

The Connection to Identity as Asian Americans: Living as a Third Culture Kid in Colorado

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Introduction

The identity of “Asian American” is not something that can be held in one ethnicity, one country, or one state of being. The Asian American identity is constantly in flux, changing with global issues, domestic recognition, community values, and family history. Because of this constant flux, there is no simple way to explain the Asian American identity, as everyone responds to and claims this identity in different ways (Entertainment, 2022, p. 14). No two people have the same life, regardless of time or place. A refugee from Vietnam will not have the same story as a Vietnamese child who grew up as a second-generation immigrant in the United States. However, the term “Asian American” seems to group hundreds of ethnicities, histories, and timelines together to represent one supposed group of people. Even if all immigrants or refugees from Asia identified as “Asian American”, what about their children? How does a child who grew up in a country different from their parents, guardians, or extended family still claim that identity? I have personally met several people

who have families that were raised in another country, but the child claims the same ethnic identity as their guardians through the culture that is shared in the family. Through language, stories, food, decoration, and holidays, those families have been able to pass on their culture to their children despite the environmental differences from their own upbringings.

This paper explores the topic of shared culture and identity within the Asian American diaspora, focusing on how people who hold this identity develop and maintain a sense of cultural identity through learning from and growing up around their guardians and communities. Even though they have grown up in an environment different from that of their guardians, the children of immigrants have been able to hold onto or connect with this identity to some degree. The extent and nature of this connection vary across individuals and are shaped by the cultural influences, traditions, and resources they encounter throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. As a result, Asian American

identity is not fixed but develops in diverse ways across generations and lived experiences.

Children who have experienced a parallel upbringing between a home culture and an outside culture are called “Third Culture Kids”, or TCKs; a child who has influence from multiple different cultures and, as a result, creates their own identity from their experiences. This concept was first introduced by sociologists John and Ruth Useem and later developed by David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken. It describes individuals who spend a significant portion of their developmental years navigating multiple cultural environments. Rather than identifying exclusively with either their parents’ culture or the dominant culture in which they are raised, TCKs often develop a “third culture” that integrates elements of both. Although the experiences of second-generation Asian Americans do not always fit the traditional definition of a TCK, the concept provides a useful framework for understanding how children of immigrants negotiate multiple cultural influences and construct identities that reflect both their family heritage and the broader society in which they grow up.

Asian American TCKs have the influence of American culture, through their engagement with systems like education, employment, and pop culture, for example, but simultaneously experience a home life that reflects the characteristics and behavior of another culture. Because of these multicultural influences, TCK children commonly choose specific labels to

express themselves in the presence of different groups of people. “[Immigrants’] children often express different labels to different audiences in strategic ways, for example, to emphasize Americanness to a white native-born American, or to clarify one’s national origin to an Asian American” (Feliciano, 2018, p. 40). Due to the vast diversity of family dynamics found across the world, I will use the term “guardians” or “family” to refer to providers of the “home culture”. TCKs absorb their guardians’ native culture in tandem with the culture of the new environment and create a space for themselves between these two cultures. The separate influences interpreted by a single individual combine into a purported third culture, which is represented by the individual, the Third Culture Kid.

Typically, when considering Asian communities in the United States, California, New York, Texas, and Hawaii are the first states considered due to the considerable concentration of Asian populations documented in these states (Pew Research Center, 2025). Within the city of San Diego, California, for example, there is a large concentration of Filipinos and Vietnamese. However, the connections each of these communities has to San Diego are distinct. “While Filipino concentration in San Diego is largely due to their historical and current connections to the US Navy, Vietnamese settlement there has to do with the location of Camp Pendleton, one of the four major military camps to which 1975 refugees were evacuated from Vietnam” (Zhou, 2005, p.

1128). Despite the long history of Asians in America, there is still much to be researched and discussed regarding their experience in the particular city or locality in which they live, along with that of their general experience in the United States. Much of the research about Asian Americans that I could find focuses on the aforementioned major communities. The cities most often researched — San Diego, for example — have a rich history of immigrant and refugee Asian American communities. Yet Asian Americans have many diasporas all over the United States and are not limited to coastal populations. In particular, it is extremely difficult to find information about Asian American communities in Colorado.

Asian communities in Denver, for example, are often overlooked in this cultural research. Professor Cynthia Feliciano discusses the changing identities of San Diego children of immigrants while growing up. In the same article, Feliciano explains that there is also little research on second-generation immigrants in the broader United States diaspora: “few studies examine how ethnic identities relate to cultural practices among the second generation” (Feliciano, 2018, p. 29). This is in spite of the fact that Colorado has a population of around 260,000 Asian identifying individuals (Colorado AAPI Circle, 2024). While doing my research, I have found very little discussion on any overlapping identities of Asian Americans, Third Culture Kids, or children of immigrants in Colorado, much less those in the

Denver metro area. With further examination of the anthropological concepts above, I want to add a new perspective to cultural research on Asian American communities and TCKs by focusing on the lived experiences of communities in the Denver metro area. I will do this by conducting interviews with multiple individuals of varying Asian cultural backgrounds to understand which terminology and cultural markers they identify with, which they may not identify with, and the reasons as to why they identify the way they do. Afterward, I will examine and consolidate the interviewees’ responses to connect the experiences I hear about with existing research on TCKs and see if this term aligns with the experiences of Asian Americans in Colorado.

Background and Context

The term “Asian American” itself has a long history. Beginning with the first Asian Americans in the late 1840s (Zhou, 2005, p. 1125), the overall sense of community within Asians in America was realized in the 1960s during a push in Asian American politics. Asian activists urged for unity among Asians, regardless of ethnicity, and to find strength within the Asian identity. It was a way for several groups in America, who themselves may be vastly different from one another, to have a chance at community as well as provide a voice for themselves in politics, business, and society (Lee, 2015, pp. 303–304).

However, the Asian American identity is malleable and can vary based on the experiences of countless different individuals. First-

generation immigrants, one-and-a-half-generation refugees, second-generation migrants; these are just a few examples of the generational differences present within the Asian American identity. Furthermore, the multitude of national, ethnic, and religious differences exacerbates the complexities of Asian American identity. Multiculturalism is a crucial aspect of Asian American identity. It is not a choice one makes about which identity they claim, but a matter of holding the multitude of their identities interchangeably, for example, in the following hypothetical, "Whether a Mr. Patel in London will think of himself primarily as an Indian, a British citizen, a Hindu, a Gujarati-speaker, an ex-colonist from Kenya, a member of a specific caste or kin-group, or in some other capacity depends on whether he faces an immigration officer, a Pakistani, a Sikh or Muslim, a Bengali-speaker, and so on. There is no single platonic essence of Patel. He is all of these and more at the same time" (Hobsbawn, 1996, p. 1067).

Along with multiple cultures adding complexity to the Asian American experience, there is no easy way to define ethnicity: "The word 'ethnicity' has no agreed meaning in sociology" (Banton, 2018, p. 119). This sentiment is further discussed in a separate paper, "...no universally accepted definition of ethnic identity, nor shared understanding of its multiple dimensions, exists," (Feliciano, 2018, p. 28). Due to this conundrum, I will be working with any ethnicity, or identity interviewees claim rather

than working from my own definitions or labels of ethnic background. In the Methodology section, I will discuss in more detail how I open up the question of identity without leading my interviewees into biased or overly simplistic depictions of their background.

I base my analysis below following my interviews on the four types of ethnic self-identity the American sociologist Ruben Rumbaut discovered during a survey of children of immigrants living in San Diego. The first category is the ancestral or national-origin identity. These refer to an identity in which a specific country or ethnic group is named (e.g., Jamaican, Hmong, Nicaraguan). The hyphenated identity is any additive identity to the "American" identity (e.g. Cuban-American, Filipino-American, Vietnamese-American). An American national identity is an assimilative identity, which lists two identities but without the hyphen (e.g. Vietnamese American, Cuban American). Lastly, the panethnic identity is a dissimilative racial identity in which a more widespread, all-embracing term is used (e.g. Hispanic, Asian, Black) (Rumbaut, 1994, p. 763). I keep track of interviewees who explain their identities in one of these ways and examine why they might in my analysis.

The term "Third Culture Kid" was first coined in the 1950s and was solely used to define military children, children of diplomats, and children of businessmen who move back and forth between their "home" country and "passport" country (Pollock, 2009, p. 14). There is

another definition of the Third Culture Kid along these lines, which describes TCK as someone who lives in different cultures as they move back and forth between their home and host culture, with emphasis on the mobility aspect of the TCK (Cockburn, 2002, p. 477). This definition makes the term TCK synonymous with a global nomad. Nevertheless, these explanations outgrew the global climate, as the term “Third Culture” became applicable to several more groups. Children of immigrants, children of refugees, and children in multicultural homes can also be described using Third Culture Kid. But Pollock argued that these groups are instead “Cross-Culture Kids”, a term proposed for a child living or having lived in or interacted with two or more cultural environments during childhood (Pollock, 2009, p. 31). It should be noted that the Third Culture Kid and Cross-Culture Kid identities are not identities found within these communities but are instead ideas that are discussed within groups of researchers and writers.

In spite of that, there is another way to define Third Culture Kid: “...a child who has spent much of their early life living in a culture that is different from their parents’ homelands and their birthplace. The term third culture comes from combining a person’s birth culture (including their parents’ birthplaces) with their adopted culture or cultures,” (Harmon, 2023). I will focus on and use this second explanation of a TCK for my research and analysis. This definition fits in with the experience of second-generation Asian

American children, those who have a different cultural influence at home and at school — an Asian American TCK.

The idea of ethnicity and identity is very important to second-generation immigrant Asian Americans. For instance, there are Asian Americans who claim the Asian American identity solely for the ease of others, especially when filling out the U.S. census. British social scientist Michael Banton examined the idea of ethnicity and ethnic origin through a global perspective. He begins his chapter by discussing the history of ethnicity and race within the United States, highlighting the issue with predetermined categories of race and ethnicity, “people may be ready to identify themselves with an ethnic group in a census because they understand why they are asked to do so, but they might not identify themselves with that ethnic group in any other circumstance,” (Banton, 2018, pp. 97–98). Within the change of cultural influences in a Third Culture Kid’s upbringing, TCK individuals learn when and where it is needed to emphasize different parts of their identity.

From a paper researching the impact of Third Culture Kid upbringings, there is a note aimed toward the reader about the possibility of influence or bias from the interviewer, “...social interaction between the interviewer and the participant, may have influenced interviewees to respond in a way they felt might be preferable to the interviewer, which makes it difficult to generalise from the findings,” (Doherty et al.,

2023, p. 165). Due to my close personal proximity to the interviewees, there is much to consider regarding their answers. This will be further discussed in the analysis section of the paper.

Regardless of the differences in influence, Asian American TCKs continue to practice and participate in, to varying degrees, an Asian culture. They continue to claim identities of other nationalities or ethnicities. Despite lacking the ethnic enclaves of larger cities, Asian American TCKs in the Denver metro area sustain ethnic identity through familiar cultural practices, though the form of identity diverges across Asian American experiences. I will explore this use of ethnic identification, cultural connection, and difference among Asian American TCKs. Further on, I will analyze the responses from four interviewees and show why the TCK identity can be beneficial to second-generation Asian Americans through finding community with people who have had similar achievements, struggles, and experiences.

Methodology

The scope of interviewees selected for this paper is second-generation Asian American young adults who grew up and completed up to secondary education in the Denver metro area. For my interview process, I asked the same five questions to four different interviewees. It should be noted that I have a personal relationship with each participant to some degree. I have listed each question asked below, and significant points brought up by participants. Each interview took

place in person or online via Zoom video conferencing technology. The primary purpose of these interviews was to have a conversation with each interviewee about their life in Denver, focusing on their cultural experiences and present-day identification with their multiple cultures. The interviewee led the conversation after each initial question, since I wanted them to direct the conversation. Each participant consented to being recorded. All participants have consented to the use of their last names in this paper. I will be using they/them pronouns for all participants, since I will be analyzing racial and ethnic identity, not gender identity. Because this study draws on a small, non-random sample of participants with whom I have existing relationships, the findings are not intended to be representative of all second-generation Asian Americans. Rather, the interviews provide qualitative insights into how a small group of individuals describe and interpret their experiences of cultural identity within the Asian American diaspora.

How would you describe yourself? This question is very open-ended, so it was a bit difficult for the interviewees to first pick what type of descriptions to use for themselves. I wanted to hear more than just an ethnic or racial identity. Despite my thesis focusing on Asian-Americans, I feel it is important to recognize the intersectional and individual experiences that each interviewee brings. By keeping this intersectionality within the paper, it allows for a

deeper understanding of the Asian American experience in Colorado. Interviewee Ajay talked about their career aspirations, one of which is to go into labor activism. Interviewee Seth discussed their personality traits and described themselves as caring, passionate, and curious. Interviewee Tran described themselves as a peaceseeker and a resilient person. Interviewee Kim brought up their focus on computer science in university.

While the racial or ethnic identities of the participants will be the main focus of analysis later on, I want to give space to emphasize the different perspectives the participants bring. The four interviewees are more than just statistics for my essay, they are people who are more than what is shared in the interview. Additionally, they represent four distinct personalities that fall within the TCK category, but they are only a partial view of the Asian-American diaspora within the Denver Metro area. Taken together, these differences demonstrate that there is no singular Asian American experience; rather, shared cultural identity emerges alongside diverse personal histories, interests, and aspirations.

Where do you feel like you belong?

Interviewees had different ideas of how to describe community. Ajay brought up different spaces such as online communities and the Desi¹ diaspora in Colorado. They felt they were able to

connect with people who had shared experiences despite the different cultures in these larger groups. However, Seth talked about community as their overall friend group and the ones they consider family. They described themselves as belonging to places with similar understandings of morality over any other qualifier. Tran simply noted that they feel like they belong in Asian American communities, as well as in a Vietnamese church school they attended as a child. Kim, however, described how they feel no strong connection to any community or group besides Christianity, “I don’t think I belong anywhere...if I stray away from social aspects, it would be more religious...I would consider myself a follower of Christ...but I don’t [have] confidence to say I belonged in any certain area.” Religious spaces, online forums, and friend groups are the main communities mentioned where the participants feel included.

These responses demonstrate that community is not experienced uniformly among second-generation Asian Americans. Rather than being defined solely by shared ethnicity, participants found belonging through a variety of spaces including cultural organizations, religious communities, online networks, and personal relationships. This diversity of experiences suggests that cultural identity within the Asian American diaspora is shaped not only by ancestry

¹ “Desi.” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/desi>. The term “Desi” is defined by

Merriam-Webster dictionary as “a person of South Asian descent, especially a person of South Asian ancestry who lives outside of South Asia”

but also by the social environments and communities individuals choose to participate in.

What are your thoughts on the term “Third Culture Kid”? There was little recognition of the term “Third Culture Kid” among the interviewees. They had either never heard of it before or knew very little about it. Furthermore, the participants did not identify with this term, but they had no animosity towards the TCK definition. From Ajay, “I think it’s relevant...the terms I have associated with myself are very specific to one region of the world...I think it’s inclusive.” From Seth, “I don’t find it harmful or unhelpful, it just sounds like a term. I haven’t used it to identify myself because [I don’t know] much about it...I don’t really have a strong opinion.” From Tran, “I think it’s nice that there’s a name to it, because [it feels like my identity] has a name to it.” From Kim, “I feel like I’m living two different, separate lives when I’m in my house versus when I’m outside in public.”

Kim especially had an immediate connection to this term, despite not knowing about it before, “[When you described it], it felt like you were describing me”. Overall, the responses varied from a neutral to positive reaction to the term TCK.

Did you ever feel tensions between your identities growing up? This question elicited the richest and most detailed responses, as every participant recalled experiences of negotiating their cultural identity while growing up. Despite differences in their backgrounds, several common themes emerged, including childhood embarrassment, pressure to assimilate,

racialization, and the gradual development of cultural pride. There were several memories recalled by each participant. There is a sense of embarrassment about their difference in culture during elementary school ages that is shared among the interviewees. Religion, cultural practices, food, skin color, and languages were key factors in this sense of difference.

Interviewee Ajay stated, “[I was] genuinely one of the only brown kids in elementary school.” They told me a story on how they were taught to pronounce the letter ‘H’, and how their classmates made fun of them. Their mom pronounced it as an “etch” sound instead of the typical “eightch” sound used in America. Ajay commented on how they felt very out of touch with their classmates, “everyone else has a shared understanding of, like, how a letter is supposed to be said...you still have to adapt in some way so that people understand you.” They further explained how they tried to push away their culture as a kid, “I don’t want to be seen as different,” they recalled thinking. Ajay would become embarrassed when a parent tried to speak Malayalam, the language of their source culture, in public, or was upset with the traditional cultural food their mom packed for lunch. Even though it was food they liked, Ajay felt embarrassed when around peers and tried to push away their culture. However, as they grew up, they cared less about others’ opinions in high school and had more acceptance of the food and language that tied them to their culture.

Interviewee Seth began with an interesting take on the perception of the term “Asian-American”, explaining that they never felt accepted within the Asian-American identity because it was seen as an East Asian identity. “They would put me in that box of South Asian and not in this general Asian-American box...I’m Asian but also I guess I’m not.” They also brought up memories of growing up, getting insulted for the various Indian cultural practices they followed. One memory Seth recalled was when they were standing in line in third grade, their mom had put oil in their hair earlier that day. A classmate asked “Why is your hair so nasty and greasy?” Seth goes on to explain how they felt bad and still remember it, “Since then, she made me feel so bad about myself. And I was in like third grade. It’s over ten years later and I’m still thinking about that.” Seth also talked about other traditions, such as using henna or celebrating Holi, which became embarrassing to them due to the amount of ridicule they received, “I almost didn’t want to identify as being Indian or South Asian...it was embarrassing when in reality it’s not embarrassing...I was always thinking about like what other people would think of it, even though it’s nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about.”

Interviewee Tran mentioned how during childhood, they didn’t recall feeling any tension when they attended the church school, due to the fact that they were amongst people with similar identities along with their natural shyness. However, they felt more tension as an adult in

college, “A lot of the Asian community was not at the business center...it felt like...[I was] ostracized a little bit.”

Interviewee Kim talked to me about how the racial bullying they went through actually caused them to hold resentment towards their parents and identity. However, that animosity is not something Kim has carried into adulthood, “I did have a little bit of tension in terms of my identity, between the origin of my parents and being in America... I wouldn’t say that there’s any sort of tension in terms of my identity right now.” Kim emphasized that nowadays they’re proud to be Korean American, and that racist remarks and bullying became less frequent as they got older.

Collectively, these narratives reveal that tensions between cultural identities were most pronounced during childhood, when participants were especially aware of being perceived as different by their peers. Language, food, religious practices, physical appearance, and cultural traditions became visible markers of difference that often led participants to distance themselves from aspects of their heritage. However, all four participants described a gradual shift toward greater acceptance of their cultural identities as they entered adolescence or adulthood. These findings suggest that identity within the Asian American diaspora is not static but evolves over time as individuals gain confidence, find supportive communities, and reinterpret the cultural practices they once viewed as sources of embarrassment.

What do you do, or what did you do in Denver to reinforce your identities? Food, language, and holidays are the main way the interviewees have reinforced their identities both through childhood and in the present day. Ajay listed a Denver Hindu gathering they would go to with their parents as a child. Ajay was also active in an Indian dance group while growing up, focused on the Bharathanatyam dance style. Seth also found reinforcement through Hindu groups, specifically a Hindu-based Sunday school where children would sing prayer songs and learn about India. Tran told me they stay in touch with their Asian identity by celebrating Asian holidays such as the Lunar New Year, and other family traditions. Kim explained that eating Korean food, speaking Korean, and going to church reinforced their identity the most, however they didn't see it as an "identity" action, but rather an overall human action.

Analysis

Before fully analyzing the participants' self descriptions of identity, it is important to remember these were verbal interviews. None of the four participants distinguished between a hyphenated or non-hyphenated identity, which are connected to two of the four identities from

Rumbaut's San Diego study in 1994; national-origin, hyphenated, assimilative, and panethnic. With that being said, I will assume both identities should be analyzed. Furthermore, I will be adding on more detail from the interviews that is more suitable for analysis, rather than listed within a

summary of responses. My personal connection to some of the interviewees had the possibility to influence the answers that were shared. I already had established relations with three of the four interviewees.

Ajay identified as Indian-American, or Indian American; they did not specify. The first identity is an example of the hyphenated identity, and the second is an assimilative identity. Seth listed two descriptions, South Asian and Indian, which is a panethnic identity for the former and a national-origin identity for the latter. Tran only held the Asian American identity, which is another panethnic identity. Finally, Kim identified as Korean-American, or Korean American; they did not specify. The former identity is a hyphenated identity, while the latter is an assimilative identity. Out of the four participants, only one claimed the panethnic "Asian" identity. Only one of four participants did not include an "American" identity within their self-description. Two of the four participants claimed a panethnic identity. Although the South

Asian identity is not confirmed to be a panethnic identity within Rumbaut's four identities, I have analyzed the South Asian identity as panethnic due to its all-encompassing nature of the Indian subcontinent and the national identities within. Neither Ajay, Indian American/Indian-American, nor Kim, Korean American/Korean-American, specified how to spell the identities. It is unclear whether this is because participants responded orally rather

than in writing, it is impossible to determine whether the distinction between hyphenated and non-hyphenated identities held any significance for them. When the participants were asked where they felt they belonged, three out of four participants mentioned a place that was not previously claimed as an identity. Ajay said they felt a sense of belonging in Desi and Indian-American spaces, but they did not identify as Desi. Tran mentioned belonging to a Vietnamese church school they attended as a kid, but did not identify as Vietnamese. Kim explained how they only felt belonging within the Christian community, but did not identify as Christian. There is an interesting pattern that shows how a sense of belonging within the participants went beyond their primary identities. Only Seth shared a unique answer according to this pattern. They specifically put the idea of morals and values as something they consider over any identity or ethnicity. However, their answer still shows that community and belonging can be found far beyond any identity or ethnicity someone holds.

Additionally, each interviewee brought in a unique perspective of a specific location in which they found community. Ajay brought up a social media platform, Reddit, which acts as an online forum. One of these forums is called “r/ABCDesis”, which stands for “Abroad-Born Confused Desis”. It provides an online space for Desis to share experiences, advice, or emotional stories while born outside South Asia. Ajay is the only interviewee who mentioned social media.

This example demonstrates that diasporic identity is not limited to physical communities but is increasingly maintained through digital spaces where individuals share experiences across geographic boundaries.

Besides the shared understanding of morality, Seth listed the city of Denver as a place they feel like they belong. They explained how all their family and friends lived in Denver, and they couldn’t imagine living somewhere else. Seth is the only interviewee who mentioned a particular city.

Tran did not explain any particular community or group they felt connected to, and instead just felt like they belonged within Asian communities. “Part of me wants to say more of the Asian side, but there are times where it’s more in the middle...but I feel like I do tend to lean more toward the Asian side”. Depending on the reader’s own identity and understanding of Asian American communities, this idea of “leaning towards” a middle identity or more to the “Asian side” is something that can be interpreted and understood in several instances.

As stated earlier, Kim explained how they lack confidence to claim any space besides a religious one, Christianity. Conversely, Kim is the only interviewee to discuss how they did not feel included, nor did they want to be included within the groups that held the same identity. “Growing up I would see [the Korean kids], and I never would have said I belonged in that group...[I

thought that] Koreans are a bit more judgy, so I would never want to hang out with them.”

These answers show the true inner complexities of Asian American identities. Asian Americans have a myriad of possibilities when considering ethnic and racial identity. It is not as simple as parental heritage or religious upbringing. The four participants have shown that the inner thought process as an individual has a crucial influence on identity. Insecurities, dilemmas, strengths, and memories were all critical moments in shaping the four participants' ethnic identities.

Conclusion

When I began this research, I sought to understand whether the concept of the Third Culture Kid (TCK) could provide second-generation Asian Americans with an additional sense of identity and community. However, the interviews suggested a more nuanced conclusion. Rather than demonstrating the need for a new label, participants showed that the experience of navigating multiple cultures is already embedded within their understandings of being Asian American. The concept of a "third culture" proved more meaningful than the label itself. Participants interpreted their identities in diverse ways, demonstrating that Asian American identity is flexible, evolving, and shaped by individual experiences rather than fixed cultural expectations.

Yet, within the local communities of Colorado, there is a severe lack of complete representation

of the Asian American experience. Each participant shared that a community they had in common in childhood was religious gatherings. Beyond that, there are few areas within the Denver metro area for Asian American communities, as expressed by the interviewees. In order to strengthen Asian American communities within Colorado, these findings suggest that expanding opportunities for community gatherings, cultural organizations, and public recognition of the diversity within Asian American communities could strengthen participants' sense of belonging.. This means opening opportunities for communities to share their identity, perhaps through forums like the Sakura festival or dragon boat festival. This could also manifest through supporting Asian businesses, institutions, or other community organizations in the Denver metro area.

The experiences of just four Asian American individuals in Denver, Colorado, each with their own unique experiences of belonging and cultural balance, illuminate the differences between people, in this case, TCKs, who have similar circumstances in the United States.

Although this study is limited to four participants, it demonstrates that second-generation Asian American identity is neither singular nor static. Participants described identity as something continually shaped by family, community, religion, geography, and personal experience, while their sense of belonging often extended beyond the labels they

used to describe themselves. Rather than replacing existing identities, the concept of a "third culture" offers a useful lens for understanding the shared experience of navigating multiple cultural worlds. Future research involving larger and more diverse populations of Asian Americans in Colorado could further explore how local communities, institutions, and social networks influence identity formation and belonging across generations.

This latter identity can give second-generation Asian Americans a chance to connect in another way beyond ethnic identity and focus on shared struggles. This may prove to be valuable, as the interviews revealed often vague or disparate understandings of labels, even while the interviewees' feelings towards source cultures were either neutral or accepting. The Asian American identity takes on many different practices, forms, and interpretations, all of which contribute to a unique third culture that must be the subject of more examination.

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