and engages with assimilationists and separatists. In doing

so, this chapter challenges traditional binary views of assimilation and separation, illustrating how cultural adaptation is a fluid and dynamic process that extends beyond childhood acculturation into adulthood identity negotiations.

Theoretical Perspectives on Diverse Acculturation and Subgroup Dynamics

A comprehensive understanding of the diverse acculturation strategies among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders requires multiple theoretical perspectives. While Berry's (1992) acculturation framework and Portes and Zhou's (1993) segmented assimilation theory provide essential models for analyzing adaptation patterns, they do not fully account for intra-ethnic subgroup tensions and hybrid identity formations. To address this gap, this chapter also incorporates Pyke and Dang's (2003) concept of intra-ethnic "othering" and Bhabha's (1994) theory of cultural hybridity, offering more profound insights into subgroup interactions and identity negotiations.

Acculturation Framework and Segmented Assimilation

Berry's acculturation framework categorizes adaptation strategies into assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. In this model, assimilationists ("white-washed") align with the dominant culture while minimizing their Korean identity, whereas separatists ("FOB Koreans" or "Korean Koreans") maintain strong ethnic ties while distancing themselves from mainstream New Zealand society. Peer networks, socialization experiences, and external pressures in both ethnic and mainstream settings shape these responses.

Segmented assimilation theory expands this understanding by emphasizing structural factors—such as societal reception, economic mobility, and access to co-ethnic resources—in shaping adaptation outcomes. According to this perspective, assimilationists pursue upward assimilation, often shedding ethnic markers to achieve social mobility and greater acceptance in mainstream society. In contrast, separatists actively preserve Korean cultural traditions while resisting full integration, relying more on ethnic networks. Meanwhile, the re-ethnicized majority selectively embraces Korean culture while simultaneously adapting to aspects of New Zealand society, constructing a hybrid identity as "Korean Kiwis" or "Asian Kiwis."

Socioeconomic status also plays a role in shaping these identity strategies. Research indicates that Korean immigrants in New Zealand are highly educated but often experience downward mobility due to language barriers and credential recognition issues (Lee & Vaydich, 2020). These structural constraints influence acculturation trajectories in different ways. Assimilationists may prioritize economic success by fully integrating into Kiwi professional networks, while separatists may rely on Korean community businesses and ethnic support systems to maintain economic stability. Meanwhile, re-ethnicized individuals often pursue alternative pathways, balancing mainstream professional opportunities with ethnic heritage engagement.

While these frameworks explain acculturation patterns, they do not fully address internal divisions within the Korean New Zealander community, requiring additional theoretical lenses to understand intra-group identity dynamics.

Intra-Ethnic Othering and Boundary-Making

Pyke and Dang's (2003) concept of intra-ethnic othering helps explain how re-ethnicized individuals position their co-ethnic assimilationists and separatists as the "Other." By critiquing both assimilationist and separatist co-ethnics, the re-ethnicized majority reinforces internal cultural hierarchies and delineates what it means to be a "Korean Kiwi" in a multicultural New Zealand context.

Labels such as "white-washed" and "FOB Koreans" function as mechanisms of identity policing, shaping how individuals evaluate cultural authenticity within their ethnic group. The re-ethnicized cohort distances itself from assimilationists for "abandoning" Korean culture while also distinguishing itself from separatists for "failing" to adapt to New Zealand society. This dynamic reflects broader boundary-making processes, wherein ethnic communities establish internal cultural distinctions to define group belonging (Tuan, 1998).

Bhabha's (1994) cultural hybridity theory provides further insight into how re-ethnicized Korean New Zealanders negotiate these internal divisions. Rather than adopting a single cultural identity, they operate within a "third space," simultaneously engaging with both Korean and Kiwi cultural spheres. This hybrid positioning allows them to challenge rigid identity categories, reinforcing the idea that ethnic belonging is a fluid and negotiated process rather than a fixed trait.

By integrating these perspectives, this chapter demonstrates that acculturation is not simply a matter of assimilation or separation but rather a dynamic process involving intra-ethnic negotiations, cultural boundary-making, and hybrid identity formation.

UNDERSTANDING ASSIMILATIONISTS: THE “WHITE-WASHED” IDENTITY

As discussed in the previous chapters, the acculturation process among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders is far from uniform. While the majority experience re-ethnicization in their young adulthood, embracing their Korean heritage after an early assimilation phase, a smaller number follow a distinct trajectory of continued assimilation into the dominant culture. These individuals, often labeled “white-washed” by their co-ethnics, actively minimize or reject their Korean identity in favor of full integration into mainstream New Zealand society (Berry, 1992).

Unlike the early-schooling assimilation discussed in Chap. 4, which was often driven by necessity (e.g., language acquisition, social adaptation in school settings), the assimilation examined in this chapter reflects conscious identity choices made in young adulthood and beyond. While re-ethnicized individuals reconnect with their Korean heritage, assimilationists deliberately distance themselves from it, prioritizing social and cultural integration into the host society.

This group was relatively small among our participants—only four out of thirty appeared to fit the assimilationist profile. However, it is important to note that assimilationists may be less inclined to participate in research on ethnic identity, as their lack of engagement with co-ethnic culture may discourage them from discussing these topics. Our interviews provided valuable insights into their motivations, adaptation strategies, and social perceptions. Additionally, secondary school teachers among our participants shared their observations of assimilationist students, and previous research on Korean New Zealander youth (Kitchen, 2014; Tan, 2008) further contextualizes their experiences.

Adaptation Strategies: Distancing From Co-Ethnics

Assimilationists prioritize integration into mainstream New Zealand society, distancing themselves from Korean cultural markers and co-ethnic

networks. Their adaptation strategies typically involve minimizing their use of the Korean language and cultural practices, socializing primarily with non-Korean peers, and expressing discomfort with Korean hierarchical norms and group-based socialization. Additionally, they may critique co-ethnics for insularity, lack of cultural awareness, or perceived behavioral shortcomings.

Discomfort With Korean Cultural Practices

One recurring theme in assimilationists' narratives is their discomfort with Korean social norms, particularly hierarchical structures based on age and status. They also express frustration with what they perceive as negative behaviors among their co-ethnics, such as gossiping (backbiting), peer pressure, and exclusivity within ethnic circles.

Several studies suggest that Korean immigrant communities often struggle with internal trust issues (Kim, 2018; Kang et al., 2015; Park, 2020), leading some members to avoid intra-ethnic relationships altogether. This pattern is also evident in New Zealand, where Korean New Zealanders report that co-ethnic friendships can be profoundly supportive but also fraught with conflict (Park, 2020).

Ivy, a 1.5-generation Korean New Zealander, reflects on her reluctance to associate with other Korean students due to perceived negative social behaviors:

Back then, I was embarrassed to be Korean. If a chubby kid walked by, Korean kids would call them a pig in Korean. I understood what they were saying, but when I challenged them, they'd snap at me—"Don't act like you know everything." I was so embarrassed. I kept thinking—"Is this what Korean culture is?" Why don't they just say it in English? Why whisper in Korean and giggle about it? It was humiliating. Because of this, I never called myself Korean—I just told everyone I was a Kiwi [Ivy, Case 26].

Parental Influence on Socialization Choices

Some assimilationists inherit negative perceptions of co-ethnics from their parents, who actively discourage them from socializing with other Koreans. This reflects a broader generational pattern, where some first-generation Korean immigrants view co-ethnic social groups as problematic or counterproductive to social mobility. For instance, Rose, a second-generation university student, shares how her mother's views shaped her social preferences:

My mom preferred that I spend time with non-Korean friends rather than Korean ones. She believed that when Korean kids stuck together, they just hung out at pool halls, smoked, and drank. She seemed to think they were troublemakers, so she told me to avoid Koreans like that [Rose, Case 29].

Motivations: Social Mobility and the Desire to Fit In

Several key factors motivate assimilationists to prioritize cultural integration over ethnic retention. These include aspirations for social mobility and career advancement, a desire to avoid racial discrimination and social exclusion, and peer pressure to conform to dominant cultural norms.

Economic and Social Pressures

According to segmented assimilation theory (Portes & Zhou, 1993), second-generation immigrants often strategically adopt mainstream cultural practices to improve their educational and career prospects. Research on Asian immigrants in New Zealand reveals that many face racial stereotyping, employment discrimination, and cultural barriers in professional settings (Ip, 2003; Spoonley, 2015). As a result, some individuals suppress their ethnic identity to improve their chances of success in a predominantly white society.

Lily, a high school teacher, describes how high-achieving Korean students often avoid co-ethnic associations to facilitate social integration:

At my school, Korean students who excel academically and take on leadership roles tend not to associate with other Koreans. They don't participate in Korean cultural activities—they integrate fully into Kiwi society instead [Lily, Case 9].

Some wish to participate not just in the dominant culture but also in the multicultural atmosphere of the host society. A New Zealand researcher, who observed Korean students in New Zealand schools in the early 2010s, explained how those Korean students who adopted an assimilationist strategy wished to be included in the multicultural settings of their adopted home (Kitchen, 2014):

Jade explained that she took deliberate steps to be included. She did not identify herself as Korean. If someone speaks to her in Korean, she replies in English because she believes it is rude to speak in a minority language when

speakers of other languages are around. She valued talk in English, viewing it as the lingua franca; however, English cultural assimilation is not the whole picture for Jade. She emphasized that she liked to mix with students from other cultures because she valued learning about other cultures—as long as the talk was in English. Participation in the mainstream for Jade was in a multicultural setting, but English was the language her multicultural peers used (Kitchen, 2014: 560).

Perceived Barriers to Integration: The Role of Religion

Some assimilationists view strong ethnic networks—such as Korean churches—as barriers to integration. While Korean churches serve as important social hubs for the broader Korean community, some participants feel that such tight-knit ethnic groups hinder cultural adaptation.

One of the common stereotypes about Koreans is that they are very religious and involved in Korean churches. For some, it's a positive experience. But in terms of integrating into Kiwi society, I think it's a barrier. Interestingly, Koreans who don't associate much with their co-ethnics tend not to attend Korean churches. They go to Kiwi churches instead [Lily, Case 9].

Consequences: Racialized Identity Struggles and Social Exclusion

Although assimilation can offer short-term social and professional advantages, it often comes with emotional and psychological costs. These may include internalized racism and identity struggles, social exclusion from both co-ethnics and the dominant society, and experiences of racialized exclusion. Many assimilationists experience internalized racism, wherein they unconsciously adopt negative stereotypes about their ethnic group to fit into the dominant culture (Pyke & Dang, 2003). However, despite their efforts, they may still face racial barriers that prevent full acceptance into mainstream society.

River, a 1.5-generation male, describes his shock and pain upon realizing that white students at the university still viewed him as “Asian” rather than Kiwi:

I grew up in a small town among Pākehā and Māori, so I always considered myself a Kiwi. But at university, I quickly realized that white students avoided me—they saw me as just another Asian. I spoke fluent English, I understood New Zealand culture, but that didn't matter. They still didn't see me as one of them. It was deeply shocking and painful [River, Case 5].

This reinforces the paradox of assimilation, where even well-integrated minorities face exclusion based on racial appearance (Alba & Nee, 2003). This chapter highlights how assimilation is not a linear path to inclusion—it is fraught with complex negotiations of identity, belonging, and social acceptance.

UNDERSTANDING SEPARATISTS: THE “FOB KOREAN” IDENTITY

The separatist subgroup among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders consists of individuals who prioritize ethnic retention over cultural integration, actively preserving their traditional values, language, and community networks. Unlike assimilationists, who seek to minimize their Korean identity, separatists embrace their Korean heritage and maintain strong ties to Korean cultural practices. They primarily socialize within Korean community spaces, speak Korean in daily interactions, and engage with Korean media, traditions, and social norms.

Separatists often form ethnic enclaves, creating close-knit Korean friendship groups, attending Korean churches, and supporting Korean-run businesses. These social networks foster cultural continuity and provide a sense of belonging but limit engagement with mainstream New Zealand society. For many separatists, New Zealand is seen as a temporary living space rather than a permanent home, with Korea remaining their primary cultural reference point.

Motivations for Separation

Several key factors drive separatists to prioritize ethnic retention over mainstream integration. These include resistance to assimilation pressures and a preference for cultural continuity, experiences of racism and micro-aggressions that reinforce a sense of exclusion, the comfort and familiarity of co-ethnic communities, and the belief that New Zealand is a temporary stop rather than a long-term home.

As seen in the concept of reactive ethnicity (Rumbaut, 2008), some individuals respond to exclusion by strengthening their ethnic identity. The Korean community provides these individuals with essential social, emotional, and economic support, compensating for the lack of full acceptance in mainstream New Zealand society.

While some separatists may adopt ethnic retention as a response to exclusion or marginalization, for others, this path reflects a proactive and affirming cultural choice. Rather than viewing separatism solely through the lens of resistance or failure to adapt, it is important to recognize that many individuals feel a deep sense of pride in their Korean heritage and choose to live in alignment with Korean values, language, and social norms. These choices are not necessarily oppositional to integration but reflect a prioritization of cultural authenticity and continuity.

For example, some Korean international students maintain strong ties with Korea not because they reject New Zealand society, but because they view their time abroad as temporary or transitional. Their emphasis on Korean community spaces can stem from a desire to retain cultural fluency and relational networks, which are vital for future reintegration into Korean society. Others may find personal comfort and emotional safety in ethnically familiar environments, where social expectations, humor, and communication styles feel intuitive. For these individuals, co-ethnic spaces provide not only support but also a sense of belonging that is difficult to replicate elsewhere.

In some cases, nationalism or cultural pride also plays a role. A few participants expressed admiration for Korea's global cultural influence—through K-pop, technology, and cuisine—and viewed their cultural maintenance as a way of asserting identity with a rising global power. Rather than retreating from modernity or global engagement, these separatists saw themselves as confidently Korean in an increasingly interconnected world. This perspective underscores that ethnic retention can be a strategic, empowered stance rather than a passive result of marginalization.

Separatists in the Context of the Korean New Zealand Community

In New Zealand's Korean community, separatists are typically Korean international students who arrive for temporary study. However, strong separatist cases were largely absent among our participants. This absence is primarily due to our selection criteria, which focused on newer-generation Korean New Zealanders who had spent at least a few years in New Zealand's primary or secondary education system. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, most international students could not enter the country, limiting our ability to include them in the study.

We acknowledge that excluding Korean international students is a limitation of this study. However, to compensate for this gap, we draw on existing research on Korean international students in New Zealand, including Collins (2010) and Lawrence and Yoon (2016). Additionally, while our participants were not international students, many shared their perceptions and experiences interacting with this group, even though their views were often critical or skeptical. By incorporating both secondary research and participant observations, we aim to provide a contextually informed understanding of separatist identity formation.

The Experiences of Korean International Students in New Zealand

Since the mid-1990s, New Zealand has been a popular study destination for Korean international students. At its peak in the early 2000s, their numbers approached 10,000 (Figure.NZ, 2024). However, their numbers have fluctuated, declining steadily since the mid-2000s before experiencing a recent resurgence. Today, South Korea remains one of the top five countries of origin for international students in New Zealand (ICEF Monitor, 2024).

Unlike locally raised Korean New Zealanders, who have spent years integrating through the local education system, Korean international students experience different acculturation. Their temporary status, linguistic barriers, and cultural separation shape their experiences, often reinforcing a sense of marginalization and exclusion.

Feelings of Isolation and Estrangement

Many Korean international students report feeling detached from mainstream New Zealand society. According to Collins (2010), these students often experience negative interactions with locals, contributing to their sense of social exclusion. One participant in Collins's study described his experiences (Collins, 2010, p. 53):

These feelings [of estrangement] are exacerbated in Auckland's urban environment by encounters with the host population that are frequently negative.

In addition to general exclusion, many Korean international students experience racial discrimination. Collins (2010) found that every participant in his study had experienced at least one instance of verbal or physical

racism while in Auckland. This aligns with broader research indicating that visible minorities often feel that “one’s body (and voice) is out of place, that one does not belong in this space” (Ahmed, 2000, as cited in Collins, 2010, p. 53).

Linguistic and Cultural Barriers

Language barriers also hinder integration. Lawrence and Yoon (2016) found that many Korean international students arrived in New Zealand expecting to form friendships with locals but struggled due to linguistic and cultural differences. One participant, Susan, described her frustration:

I had a problem speaking with other people. Also, I felt that many people had a problem speaking with me as an Asian person. That kind of experience made me feel embarrassed and awkward. And even at times humiliated (Lawrence & Yoon, 2016, p. 18)

Additionally, many students struggled with New Zealand’s English accent, as they were more familiar with American English in Korea. This linguistic challenge further distanced them from meaningful social interactions, reinforcing their preference for Korean-speaking peer groups.

Reliance on Ethnic Networks and Digital Communities

In response to these challenges, Korean international students form close-knit ethnic communities, using them as support networks for emotional well-being, practical assistance, and social belonging. These friendship networks, known as *inmaek* in Korean, serve as crucial support systems, helping students navigate housing, transportation, and daily struggles (Collins, 2010, p. 54).

Three Korean female students formed an inseparable friendship, helping each other through homesickness, isolation, and racism (Collins, 2010, p. 55).

Beyond in-person friendships, online platforms play a critical role in maintaining a sense of connection. According to Collins (2010), over 90% of Korean international students in Auckland use the internet weekly,

with more than 50% spending over five hours per week online. Korean websites such as Daum and Cyworld¹ provide virtual spaces where students share information, seek advice, and maintain cultural continuity, alleviating their isolation.

Cultural Differences: Separatists Vs. Korean Kiwis

While Korean international students and locally raised Korean New Zealanders share an ethnic heritage, they often experience social distance due to cultural and behavioral differences.

Perceived Social and Cultural Differences

Many Korean New Zealanders perceive international students as socially insular, preferring to stay within Korean-only circles. Some participants attribute this to South Korea's education system, which they believe fosters a parochial mindset that does not encourage global perspectives.

Additionally, Korean New Zealanders commonly associate international students with heavy drinking, nightlife, and various leisure activities that do not align with their own upbringing and social norms.

Korean international students partied like crazy. They swore a lot, drank excessively, and behaved in ways we weren't used to [Jo, Case 18].

Similarly, participants noted that international students often upheld Korea's rigid age-based hierarchy, which locally raised Korean New Zealanders found unnecessary and uncomfortable.

I feel more comfortable with Korean Kiwis than with 'real' Koreans from Korea. When I'm with Kiwis, it's not uncomfortable, but it's also not completely comfortable. But with Korean Kiwis, I don't have to explain myself—we just get each other [Cedar, Case 12].

These findings illustrate that shared social experiences, rather than ethnicity alone, shape belonging among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders.

¹ One of the early South Korean social network services launched in 1999.

INTRA-ETHNIC SUBGROUP RELATIONS: OTHERING AND “ETHNICITY” IN RE-ETHNICIZATION

While assimilationists and separatists adopt contrasting acculturation strategies, both groups are often positioned as the “Other” by the re-ethnicized majority among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. This integrated cohort actively participates in both Korean and Kiwi cultural spaces, forming a hybrid identity that distinguishes them from their assimilationist and separatist counterparts. Their ability to navigate both cultural spheres enables them to maintain their Korean heritage while integrating into New Zealand society, positioning them between the extremes of assimilation and separation.

This section explores how re-ethnicized individuals perceive assimilationists and separatists, highlighting the internal differentiation, identity policing, and cultural negotiations that shape intra-ethnic relations. These perspectives demonstrate that ethnic identity is not merely inherited but rather actively constructed through social positioning, cultural orientation, and lived experiences.

The Positioning of Assimilationists and Separatists as the “Other”

Re-ethnicized Korean New Zealanders often critique assimilationists for rejecting Korean heritage and separatists for their cultural insularity. This internal differentiation highlights how cultural engagement, rather than shared ancestry alone, determines social belonging in multicultural settings.

Assimilationists, frequently labeled “white-washed,” are perceived as abandoning their Korean identity to conform to mainstream New Zealand culture. Many re-ethnicized individuals view their assimilationist peers as actively distancing themselves from Korean heritage, often minimizing cultural markers such as language, traditions, and social networks. Some assimilationists even discourage associations with other Koreans to avoid being perceived as foreign. This aligns with research on internalized racism, which suggests that some minorities adopt dominant cultural norms to escape racialized stigmas (Pyke & Dang, 2003).

Conversely, separatists, often referred to as “FOB Koreans,” are seen as resistant to cultural adaptation, maintaining strong ethnic ties at the expense of integration into New Zealand society. Re-ethnicized

individuals often express frustration at the social and cultural rigidity of separatists, believing that their insular behaviors reinforce ethnic stereotypes and limit their ability to engage with broader social environments. Unlike assimilationists, who over-adapt, separatists are perceived as rejecting adaptation altogether, thereby reinforcing their social exclusion from mainstream society (Tuan, 1998).

The positioning of these two subgroups as oppositional identities reveals that ethnic belonging is not a fixed state but rather a fluid process shaped by cultural orientation, social affiliations, and perceptions of group authenticity. The re-ethnicized majority, while embracing their Korean heritage, defines itself in contrast to both assimilationists and separatists, reinforcing its own hybrid identity.

Identity Policing: The Role of Labels Like “White-Washed” and “FOB”

One of the most prominent ways intra-ethnic subgroup relations manifest is through identity policing, where community members impose cultural hierarchies by labeling individuals based on their perceived level of cultural authenticity. Pyke and Dang’s (2003) theory of intra-ethnic othering explains how minority communities create internal boundaries, categorizing individuals as either too assimilated or too ethnic.

The term “white-washed” is applied to those who are perceived as assimilating too much, distancing themselves from Korean identity in an attempt to blend into mainstream New Zealand culture. This label often carries negative connotations within the Korean community, implying that assimilationists have betrayed their ethnic roots in pursuit of social acceptance. Conversely, “FOB” (Fresh Off the Boat) describes individuals who retain strong ethnic ties and resist cultural adaptation. This term is commonly directed at recently arrived Korean international students, reinforcing their perceived social and cultural distance from locally raised Korean New Zealanders.

These labels serve as mechanisms of social control, reinforcing expectations of cultural authenticity and shaping group boundaries. While re-ethnicized individuals critique assimilationists and separatists, they too engage in boundary-making practices, reinforcing cultural divisions within their community. This paradox illustrates how even hybrid identities are socially negotiated and policed in multicultural societies (Kibria, 2002). Bhabha’s (1994) theory of cultural hybridity offers a valuable lens for

understanding how re-ethnicized Korean New Zealanders position themselves between the extremes of assimilation and separation. Rather than simply occupying a midpoint, they inhabit what Bhabha calls a “third space,” where new, negotiated identities emerge that do not fully align with either the dominant host culture or the original ethnic culture. This space allows for a reconfiguration of meaning and belonging—what it means to be Korean, Kiwi, or both becomes open to redefinition.

For Korean New Zealanders, this hybrid space is often marked by intentional selectivity: embracing Korean values such as filial piety or collectivism while also internalizing New Zealand’s egalitarian ethos and multicultural orientation. They may reject rigid age hierarchies from Korean tradition while still cherishing the language, food, or emotional idioms of Korean culture. In this sense, hybridity is not passive blending but a site of cultural production—one where re-ethnicized individuals exercise agency in assembling an identity that reflects both rootedness and openness.

The Re-Ethnicized Cohort and Korean International Students

Although re-ethnicized Korean New Zealanders actively engage with Korean cultural spaces, they do not identify with recently arrived Korean international students. Many express a clear sense of cultural distance, often labeling them as “Korean Koreans” (or “FOBs”), terms that highlight their perceived foreignness within the local Korean New Zealander community.

For example, some participants describe their discomfort with the rigid age-based hierarchy practiced by international students. Unlike New Zealand-raised Koreans, who have adapted to more egalitarian social norms, international students often adhere to strict seniority-based interactions and show deference to older peers. Additionally, participants note differences in speech, behavior, and socialization patterns, with international students frequently using Korean slang and expressions that locally raised Koreans find unfamiliar or inappropriate in a New Zealand context.

These distinctions suggest that re-ethnicization among Korean New Zealanders does not reflect a return to a pan-Korean identity. Instead, it marks the emergence of a distinct identity shaped by shared migration experiences, local upbringing, and the negotiation of cultural influences unique to New Zealand.

Beyond Ethnicity: Shared Experiences as a Basis for Connection

Despite identifying as ethnic Koreans, re-ethnicized Korean New Zealanders report feeling closer to other Asian New Zealanders than to their assimilationist or separatist co-ethnics. This highlights that shared experiences of growing up as an ethnic minority in New Zealand are often more significant than ethnicity alone in shaping social belonging. For instance, Petal, a second-generation Korean New Zealander, reflects on the power of shared immigrant experiences:

It doesn't have to be a Korean immigrant kid. You talk to any immigrant kid; they know what you are talking about. That's one of the most liberating things—you don't have to explain yourself. They just get it [Petal, Case 24].

This shift from an ethnic-centric identity to pan-ethnic solidarity suggests that cultural orientation, migration history, and racialized experiences play a more significant role in shaping group affiliation than ancestry alone (Kibria, 2002).

The re-ethnicized identity among Korean New Zealanders represents a dynamic and flexible mode of acculturation, balancing heritage retention and integration into New Zealand society. While assimilationists attempt to distance themselves from Korean heritage and separatists reinforce ethnic boundaries, re-ethnicized individuals strategically navigate both cultural spaces, constructing a hybrid identity that challenges traditional binary views of acculturation.

Ultimately, shared social experiences, rather than ethnicity alone, determine group belonging for Korean New Zealanders. This underscores the idea that identity is not static but is constantly negotiated within intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic dynamics, shaping how newer-generation Korean New Zealanders define themselves in contemporary multicultural New Zealand.

This hybrid “Korean Kiwi” identity echoes pan-ethnic formations in other multicultural societies, such as “Asian American” in the United States or “British Asian” in the United Kingdom. Like Korean Kiwis, these groups navigate the tension between ethnic specificity and shared racialized experiences, often finding solidarity across Asian backgrounds through common experiences of marginalization, language negotiation, and bicultural belonging. While the cultural and institutional contexts differ, all three identities reflect how second-generation diasporic youth create new frameworks for belonging that transcend strict national or ethnic categories.

CONCLUSION

In sum, this chapter has examined the complex and contested terrain of identity negotiation among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders, focusing on the contrasting acculturation pathways of assimilationists, separatists, and the re-ethnicized majority. Assimilationists seek full integration into mainstream New Zealand society, often distancing themselves from Korean cultural practices and co-ethnic networks, while separatists prioritize ethnic retention and primarily operate within Korean-speaking and culturally familiar spaces. In contrast, the re-ethnicized group constructs a hybrid identity that selectively incorporates elements of both Korean and Kiwi cultures, navigating between cultural preservation and adaptation. These divergent strategies not only reflect personal choices and structural conditions—such as experiences of racism, parental influence, and aspirations for social mobility—but also generate intra-ethnic tensions marked by cultural boundary-making, identity policing, and mutual perceptions of “Otherness.” Together, they illustrate that acculturation is neither linear nor uniform, but rather a fluid and multidimensional process shaped by dynamic interactions between individuals, their communities, and the broader sociocultural environment in which they are embedded.

While this chapter has explored the varied acculturation strategies among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders—ranging from assimilationist retention to hybrid re-ethnicization—it has also revealed a deeper undercurrent shared across these divergent paths: a pervasive sense of emotional disconnection from the host society. Regardless of how these youth align themselves culturally, many remain caught between structural integration and an enduring feeling of cultural or emotional exclusion. Whether labeled “white-washed,” “FOB,” or “Korean Kiwi,” their identities are shaped not only by their own choices and intra-ethnic dynamics but also by the broader sociocultural landscape that often renders them peripheral. In the next chapter, we explore this paradox of integration without belonging, examining how formal inclusion through citizenship and social participation contrasts with more subtle forms of exclusion and marginalization. Chapter 7 investigates how Korean New Zealanders navigate this in-betweenness—feeling simultaneously anchored and adrift—and how transnational connections and pan-ethnic solidarities offer alternative frameworks for belonging and identity formation.

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CHAPTER 7

Integrated, Yet Unrooted

Abstract This chapter explores the paradox of structural integration without affective belonging among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. Despite success in education, careers, and citizenship, many feel emotionally disconnected from New Zealand’s cultural narratives, traditions, and national identity. Participants describe feeling “more Korean” in New Zealand but “less Korean” in Korea, highlighting the tensions of transnational identity. Korea offers cultural grounding, yet its competitive lifestyle contrasts with New Zealand’s relaxed environment. The chapter also examines emerging cross-ethnic solidarity, with participants identifying more as “Asian Kiwis” than aligning with assimilationist or separatist co-ethnics. Shared experiences of racism and cultural negotiation foster a pan-ethnic sense of belonging. These findings challenge linear models of integration and underscore the hybrid, fluid nature of identity in multicultural societies.

Keywords Affective belonging · Emotional citizenship · Transnational identity · Asian kiwi identity · Hybrid identity

INTRODUCTION: INTEGRATED, YET UNROOTED

The newer-generation Korean New Zealanders examined in this book have navigated complex pathways of acculturation, moving between assimilation, re-ethnicization, and hybrid identity formation. As seen in previous chapters, many initially sought to assimilate into mainstream New Zealand culture during their early schooling years but later rediscovered and embraced their Korean heritage. Others pursued alternative strategies, either fully adopting a Kiwi identity or maintaining strong ties to their Korean cultural roots. Despite these diverse paths, a common theme emerges: while these youth are structurally integrated—fluent in English, successful in education and careers, and active in Kiwi society—they often struggle with affective belonging or emotional attachment to New Zealand’s national identity.

This chapter explores the paradox of integration—the reality that legal citizenship, linguistic fluency, and participation in Kiwi institutions do not necessarily translate into an emotional connection to the country. Many participants described a persistent sense of cultural dissonance, an “in-betweenness” that prevents them from being fully recognized as Kiwis by mainstream society. This aligns with the distinction between practical (cognitive) integration and affective belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). While practical integration involves participation in education, employment, and social structures, affective belonging is shaped by emotional and symbolic inclusion—how individuals perceive themselves as part of a national community and how others accept them in return.

This disjuncture between structural integration and emotional attachment can also be understood through Berry’s acculturation model, which distinguishes between integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization as psychological strategies migrants adopt to navigate host societies (Berry, 1997). While many participants exhibit what Berry would categorize as “integration”—maintaining cultural heritage while engaging with mainstream society—their narratives suggest that psychological integration is not necessarily accompanied by emotional inclusion. This underscores the importance of what scholars like Bloemraad (2006) and Fortier (2020) describe as emotional citizenship—a sense of belonging that goes beyond legal status or civic participation to include feelings of recognition, inclusion, and emotional investment in the national community. For many newer-generation Korean New Zealanders, this deeper emotional connection remains

elusive, as their legal citizenship and social participation are not always matched by a sense of being fully embraced by the cultural and historical narratives of New Zealand.

Yet, even in the absence of emotional citizenship, many participants expressed a strong appreciation for life in New Zealand. Despite these challenges, most participants appreciated living in New Zealand, recognizing its safety, stability, and multicultural policies (Spoonley & Bedford, 2012). Many described New Zealand as “home” practically, valuing its natural beauty, quality of life, and friendly social environment. For example, Cedar, a 1.5-generation Korean New Zealander who immigrated in the mid-1990s, shared:

I feel deeply satisfied with my life in New Zealand. I’m truly grateful, and I can’t help but feel immense appreciation for my mother, who brought me here ... I can’t think of a better place to raise a family than here. People here are kind, with a general sense of respect and fairness. New Zealand is my home. [Cedar, Case 12]

However, this practical attachment does not necessarily equate to a strong emotional connection to New Zealand’s cultural or historical narratives. Herman, who arrived in New Zealand at the age of 11, reflects on this disconnect, even after obtaining citizenship:

Even after receiving my New Zealand citizenship, I didn’t feel like this was ‘my’ country. I didn’t feel anything special. Even now, I don’t really identify as a New Zealander. When it comes to history, I don’t feel any connection to New Zealand’s past—I’m much more interested in Korean history. [Herman, Case 2]

These perspectives highlight the fluid and often ambiguous nature of national identity for newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. While they acknowledge New Zealand as their legal and social home, their sense of belonging is shaped by a complex interplay of cultural influences, social acceptance, and transnational connections.

This chapter focuses on three key dimensions of this paradox of integration without belonging. First, it examines how cultural dissonance and subtle forms of exclusion reinforce the feeling of being “not quite Kiwi.” Second, it explores the role of Korea as a cultural anchor, illustrating how participants experience transnational belonging, yet also face challenges of

cultural misalignment when visiting Korea. Finally, it highlights the emergence of cross-ethnic solidarity, as many participants feel a stronger connection with other Asian New Zealanders than with assimilationist or separatist co-ethnics. These themes provide insight into the complexities of identity formation in a multicultural society, challenging traditional assumptions that integration necessarily leads to full belonging.

“NOT QUITE KIWI”: CULTURAL DISSONANCE AND SUBTLE EXCLUSION

Despite their successful structural integration into New Zealand society—through education, careers, and citizenship—many newer-generation Korean New Zealanders experience a lingering sense of cultural dissonance. Although they are legally and socially recognized as part of New Zealand, their emotional and symbolic inclusion remains tenuous. They often encounter subtle forms of exclusion, reinforcing the “perpetual foreigner” stereotype, where non-European New Zealanders are seen as outsiders regardless of their citizenship or time spent in the country (Tuan, 1998). This section examines how this cultural dissonance manifests in everyday interactions, from social relationships to national identity markers.

Navigating Social Interactions: A Sense of In-Between

For many participants, social interactions with Pākehā and other Kiwis reinforced their “in-betweenness”—the feeling of not fully belonging to either mainstream Kiwi society or the Korean community. Despite being fluent in English and familiar with New Zealand norms, their ethnic background remained a defining marker in social settings.

This sense of cultural liminality was particularly evident in moments of casual exclusion, such as being overlooked in social invitations, encountering microaggressions about their “good English,” or feeling like cultural outsiders during national celebrations such as ANZAC Day or Waitangi Day. Even when they fully participated in Kiwi social life, an implicit boundary often separated them from their Pākehā peers, reinforcing their status as perpetual outsiders rather than true New Zealanders.

The sentiment of being Kiwi yet not quite Kiwi illustrates the deeper challenge of belonging for newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. Their experiences suggest that structural integration, such as education and career success, does not necessarily translate into affective belonging within the national identity. Instead, their identities are shaped by ongoing negotiations of cultural proximity and exclusion, leading many to embrace a hybrid identity, such as “Korean Kiwi” or “Asian Kiwi.”

Oak, a second-generation male participant, reflected on how, despite growing up in New Zealand and identifying as a Kiwi, people still saw him as simply “Asian”:

Even if I consider myself a Kiwi, people don’t see me that way. New Zealand doesn’t have a long history of Asian immigration, so when people meet me for the first time, they won’t think of me as a New Zealander. Once they hear me speak, they recognize that I grew up here, but their first assumption is always that I’m just another Asian. [Oak, Case 17]

This experience is not unique to Korean New Zealanders. Research on Asian migrants in Western societies shows that phenotypical differences (e.g., facial features) strongly shape perceptions of belonging (Li, 2010; Lee & Kye, 2016). Regardless of fluency in English or cultural familiarity with local customs, many Asian migrants and their descendants find that their visible differences mark them as perpetual foreigners.

Some participants described microaggressions—subtle, often unintentional forms of discrimination that reinforce exclusion. While not overtly hostile, these interactions serve as reminders that their Kiwi identity is conditional, recognized only when proven through speech, behavior, or cultural knowledge.

Fern, a 1.5-generation female, shared how people judged her through the lens of her Asian appearance:

When I make a small mistake while driving, like using the indicator incorrectly or something that anyone could do, people assume it’s because I’m an Asian driver. On the other hand, if I drive really well, they say things like, “You’re Asian, but why are you such a good driver?” I’ve had a Pākehā friend tell me multiple times, “You’re actually a much better driver than I expected.” It makes me realize that people are constantly judging me based on my skin color and my hair rather than just seeing me as an individual. [Fern, Case 10]

Sherlie, a second-generation female, described how the “Asian stereotype” shaped her school experience:

There’s this typical image that Asians are good at studying. So when I didn’t get the highest score, people seemed surprised, as if I was supposed to excel academically. Also, if we were being a bit noisy in class or not following instructions, teachers often looked puzzled, as if they didn’t expect that kind of behavior from us. It was as if they assumed that, because we were Asian, we would always perform at a certain academic level. Experiencing such assumptions and expectations was quite uncomfortable. [Sherlie, Case 11]

These experiences of stereotyping and microaggressions contribute to identity confusion among Korean New Zealanders. The conflicting external expectations placed upon them—being perceived as perpetual foreigners despite their Kiwi upbringing—create tensions between their self-perception and how they believe others see them. Such encounters reinforce the idea that their ethnicity overrides their national identity, leading to a sense of exclusion from mainstream Kiwi identity and making them question whether they are truly accepted as New Zealanders.

Limited Emotional Attachment to National Identity Markers

For many newer-generation Korean New Zealanders, cultural dissonance is also evident in their relationship with New Zealand’s national identity markers, such as the Treaty of Waitangi, ANZAC Day, and the country’s sporting culture. These symbols of national pride and historical memory symbols hold little personal meaning for many participants, who often feel disconnected from New Zealand’s dominant historical narratives.

Herman, quoted above reflected on his experience of attending his New Zealand citizenship ceremony, an event often framed as a significant milestone in the immigrant journey.

Other participants described a lack of emotional attachment to New Zealand’s major sports, such as rugby or cricket, which serve as key national unifiers. Daisy bluntly stated:

I have no idea what Kiwi patriotism feels like. I absolutely hate rugby, I don’t like cricket, and I don’t even like netball. I know that, for many Kiwis, these sports are part of their national pride, but for me, I feel nothing. [Daisy, Case 15].

Shea also says that she does not feel any connection to New Zealand's historical background. Shea shares:

There is a sense of distance between New Zealand's historical background and myself. For example, the Treaty of Waitangi, that's just something that people in the past created as they needed. It may hold meaning for New Zealanders today, but for me, it's just an event that happened here in the past, and I only think of it as something that eventually led to people living together now—I don't feel any personal connection to it. Of course, I find myself more interested in historical issues related to Korea. [Shea, Case 19]

Spruce, a second-generation male participant, says that New Zealand history is not connected to him because it is more connected to Māori people. He notes:

I feel I'm closer to New Zealand than Korea. Though I'm a Korean and I like Korea, I have lived in New Zealand for over 16 years, so I feel closer to New Zealand. But New Zealand culture is more connected to Māori, and I don't really connect with that. For example, the history of New Zealand . . . I find it hard to be connected to. I find Korean culture closer to me than New Zealand's. Although I've lived in New Zealand much longer than Korea, I feel more connected to Korea . . . [Spruce, Case 20].

Another participant, Reed, who is a second-generation male, articulated a particularly nuanced and emotionally layered response to this disconnection:

I'm actually quite curious about how non-ethnic New Zealanders relate to New Zealand history. When I talk with other Korean friends, we all tend to agree that we understand why we need to study New Zealand history, and we see its value, but at the same time, we feel like it's not our history. I felt the same way. Even though I'm a New Zealand citizen, I used to feel guilty about not having any interest in New Zealand's social history. I thought to myself, "I'm a New Zealander, so why am I not interested in the history of this country?" [Reed, Case 1]

Reflecting on conversations with other Korean friends, he observed a common sentiment: while they understood the importance and value of studying New Zealand history, they felt it was not *their* history. This confession reveals more than just detachment; it signals an internalized

tension between structural belonging and emotional resonance. Reed's sense of guilt points to the subtle pressures migrants may feel to align their emotional attachments with the historical narratives of the nation-state.

As Yuval-Davis (2011) and Bloemraad (2006) argue, affective citizenship involves not only formal participation in a political community but also the expectation of emotional investment in its symbolic and historical fabric. The discomfort Reed expresses underscores how emotional belonging is not automatically produced by citizenship or residence but is instead shaped by perceived expectations of national loyalty and narrative alignment. His experience highlights the emotional complexity of second-generation identity, where even well-integrated citizens may privately question their legitimacy or belonging when their historical affinities diverge from those deemed normative.

This limited engagement with national symbols highlights that, while participants are socially and legally integrated, their affective connection to New Zealand remains weak. The following section explores how transnational connections to Korea provide an alternative emotional anchor, reinforcing ethnic pride while complicating their sense of belonging in New Zealand.

TRANSNATIONAL TIES: KOREA AS AN EMOTIONAL ANCHOR

While newer-generation Korean New Zealanders often feel emotionally unrooted in New Zealand, their connection to Korea provides an alternative source of belonging—yet one that is also fraught with complexity. Many experience a dual sense of attachment to both countries but do not feel at home. This section explores how Korea serves as an emotional and cultural anchor, shaped by transnational influences such as Hallyu (the Korean Wave), digital connections, and travel to Korea. However, it also examines how these ties complicate identity, reinforcing a sense of in-betweenness rather than resolving it.

Hallyu and the Global Appeal of Korean Identity

The rise of Hallyu—spanning K-pop, Korean dramas, fashion, and beauty trends—has profoundly impacted many younger-generation Korean New Zealanders. Unlike earlier generations, who may have distanced themselves from Korean culture in pursuit of assimilation, many participants

reported a renewed sense of ethnic pride due to the global popularity of Korean culture.

For some, Hallyu provides a pathway to cultural connection, offering a sense of pride in being Korean, even when living abroad. Petal, a second-generation female, shared:

Growing up, being Korean wasn't cool. But now, with K-pop and Korean barbecues, everyone's like, "Oh, you're Korean? Can we go to Korea together?" It was never like that before. [Petal, Case 24]

While Hallyu has not only reshaped perceptions of Korea among the global audience but also empowered diasporic Koreans to reclaim their cultural identity confidently, it does not necessarily resolve deeper questions of belonging. Some view it as an idealized or superficial representation of Korea that does not fully reflect their own experiences.

Traveling to Korea: A Place That Feels Both Familiar and Foreign

The popularity of Korean pop culture also provides participants with a "safe" form of ethnic pride—one that is widely accepted and even admired by non-Korean peers in New Zealand. Embracing Korean dramas, K-pop, or fashion allows them to express cultural distinctiveness without appearing oppositional to host country norms. This selective form of cultural consumption offers a sense of pride and legitimacy but does not necessarily deepen personal identification with Korean society or values. For many, Hallyu serves more as a symbolic resource than a bridge to deeper belonging. For many newer-generation Korean New Zealanders, visiting Korea is both affirming and disillusioning. While they express excitement about connecting with their heritage, they often confront unexpected cultural barriers and reverse cultural shock, feeling like outsiders in their supposed "homeland."

Fern shared:

I always considered Korea as a home I could return to, but when I actually visited, I felt like a stranger. People pointed out my accent, my appearance, even my style, telling me I was "half a foreigner." [Fern, Case 10]

Almost all participants expressed little desire to live or work in Korea, citing its busy lifestyle, extreme competition, and hierarchical workplace culture. Pine, a 1.5-generation male, observed:

Korea is such a competitive place, so I have no desire to live there. In New Zealand, you just need to do your own work well, but in Korea, it feels like you have to constantly compete to get ahead. [Pine, Case 28]

Ash, another 1.5-generation male participant, highlighted how his early enthusiasm for Korea, shaped by idealized portrayals in Korean dramas, gave way to discomfort and alienation during actual visits:

When I was a child, Korea looked cool and fun in the dramas I watched. At that time, I often thought I really wanted to work in Korea one day. But each time I actually visited Korea, I felt more and more strongly that I didn't want to work there. Compared to New Zealand, everything felt too rushed. People didn't look very friendly, and it all felt a bit intimidating ... [Ash, Case 13]

Ash's story illustrates the tension between a curated, globally appealing image of Korea and the less accommodating realities on the ground. While Hallyu offers a "safe" form of ethnic pride that resonates across borders, it does not necessarily translate into a deeper sense of comfort or belonging within Korean society itself. His experience reflects the broader emotional complexity of transnational identity, feeling pride in Korean culture while remaining detached from its everyday social fabric.

This phenomenon aligns with transnational migration studies, where diasporic returnees often struggle to integrate into their ancestral homeland due to cultural and linguistic differences. While Korea remains a powerful cultural and emotional reference point, their experiences of exclusion there mirror the subtle exclusions they feel in New Zealand.

Digital Connections and the Creation of a Virtual Homeland

Even for those who do not physically travel to Korea, digital spaces provide a constant connection to Korean culture. Social media platforms, streaming services, and messaging apps allow newer-generation Korean New Zealanders to engage with the Korean language, trends, and peer networks in ways that previous generations could not.

Hawthorn, a second-generation participant, explained:

I like that I can be both Kiwi and Korean. If I want to feel Kiwi, I go about my normal life here. But if I want to feel Korean, I go online, watch Korean shows, and talk to Korean friends. It's like I can switch between two worlds. [Hawthorn, Case 3]

While digital platforms provide a sense of accessibility and connection, they can also reinforce idealized or curated images of Korea that do not always reflect participants' lived experiences. Several interviewees noted that the Korea they engage with online—through K-dramas, beauty influencers, or stylized YouTube content—is sleek, modern, and culturally appealing. Yet, when they visit Korea in person or interact with peers raised in Korea, these curated portrayals often clash with realities marked by hierarchical social norms, fast-paced lifestyles, and linguistic gaps. This dissonance can leave participants feeling emotionally dislocated, even when engaging with content that is supposed to affirm their heritage. Rather than deepening a stable sense of identity, digital Koreanness can sometimes amplify feelings of estrangement by presenting a version of “Korea” that is exciting but not entirely theirs.

This paradox underscores the hybrid and negotiated nature of transnational identity, where an emotional connection to an imagined homeland is real but not always reconcilable with direct experience. While digital connections offer cultural enrichment, they do not necessarily resolve feelings of emotional unrootedness—they merely allow individuals to navigate between two different cultural realities.

Korea as a Comfort, but Not a Solution

For newer-generation Korean New Zealanders, Korea serves as an emotional anchor, but not a final destination. While Hallyu, travel, and digital engagement strengthen their connection to Korean culture, these ties also highlight their status as perpetual in-betweeners—not fully at home in Korea, yet not fully embraced as Kiwis.

As we move into the next section, we examine how, despite this dual sense of disconnection, many newer-generation Korean New Zealanders find solidarity with other Asian New Zealanders, forming an alternative community where shared minority experiences transcend ethnic boundaries.

BEYOND ETHNICITY: CONNECTION WITH OTHER ASIANS

For many newer-generation Korean New Zealanders, the feeling of not fully belonging to either Korean or mainstream Kiwi society leads them to seek alternative social and cultural connections. One significant finding from the interviews is that many re-ethnicized participants feel a greater

sense of solidarity with other Asian New Zealanders than with either assimilationist or separatist Korean New Zealanders. This pan-Asian identification emerges from shared experiences of subtle racism, bicultural identity struggles, and the challenges of navigating New Zealand's social structures as ethnic minorities. This section explores how these cross-ethnic connections shape identity formation and provide a sense of belonging beyond rigid national or ethnic categories.

Shared Minority Experiences: A Basis for Connection

Many participants emphasized that their sense of connection to other Asian New Zealanders is not based solely on ethnicity but rather on similar experiences of being an ethnic minority in a predominantly white society. These shared experiences include facing racial microaggressions, negotiating family expectations, and struggling with dual cultural identities.

Herman (Case 2) explained:

It's not just about being Korean. It's about being Asian in New Zealand. I find that my Chinese and Indian friends understand my experiences. We've all gone through similar things—dealing with racism, balancing our parents' expectations with Kiwi culture, and trying to figure out where we fit in. [Herman, Case 2]

Cedar (Case 12) describes the comfort he felt from a group of best friends in high school, all of whom were Asians who gathered almost instinctively. Cedar shares:

There was a group of us who always gathered together at school, and without intending to, it ended up being an all-Asian group. All of us grew up in New Zealand, and we were all fluent in English. Somehow, we met again at university and gravitated toward each other again. We studied together, sat in the cafeteria talking, and after lab sessions, we would instinctively gather. Then, one day, one of us suddenly said, "Hey, we're all Asian." It wasn't something we planned—it just happened naturally. Whenever there was a ball, party, or social event, the five of us would go together. Maybe it was instinctive—we were all Asian. [Cedar, Case 12].

This observation aligns with studies on pan-ethnic solidarity among Asian diaspora communities, which suggest that shared social positioning and common experiences of racialization foster cross-ethnic identification (Tuan, 1998; Kibria, 2002). While ethnic identity remains important, many younger-generation migrants relate more to those who share their social realities rather than to those who share their nationality.

The “Perpetual Foreigner” Stereotype and Racial Solidarity

One key factor that fosters solidarity among Asian New Zealanders is the experience of racial exclusion, particularly the “perpetual foreigner” stereotype—the assumption that Asian individuals, regardless of how long they have lived in New Zealand, are outsiders. Many participants reported feeling frustrated when white New Zealanders questioned their belonging, often assuming they were international students or asking, “Where are you really from?”

This resonates with findings from race and identity studies, which highlight how racialized minorities often develop cross-ethnic solidarities in response to exclusion from mainstream national identity (Ong, 1999). Even though Korean, Chinese, and Indian New Zealanders have distinct cultural backgrounds, they often face similar racialization processes that shape their social positioning in New Zealand society.

However, not all participants embraced the pan-Asian label uncritically. Daisy, a 1.5-generation female participant, expressed discomfort with identifying broadly as “Asian,” noting that the term often carries negative connotations:

If I just identify my ethnicity directly and say, ‘I am Korean,’ there are more positive aspects to it. But if I just say, ‘I am Asian,’ there tend to be more negative perceptions overall. [Daisy, Case 15]

Her comment underscores the ambivalence some participants feel toward pan-ethnic categories, especially when these categories are shaped by stereotypes or external social perceptions. While cross-ethnic solidarity offers a sense of shared experience and belonging for many, others prefer more specific ethnic identification as a way to resist homogenization and reclaim cultural distinctiveness.

The Emergence of “Asian Kiwi” Identity

As a result of these shared experiences and social positioning, some participants identified with a broader pan-Asian identity, describing themselves as “Asian Kiwi” rather than just Korean or Kiwi. This hybrid identity allows them to integrate elements of both their ethnic heritage and their New Zealand upbringing without feeling pressure to choose one over the other.

Hawthorn (Case 3) described this evolving identity:

I used to struggle with being Korean or being Kiwi, but now I just say I’m an Asian Kiwi. It’s a mix of both. I relate to other Asians here more than I do to Koreans in Korea or white Kiwis, so that’s what makes sense to me. [Hawthorn, Case 3]

These dynamics of pan-ethnic identification among Korean New Zealanders mirror findings from studies on Asian American communities. Espiritu (1992) argued that pan-Asian identity in the United States often emerges not from cultural similarity but from shared experiences of racialization and marginalization. Similarly, Zhou and Lee (2007) highlight how structural conditions—such as immigrant status, minority positioning, and educational aspirations—shape the formation of pan-ethnic solidarities among diverse Asian-origin groups. In the New Zealand context, where “Asian” is frequently used as a catch-all category by media, schools, and government agencies, participants often find common cause with other Asians not because of inherent cultural closeness but due to their parallel navigation of racial boundaries and social expectations.

This aligns with Bhabha’s (1994) concept of cultural hybridity, which argues that migrant communities create “third spaces” where new identities emerge by blending cultural influences. Rather than strictly adhering to either a Korean or a Kiwi identity, many newer-generation Korean New Zealanders adopt a fluid, transnational identity that reflects their lived experiences.

As such, while many newer-generation Korean New Zealanders feel emotionally unrooted in both Korea and mainstream Kiwi society, they often find a sense of belonging and comfort among other Asian New Zealanders. Shared experiences of racialization, cultural negotiation, and bicultural identity struggles shape these cross-ethnic connections.

Rather than seeing identity as fixed, many participants embrace a hybrid, pan-Asian identity that reflects their unique social position. As we move into the final section, we consider what this means for the future of identity and belonging in New Zealand's multicultural landscape.

RETHINKING IDENTITY AND BELONGING

Throughout this chapter, we have explored the paradox of integration experienced by newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. While they are structurally integrated into Kiwi society—excelling in education, participating in the workforce, and engaging in social life—they often struggle with affective belonging. This disconnect stems from cultural dissonance, subtle exclusion, and the enduring “perpetual foreigner” stereotype, which prevents many from feeling fully accepted as New Zealanders. At the same time, transnational ties to Korea and solidarity with other Asian New Zealanders shape their evolving sense of identity, leading to the emergence of hybrid identities such as “Korean Kiwi” or “Asian Kiwi.”

The Limits of Policy-Driven Multiculturalism

New Zealand presents itself as a multicultural society that celebrates diversity, but participants' experiences suggest that inclusion does not always translate into deep emotional belonging. Despite growing up in New Zealand, many newer-generation Korean New Zealanders feel that Kiwi national identity remains centered on Pākehā culture, making it difficult for ethnic minorities to feel fully “at home.” National celebrations, such as Waitangi Day and ANZAC Day, often hold little personal meaning for them, further reinforcing their sense of being outsiders.

Herman, who stated that New Zealand citizenship does not make him feel fully Kiwi, captured this sentiment. This echoes critiques of policy-driven multiculturalism, which often focus on surface-level inclusion (e.g., cultural festivals and diversity celebrations) rather than fostering deeper emotional connections (Kymlicka, 1995; Spoonley, 2015). Multiculturalism remains incomplete without active efforts to expand national narratives to include diverse histories and contributions.

Rethinking Acculturation and Belonging

Traditional acculturation models assume that successful integration leads to a sense of belonging, but the experiences of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders challenge this assumption. Many participants expressed feeling simultaneously “at home” and “unrooted,” integrated yet emotionally disconnected from mainstream society. This experience aligns with transnational identity theories, which emphasize that migrants and their descendants often develop dual or hybrid identities rather than fully assimilating into a single national identity (Levitt & Schiller, 2004; Vertovec, 2009).

As Oak reflected:

I consider myself a Kiwi, but when people first meet me, they don't see me that way. They assume I'm just another Asian immigrant. It's frustrating, but I've also realized that I don't need to prove anything to anyone. I don't have to pick one identity—I can just be both. [Oak, Case 17]

This suggests that newer-generation Korean New Zealanders are not simply assimilating or maintaining their ethnic identity but are constructing fluid, hybrid identities that reflect their lived experiences.

This embrace of hybridity builds on the identity trajectories traced across earlier chapters. As seen in Chaps. 4 and 5, many participants initially downplayed or even rejected their Korean heritage in order to assimilate during childhood and adolescence. Over time, however, they began to re-engage with their ethnic background through co-ethnic friendships, digital platforms, and cultural pride fostered by the global visibility of Korean culture. Chapter 6 then illustrated the diversity of acculturation strategies that emerged during young adulthood, ranging from cultural re-ethnicization to individualistic detachment. By the time we reach this chapter, these shifting pathways culminate in nuanced identity positions that do not conform to binary labels. The sense of being “Korean Kiwi” or “Asian Kiwi” is not simply a compromise between two worlds but the result of years of negotiation across multiple social contexts. This cumulative evolution highlights identity as a dynamic, relational, and context-dependent process, shaped by both internal reflections and external social positioning.

The Rise of “Korean Kiwi” and “Asian Kiwi” Identities

Rather than fully identifying as either Korean or Kiwi, many participants embrace a hybrid identity that acknowledges their cultural duality. Some describe themselves as “Korean Kiwi,” while others prefer the broader term “Asian Kiwi” to reflect their solidarity with other Asian New Zealanders. This hybrid identity is not a rejection of either culture but an acknowledgment that their lived experiences cannot be neatly categorized into a single national or ethnic label.

Hawthorn (Case 3) expressed this evolving sense of identity:

I like being both Kiwi and Korean. If I want to be Kiwi, I can be Kiwi. If I want to be Korean, I can be Korean. I don't feel the need to choose.
[Hawthorn, Case 3]

This aligns with Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity, which argues that migrant communities create “third spaces” where new identities emerge through cultural blending and negotiation. Rather than being stuck between two cultures, many newer-generation Korean New Zealanders use their hybrid identity as a source of agency, allowing them to easily navigate multiple cultural contexts. As New Zealand continues to evolve as a multicultural society, the experiences of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders highlight the need for a more inclusive understanding of national identity. The growing presence of second-generation migrants raises important questions about how belonging is defined and who is recognized as a “real” New Zealander.

These reflections carry important implications for national policy. New Zealand's bicultural framework, while central to its efforts to honor Te Tiriti o Waitangi and uphold Māori rights, often leaves Asian and other non-Indigenous migrants in an ambiguous symbolic space. Multicultural policies, meanwhile, tend to focus on cultural celebration rather than structural inclusion or affective belonging. The lived realities of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders suggest a need to reconceptualize these frameworks—to move beyond binary constructions of national identity and embrace models that recognize hybridity, transnationalism, and intersectional minority experiences. Policies that promote inclusive curricula, anti-racism education, and the representation of diverse migrant

stories in public discourse are essential to fostering a sense of belonging among newer generations. Rather than asking migrants to “fit in,” the challenge is for the nation to expand its cultural imagination to make space for those who are both here and elsewhere, Korean and Kiwi, local and global.

In the end, newer-generation Korean New Zealanders challenge traditional narratives of assimilation and national belonging, showing that integration is not just about participation in society but about feeling emotionally connected to it. Their experiences call for rethinking acculturation, belonging, and identity formation in an increasingly diverse New Zealand.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the paradox of being integrated yet unrooted among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders. While participants are structurally integrated—fluent in English, active in New Zealand’s education and employment sectors, and legally recognized as citizens—they often lack affective belonging. Their narratives reveal persistent cultural dissonance, subtle racial exclusions, and a limited emotional connection to New Zealand’s dominant historical and cultural narratives. Many are still perceived as “perpetual foreigners,” a stereotype that undermines their self-identification as Kiwis.

At the same time, participants draw emotional and cultural sustenance from transnational ties to Korea, shaped by global cultural flows such as Hallyu, digital engagement, and periodic visits to their ancestral homeland. Yet, these connections are often fraught with ambivalence. Many report feeling like outsiders in Korea as well. In response, a number of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders develop cross-ethnic solidarities with other Asians and articulate hybrid identities—such as “Korean Kiwi” or “Asian Kiwi”—that better reflect their lived realities.

The findings of this chapter challenge linear or binary models of acculturation that assume integration naturally leads to national belonging. Instead, they illustrate that affective belonging is contingent not only on individual adaptation but also on societal recognition, inclusive cultural narratives, and symbolic acceptance. This disjuncture calls for a more

nuanced understanding of multicultural integration—one that goes beyond policy-driven inclusion to encompass deeper forms of emotional recognition.

These insights also contribute to wider debates on diasporic identity formation. Rather than identifying strictly as Korean or Kiwi, many participants construct flexible, hybrid identities that resist rigid categorization. These identities are not merely strategic but emerge through complex affective negotiations across time, space, and social positioning. The rise of “Asian Kiwi” as a meaningful identifier underscores how cross-ethnic solidarity increasingly shapes belonging for second-generation migrants in New Zealand.

Finally, the findings have implications for multicultural policy and future research. If New Zealand is to foster a genuinely inclusive national identity, it must move beyond symbolic multiculturalism to acknowledge the emotional and symbolic dimensions of belonging. This includes integrating diverse migrant narratives into public history, education, and civic life. For researchers, the case of Korean New Zealanders offers a valuable opportunity for comparative inquiry with other Asian diasporas, as well as longitudinal studies of identity formation across life stages.

As these narratives have shown, identity among newer-generation Korean New Zealanders is rarely fixed or singular. Their experiences of being integrated yet emotionally unanchored reveal the limitations of conventional models of assimilation and highlight the need to recognize hybrid, transnational forms of belonging. In the concluding chapter that follows, we step back to reflect on these findings in theoretical and comparative perspective, considering how the processes of re-ethnicization, selective acculturation, and emotional citizenship offer new ways of understanding immigrant adaptation in a globalized, multicultural New Zealand.

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Conclusion

Abstract This conclusion synthesizes the book’s key findings on the acculturation and identity of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders, who navigate structural integration and affective belonging. While they succeed in education and careers, many feel like “perpetual foreigners,” revealing a disconnect from dominant national narratives. Their experiences reflect segmented assimilation and transnationalism, marked by selective acculturation—blending cultural retention, bilingualism, and mainstream participation. The study emphasizes that structural inclusion does not ensure an emotional connection to national identity. Practical implications include the need for inclusive curricula, heritage language support, and stronger multicultural policies. It calls for future research into comparative Asian identities, longitudinal change, and digital influence. Ultimately, the study challenges rigid assimilation models and affirms hybrid, transnational identities as central to New Zealand’s evolving multicultural identity.

Keywords Segmented assimilation · Affective belonging · Perpetual foreigners · Hybrid identity · Transnationalism · Multiculturalism in New Zealand

This book has examined the acculturation pathways and identity negotiations of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders, revealing a complex interplay of integration, re-ethnicization, and hybrid identity formation. While early childhood experiences often involved assimilation pressures and cultural distancing, adolescence and early adulthood frequently saw a revival of ethnic identity. Participants in this study did not follow a singular trajectory of assimilation or separation but instead engaged in dynamic processes of cultural adaptation that reflected their lived realities.

To frame our conclusions, it is important to revisit the central research questions that guided this study: (1) How do members of the newer-generation Korean New Zealander cohort navigate the cultural terrain of their host society while negotiating between their Korean ethnic identity and New Zealand national identity? (2) How and why do many of them experience a strengthening of ethnic identity—a re-ethnicization—during adolescence and young adulthood? (3) What other patterns of acculturation and integration are visible beyond re-ethnicization, such as assimilationist and separatist trajectories? (4) What kind of belonging do they develop, and what are the implications for their relationship with New Zealand multiculturalism and Korean transnationalism? The chapters that follow address each of these questions through empirical data and theoretical analysis, and this final chapter reflects on what these findings mean for broader theories of assimilation, identity, and belonging in multicultural contexts.

Chapters 4 and 5 illustrated how younger Korean New Zealanders initially suppressed their ethnic identity to fit into Kiwi society but later reconnected with their Korean heritage through co-ethnic friendships, digital engagement, and the influence of the Korean Wave. Chapter 6 introduced the diversity of acculturation strategies, showing that while many followed a re-ethnicization path, others either fully assimilated or remained culturally separatist. Chapter 7 explored the paradox of integration without full belonging, demonstrating how structural incorporation into New Zealand society does not necessarily translate into affective inclusion. These findings highlight the fluid, nonlinear nature of acculturation, challenging traditional models of straight-line assimilation.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The experiences of Korean New Zealanders align with segmented assimilation theory (Portes & Zhou, 1993), which argues that immigrant youth follow diverse pathways rather than a singular trajectory of integration. Many participants engaged in selective acculturation, adopting aspects of Kiwi society while maintaining strong cultural and linguistic ties to their Korean heritage. This pattern of selective acculturation was most clearly expressed through what we have termed re-ethnicization—a process in which participants, after early assimilation pressures, re-engaged with Korean language, culture, and peer networks during adolescence or early adulthood. Rather than being a deviation from assimilation, re-ethnicization can be understood as a distinctive form of selective acculturation, shaped by both structural forces and cultural agency. Unlike classical assimilation models, which assume that integration inevitably leads to cultural loss, this study supports the notion that bilingualism, ethnic community support, and transnational ties can coexist with mainstream societal participation.

The study also contributes to transnational migration theories (Levitt & Schiller, 2004), demonstrating how newer-generation Korean New Zealanders sustain emotional, cultural, and digital ties to Korea. Many participants expressed a dual frame of reference, where they compared life in New Zealand to Korean norms, sometimes idealizing one over the other depending on the context. This ongoing engagement with Korea—whether through online platforms, periodic visits, or Hallyu consumption—complicates the notion of a singular national belonging. Instead, identity is shaped through constant negotiation between multiple cultural reference points.

Taken together, these findings invite a rethinking of dominant acculturation theories in at least three ways. First, they challenge the assumption—present in both classical assimilation and some acculturation models—that identity formation follows a linear, one-directional path from ethnic retention to cultural adaptation. The widespread pattern of re-ethnicization among Korean New Zealanders demonstrates that cultural re-engagement can occur even after prolonged assimilation, suggesting a cyclical or recursive model of identity development. Second, the study complicates segmented assimilation's notion of “selective acculturation” by showing that cultural retention is not always an instrumental strategy for upward mobility but can also be driven by affective needs, peer solidarity, and transnational cultural

pride. Third, the Korean New Zealander case underscores the importance of emotional and symbolic recognition—what Yuval-Davis (2011) and Bloemraad (2006) call affective belonging and emotional citizenship—as essential components of integration. Without this layer, structural inclusion remains fragile and incomplete. These insights suggest the need for a more flexible, context-sensitive framework that accounts for emotional ambivalence, cyclical identity shifts, and the influence of global cultural flows on diasporic youth.

A critical contribution of this study lies in its exploration of affective belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011), or the emotional and symbolic aspects of inclusion. While participants were structurally integrated into New Zealand society, many felt emotionally unanchored. This aligns with research on perpetual foreigner syndrome, where visible minorities remain seen as outsiders regardless of their generational status (Tuan, 1998). The emergence of hybrid identities such as “Korean Kiwi” or “Asian Kiwi” suggests that belonging is not simply about cultural adaptation but also about how dominant society perceives and accepts individuals.

Importantly, these findings also complicate existing theories by situating them in the unique context of a society like New Zealand, where multiculturalism is layered upon a formal commitment to biculturalism. Unlike many Western nations, where ethnic minorities negotiate belonging primarily in relation to a white majority, Korean New Zealanders must navigate a social landscape that includes both Pākehā dominance and Māori-Pākehā bicultural politics. This context creates a distinct form of “triple consciousness”: being Korean, being Asian, and being a non-Māori ethnic minority in a bicultural framework. Existing models of segmented assimilation and transnationalism have rarely accounted for this dynamic. Therefore, the New Zealand case invites an expansion of these theories to consider how historically embedded indigenous-settler relationships shape the reception and self-perception of newer migrant groups in multicultural societies.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings call for a more inclusive approach to education that acknowledges the experiences of Asian New Zealanders. Schools play a crucial role in shaping national identity, yet many participants reported feeling disconnected from New Zealand’s historical narratives, such as the Treaty of

Waitangi and ANZAC Day. A more multicultural curriculum, incorporating the histories and contributions of Asian communities, could foster a greater sense of belonging for newer-generation migrants.

This study highlights the importance of ethnic identity affirmation in promoting mental well-being and academic success. Policies that support heritage language retention, co-ethnic peer networks, and cultural representation in media and public life can help immigrant youth navigate their identities without feeling pressured to choose between cultural adaptation and heritage maintenance.

New Zealand's multicultural policies emphasize cultural celebration but often neglect deeper issues of racial exclusion and affective belonging. The findings suggest a need for policies that go beyond symbolic diversity and address systemic barriers that ethnic minorities face. This includes initiatives to combat racial microaggressions, improve workplace diversity, and foster cross-ethnic solidarity beyond cultural festivals.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research could compare the experiences of Korean New Zealanders with other Asian migrant groups, such as Chinese, Indian, or Filipino New Zealanders. Understanding the commonalities and divergences in their acculturation pathways could provide deeper insights into racial hierarchies, cross-ethnic solidarity, and the broader Asian New Zealander experience. Since identity is dynamic, longitudinal studies tracking newer-generation Korean New Zealanders over different life stages, such as career transitions, marriage, and parenthood, could offer valuable perspectives on how identity and belonging evolve over time.

The role of digital spaces in shaping transnational identities warrants further exploration. Social media platforms like KakaoTalk, Instagram, and YouTube enable Korean New Zealanders to maintain close ties with Korea while navigating their lives in New Zealand. Future research could investigate how these digital interactions influence self-perception, cultural engagement, and generational identity shifts.

In addition to comparative and longitudinal studies, this research opens up several new questions for future inquiry. How do experiences of affective dissonance—such as guilt over historical detachment or emotional exclusion from national narratives—shape long-term identity development, mental health, and civic engagement? To what extent do digital and transnational spaces mediate emotional belonging in the absence of full cultural inclusion

in the host society? How might racialized perceptions of “Asianness” intersect with gender, class, or religion to produce differentiated forms of hybrid identity within the same ethnic group? Moreover, what role do educational institutions, media, and public discourse play in either reinforcing or reshaping the symbolic boundaries that exclude second-generation migrants from national belonging? These questions call for more intersectional, multi-method, and policy-oriented research that centers the voices of migrant youth as active constructors of identity and agents of social change in multicultural societies like New Zealand.

FINAL REFLECTION: IDENTITY IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

The experiences of newer-generation Korean New Zealanders underscore the fluid and hybrid nature of identity in an era of globalization. No longer confined to a binary choice between assimilation and ethnic retention, these youth engage in multidirectional identity negotiations, constructing new ways of belonging that transcend national boundaries. Their experiences challenge traditional notions of immigrant adaptation, illustrating that integration is not simply about legal status or economic participation but also about recognition, emotional connection, and self-definition.

While the identity trajectories of Korean New Zealanders are not uniform, the overall direction observed in this study points toward the development of hybrid, contextually adaptive identities, rather than full assimilation or strict ethnic separation. The majority of participants move from early-stage assimilation pressures to a phase of re-ethnicization during adolescence or young adulthood, and ultimately toward a flexible integration of both cultural worlds. This trajectory suggests that many are not choosing between being “Korean” or “Kiwi,” but instead are constructing a “Korean Kiwi” or “Asian Kiwi” identity that allows for selective participation, transnational engagement, and situational navigation of cultural boundaries. Their identity work reflects agency, resilience, and emotional negotiation in response to both structural constraints and evolving multicultural norms. Rather than progressing toward a singular national identity, they are moving toward a negotiated space of plural belonging—a direction that challenges the binary assumptions of classical acculturation models and signals a broader transformation in how ethnic minority youth in New Zealand define what it means to belong.

As New Zealand continues to evolve as a multicultural society layered upon a bicultural foundation, the question of who truly gets to belong remains urgent. The experiences of Korean New Zealander youth—structurally integrated but emotionally unanchored—reveal the limits of conventional models of national identity. Legal citizenship, English fluency, and civic participation do not guarantee emotional inclusion or symbolic recognition. If we are to build a society where newer-generation migrants feel not just accepted but emotionally invested in their national community, we must move beyond narrow narratives of cultural assimilation or surface-level diversity. This requires expanding our national imagination to fully include hybrid, transnational, and affectively complex identities like those of “Korean Kiwis” and “Asian Kiwis.” Ultimately, this book calls for a rethinking of belonging itself—one that recognizes identity as negotiated, relational, and dynamic, and that welcomes migrant youth not as perpetual outsiders but as integral co-authors of Aotearoa New Zealand’s unfolding story.

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