



ASIA PACIFIC  
FOUNDATION  
OF CANADA

FONDATION  
ASIE PACIFIQUE  
DU CANADA

ZERO TOL  
on CRI  
y/against

A BAD DAY  
FOR HIM?  
STOP WHITEWASHING  
ASIAN HATE!

Asian  
Lives  
Matter!!!

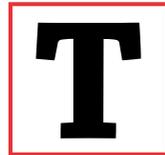
## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

East Asian Young Adults Talk About  
Multiculturalism and Anti-Asian Racism  
in Canada, and Recommendations for  
Building an Inclusive Future

MAY 2021

# ABOUT THE ASIA PACIFIC FOUNDATION OF CANADA

---



The Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF Canada) is a not-for-profit organization focused on Canada's relations with Asia. Our mission is to be Canada's catalyst for engagement with Asia and Asia's bridge to Canada. APF Canada is dedicated to strengthening ties between Canada and Asia with a focus on seven thematic areas: trade and investment, surveys and polling, regional security, digital technologies, domestic networks, sustainable development, and Asia Competency

Our research provides high-quality, relevant, and timely information, insights, and perspectives on Canada-Asia relations. Providing policy considerations and business intelligence for stakeholders across the Asia Pacific, our work includes Reports, Policy Briefs, Case Studies, Dispatches, and a regular Asia Watch newsletter that together support these thematic areas.

APF Canada also works with business, government, and academic stakeholders to provide custom research, data, briefings and Asia Competency training for Canadian organizations. Consulting services are available by request. We would be pleased to work with you to meet your research and business intelligence needs.

Contact us at [info@asiapacific.ca](mailto:info@asiapacific.ca) or visit us online at [www.asiapacific.ca](http://www.asiapacific.ca).

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b><u>INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY</u></b>	<b>3</b>
Notes About the Report	5
<b><u>CRITIQUING CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM</u></b>	<b>6</b>
The Unevenness of Canadians' Beliefs and Feelings About Diversity	8
Personal Encounters: Multicultural Ideal vs. Reality	10
<b><u>EAST ASIAN YOUNG ADULTS' PERSPECTIVES ON AND EXPERIENCES WITH ANTI-ASIAN RACISM</u></b>	<b>14</b>
Microaggressions	16
Stereotypes	19
Asian Attitudes Toward Racism	22
<b><u>YOUNG ADULTS' IDEAS FOR BUILDING A MORE INCLUSIVE SOCIETY</u></b>	<b>26</b>
Making Canadian Education More Inclusive	26
Media Diversification and Representation	31
Deconstructing Asia as a Monolith	35
<b><u>WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?</u></b>	<b>36</b>
<b><u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u></b>	<b>38</b>
<b><u>RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CANADIANS OF ASIAN DESCENT, ALLYSHIP, AND TRAINING</u></b>	<b>39</b>

## INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed and exacerbated deep flaws and fissures, not only in many countries' public health systems, but also in their social welfare systems, their politics, and their societies. Canada is no exception. Among the “shadow pandemics” with which Canadians are having to reckon is the alarming increase in violence and hostility by Canadians against fellow Canadians, specifically, people of Asian descent. Asian international students and workers residing in Canada have also been among the victims. According to a [new report](#) titled *A Year of Racist Attacks* by several Canadian advocacy groups, there have been 1,150 cases of racist attacks across Canada since March 2020. The bulk of the incident reports came from Ontario and British Columbia, and over 84 per cent of those reports have been made by people who identify as East Asians.

In the summer of 2020, the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF Canada) convened a series of focus groups with East Asian-identifying youth in hopes of better understanding how they were processing and experiencing this escalation of anti-Asian aggression. These focus groups comprised young adults (aged 20-28), including Canadian citizens, permanent residents, and temporary residents. In its 36-year history, APF Canada has advocated for greater engagement and understanding between Canada and Asia, whether between different levels of governments, business partners, Indigenous groups, researchers, or NGOs and civil society organizations. We have also strived to be a source of information and objective analysis about events happening in the Asia Pacific region and recommendations on how Canada can and should respond.

## METHODOLOGY

The Focus Group method was considered the most appropriate as it provides first, an opportunity to generate a rich understanding of the young adults' perspectives about anti-Asian racism, and second, helps explore shared views and opinions (and divergences) on the topic. Efforts were made to seek out participants who were Canadians, permanent residents, and temporary residents (international workers or students) in Canada and self-identified their ethnicity as East Asian. Researchers used convenience and snowball sampling methods to seek out participants. Respondents were initially asked to fill out a pre-focus group survey on relevant issues. Each participant was also asked for a pseudonym of their choice, which was then used during the focus groups to help maintain their privacy and confidentiality. The focus groups were held virtually through a secure platform, which also allowed participants to join from all over Canada. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes. At the end of the focus groups, participants were given gift cards as a token of appreciation for their time and efforts. The focus groups were recorded with prior consent and the researchers transcribed, analyzed, and independently coded the interviews.

**Total participants:**  
23

**Moderators:**  
2 (1 citizen, 1 permanent resident)

**Participants' Age range:**  
20 to 28 years.

**Gender Identity:**  
Female = 15; Male = 7;  
Non-binary = 1

An important part of our commitment to this mandate is educating and engaging young people. Through our programs, we aim to reach youth from a wide variety of backgrounds, while also taking note that these programs may have special salience for some youth of Asian descent. As such, we wanted to hear directly from them on how we and other organizations might do more to effectively address the hate, bias, discrimination, and stereotyping of Asians and Canadians of Asian descent. We are incorporating some of these insights and ideas into our existing projects, but also welcome the opportunity to share them with others who are wanting to do the same. Some of the main takeaways from these focus groups include the following:

1. Anti-Asian hate, hostility, bias, and discrimination are neither new phenomena nor are they isolated incidents. Most of our participants had experienced this kind of treatment first-hand, in different forms and at various points in their lives.
2. Harmful stereotypes about Asia, Asians, and Canadians of Asian descent are pervasive and persistent. Moreover, some of the participants said that they were confronted with these stereotypes when interacting with people they knew – their peers, their classmates, and even their friends.
3. While many participants felt that the sources of anti-Asian bias and prejudice were widespread, they singled out two areas that could be mobilized to address the issue: education about Asia and the experiences of Canadians of Asian descent, and better representation of Asians and Asian diaspora populations in the media and popular culture.

**Resident of:**

British Columbia = 19; Ontario = 2; Alberta = 1; Quebec = 1

**Status in Canada:**

Canadians = 15; Permanent Resident = 3; Temporary residents = 5

**Focus Groups Dates:**

June 24 to July 16, 2020

**Focus Group sizes:**

4 to 6 members per group

**Number of Focus Groups:**

5

**Duration:**

90 minutes (approx.)

*Note: Only one group had no temporary residents. Remaining four groups had a mix of citizens, PRs, and temporary residents.*

**Positionality** – In qualitative research it is pertinent to identify the researchers' positionality and recognize that they may have inherent biases that can influence the interpretation of the findings. This work involved four team members – two lead researchers and two junior researchers/moderators. One of the lead researcher identified as Caucasian American, and the other as South Asian. The two moderators both identified as East Asian. The four members were all females and three identified as immigrants, with one of the moderators identifying as a Canadian. One of the lead researchers has 10 years of experience in advocating for and building Asia competency among Canadians, particularly youth. The second lead researcher has experience in conducting public opinion studies using various research methods, and is an experienced researcher on diversity issues. All efforts have been made to maintain objectivity, however, the researchers' experience, knowledge, and biases can affect the way the data is interpreted.

## Notes About the Report

In this report, we use the term *Canadians of Asian descent* (rather than Asian Canadians) as an identity group, keeping in mind the larger context of identity and underscoring that Canadians of Asian heritage are first and foremost Canadians.

The geopolitical context of COVID-19 shaped this study's participant selection. The pandemic has been publicly attributed to communities of East Asian descent, and Chinese people specifically, since its first outbreak in early 2020. Because of such associations with the virus, participant selection was purposefully restricted to people of East Asian descent. The effects of anti-Asian racism are not limited to East Asians, however, and further research is needed to capture the experiences of Southeast and South Asian youth populations as well.

The type of change needed to address these critical issues in a fundamental and transformative way will require a serious and long-term commitment by a wide range of stakeholders. APF Canada expresses its respect for the many individuals and organizations that have long been active in this work, and is profoundly grateful for the opportunity to learn from them. By sharing this report, we hope that it can contribute to these ongoing efforts.

Finally, the lead researchers, as well as the entire APF Canada team, wish to express their sincere gratitude to the 23 young adults who participated in this study. We did not take lightly what it was we were asking of them – sharing their personal experiences and feelings about something that has left deep emotional scars for many people of Asian descent. Our commitment to them was, and remains, to forward strategies to 'do better,' whether that is through how we carry out our own work, or by using our voice to advocate for the difficult but necessary changes that this current period of Canadian history has exposed.

## CRITIQUING CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM

We began both the focus group discussions and the pre-focus group survey with a question about the young adults' perceptions of Canadian values (see Box 1). This question was meant to provide a general starting point for easing into a more focused conversation about their experiences as Canadians of Asian descent and Asians living in Canada. In the survey, participants were asked to reflect on their perceptions of shared Canadian values and asked to rank 13 factors identified as important Canadian values through various polls (see [Nanos](#) and [Environics](#)). Fifty per cent of the participants ranked “ethnic and cultural diversity” as the top Canadian value.

This result was not unexpected. In 2018, the Environics Institute published a report titled “[Canada’s World](#),” based on a survey of Canadians’ views on global issues. When asked about Canada’s biggest contribution to the world, the most frequent response (25%) was that it was a country that welcomed people from all over the world and could serve as a multicultural role model for others. The percentage of people who held this view had more than tripled since the last time this survey was conducted, in 2008. These feelings were especially pronounced among people aged 18-24. APF Canada’s 2020 [National Opinion Poll](#) found strong agreement with this self-image: nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents felt that “Canadians are very inclusive.”

On one level, these survey results seem to indicate resounding support for genuine cultural and racial diversity. Indeed, our focus group participants, specifically, those who had grown up in Canada, were familiar with the emergence of multiculturalism as a value stand during Pierre Trudeau’s government, and that this

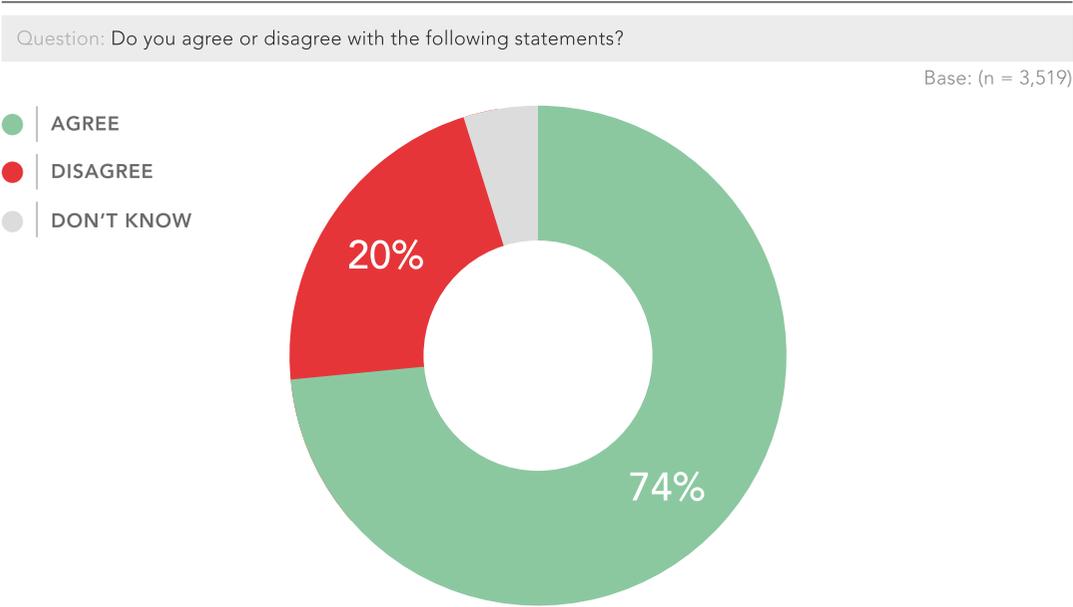
### Box 1: East Asian Young Adults’ Perception of Shared Canadian Values (rank-ordered)

1. Ethnic and cultural diversity
2. Human rights
3. Democracy
4. Gender equality
5. Inclusion
6. Respect for rule of law
7. Environmental rights
8. Respect for minorities
9. Sustainable development
10. Economic security
11. Respect for Indigenous cultures
12. Innovation
13. Leadership

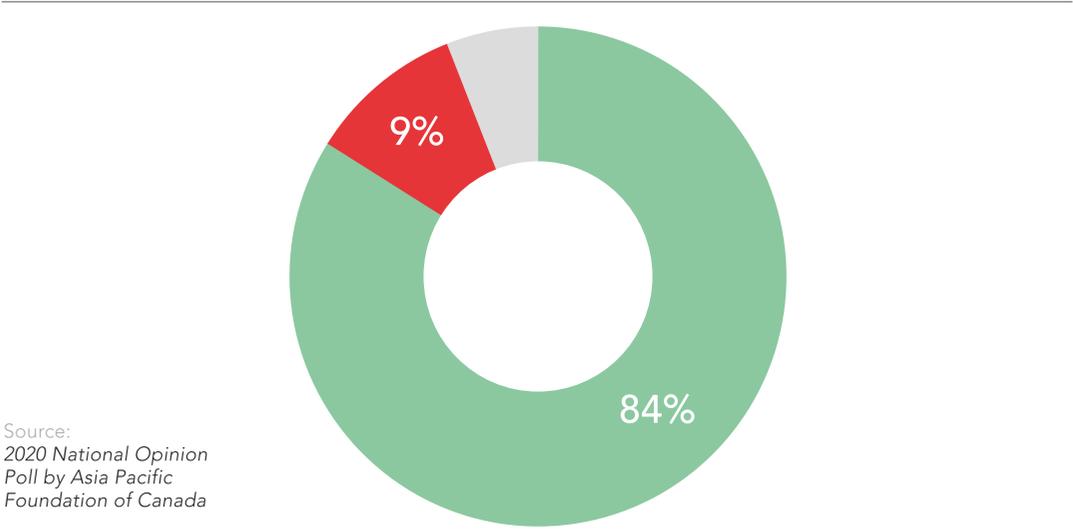
*Q: Among the following, what factors do you identify as shared Canadian values? Please rank them according to your beliefs*

had culminated in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1985), which recognizes and promotes multiculturalism as a reflection of Canada’s racially and culturally diverse society. But when we explore these types of survey results on a deeper level, we find a fair bit of inconsistency in how people interpret abstract concepts like “multiculturalism,” “inclusivity,” and “tolerance.” That is a topic we turn to below.

FIGURE 1  
*Most Canadians believe that "Canadians are very inclusive"*



*But at the same time, they also believe "Anti-Asian racism existed in Canada before COVID-19"*



## The Unevenness of Canadians' Beliefs and Feelings About Diversity

Several of the young adults in our focus groups affirmed their agreement with the multicultural vision of Canadian society. For example, **Kareem**, a 20-year-old citizen, said that Canada “does have a very strong image in terms of diversity and multiculturalism,” adding that “we welcome all kinds of people whether they come from any kind of background. And I think that’s pretty great about Canada.”

Similarly, **Yvette**, also a 20-year-old citizen, noted:

*“...I feel like it’s part of the Canadian spirit that we have a lot of different culture[s], and then we allow different voices and then people here are just so open-minded. I feel so comfortable for sharing my story or sharing my perspective, even though I know some people may have different opinions [than mine].”*

Their appraisals of Canadian multiculturalism were not made in isolation, but rather in comparison with other white-dominant settler colonial societies, such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Observations about race relations in the United States – especially the killing and abuses of Black Americans by police officers – surfaced in several of the discussions. However, participants also used these comparisons to show where Canada was falling short, especially in its treatment of Indigenous peoples. Timothy, a permanent resident in B.C., pointed out that New Zealand had made more progress in respecting Indigenous communities, cultures, and languages. He also mentioned that simply doing better than other countries should not be the yardstick Canadians use to measure their own progress.

**Peter**, a 20-year-old citizen from B.C., also pointed to the problems inherent in taking a ‘victory lap’ mentality.

*“It is dangerous to just buy into this narrative blindly and then have everyone just believe that we are this multicultural society when we really aren’t, and obviously, we have our problems... But on the other hand, I still do believe that*

*Canada is much further advanced than a lot of other countries in terms of race. So it is this double-edged sword, right? It's hard to really pinpoint where exactly we are."*

Peter's observation – that it is “hard to really pinpoint exactly where we are” – was an important piece of subtext for these conversations, namely, uncertainty about Canadians' true commitment to genuine multiculturalism. **Roji** felt that for some people, this commitment was sincere, whereas for others, it may not be something they embrace or engage with on a substantive level.

*"...a lot of people think that for Canada, multiculturalism and diversity is a value. But I think for a lot of people, it's just a fact or something that exists, but they don't really interact with it..."*

**– Roji, 21, Canadian citizen, B.C.**

Roji's intuition suggests an unevenness to Canadians' acceptance of cultural and racial differences. For example, a 2019 [poll](#) by the Angus Reid Institute showed that 56 per cent of Canadians feel that “minorities should do more to fit in better with mainstream Canadian society” rather than being encouraged to preserve their own customs and languages. When broken down by sex and age group, men and people 55 years and older were considerably more likely to feel this way. But even among people in our participants' peer group – those aged 18 to 34 – 51 per cent of men and 31 per cent of women felt that minorities need to do more to fit into the mainstream.

While we need to exercise caution in reading too much into a single poll result, at a minimum, this suggests ambiguity or a significant lack of consensus in how people define ‘the mainstream’ in a country that officially embraces multiculturalism as a core part of its identity. In the following section, we highlight how these young adults try to reconcile the ideal with the reality of Canadian multiculturalism in a society in which some people treat their ‘Asian-ness’ as a subtle or not so subtle disqualifier from the so-called ‘mainstream.’

## Personal Encounters: Multicultural Ideal vs. Reality

Participants shared moments when the Asian part of their identities began to crystallize in response to personal encounters with Canadian multiculturalism.

**Peter**, born and brought up in Canada, said he identifies more as Canadian than Chinese. This disconnect from being Chinese is reinforced when he is in China visiting relatives, who comment that they tend to see him as more Canadian than Chinese. Nevertheless, in Canada, he is still seen as having a “hyphenated” identity as Chinese Canadian. Annabelle elaborated on this feeling of disconnect that arose from trying to identify as either exclusively Canadian or Asian. She described growing up feeling like she ‘fell into a gap,’ wondering, “Why am I not this or why am I not that?” She said it is only recently that she felt a sense of agency in defining who she is.

*“...it’s not something that you should ever feel like you’re lacking in either area, because you also straddle a line that is so hard to straddle. And to give yourself that space to be who you are, and be unapologetically, is something that I have only very recently come to understand and be proud of.”*

– **Annabelle, 21, Canadian citizen, Ontario**

Some participants whose parents immigrated to Canada as adults contrasted their own experiences with those of their parents. Some noted a kind of sliding scale of acceptance based on whether a person retains markers that some people might mistake as signs of ‘foreign-ness,’ such as cultural norms or not being a native speaker of English or French. Nancy, whose mother immigrated to Canada as an adult, made the distinction in how these two groups are perceived.

### IDENTITY

The term “identity” refers to the “characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is.” (Oxford)

Social identity, can be defined as “the individual’s knowledge that [s] he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/[her] of the group membership,” as defined by British social psychologist Henri Tajfel (Turner, 1982, p. 18).

*“So, for example, [one group] can speak English without an accent or an identifying accent. You know, they were born here and have lived here most of their lives, versus people of colour who have immigrated more recently, who are notably immigrants, whether it’s an accent and maybe it’s the cultural norms and that kind of thing.”*

– **Nancy, 22, Canadian citizen, B.C.**

In North American contexts, the latter group is sometimes labelled pejoratively as “Fresh off the Boat,” especially when they display “ethnic identifiers” like speaking “accented English” or speaking one’s native language with co-ethnics – both big factors in anti-Asian discrimination.<sup>1</sup>

The international students or workers, or those who had come to Canada after they were old enough to have already formed impressions of the country, had somewhat different kinds of encounters with Canadian multiculturalism. For example, 28-year-old **Daxia** said that “as an international student and before I came to Canada, I was really insensitive to race... because when I was in my home country, everyone is from the same ethnic group. So we didn’t think too much about race issues.” **Yun**, a temporary worker, reflected that her perception of Canada had changed quite a bit since she began learning about Canada’s history and socio-political system.

*“... settler-colonialism is a structure rather than an event, which means it’s an ongoing oppressive structure in everyday reality for Indigenous peoples. That’s something that I am constantly trying to grapple with myself as well, as a settler invited here. I’m constantly trying to think through the position that I’m currently occupying and the history that happened here and what I can do and what my contribution can be.”*

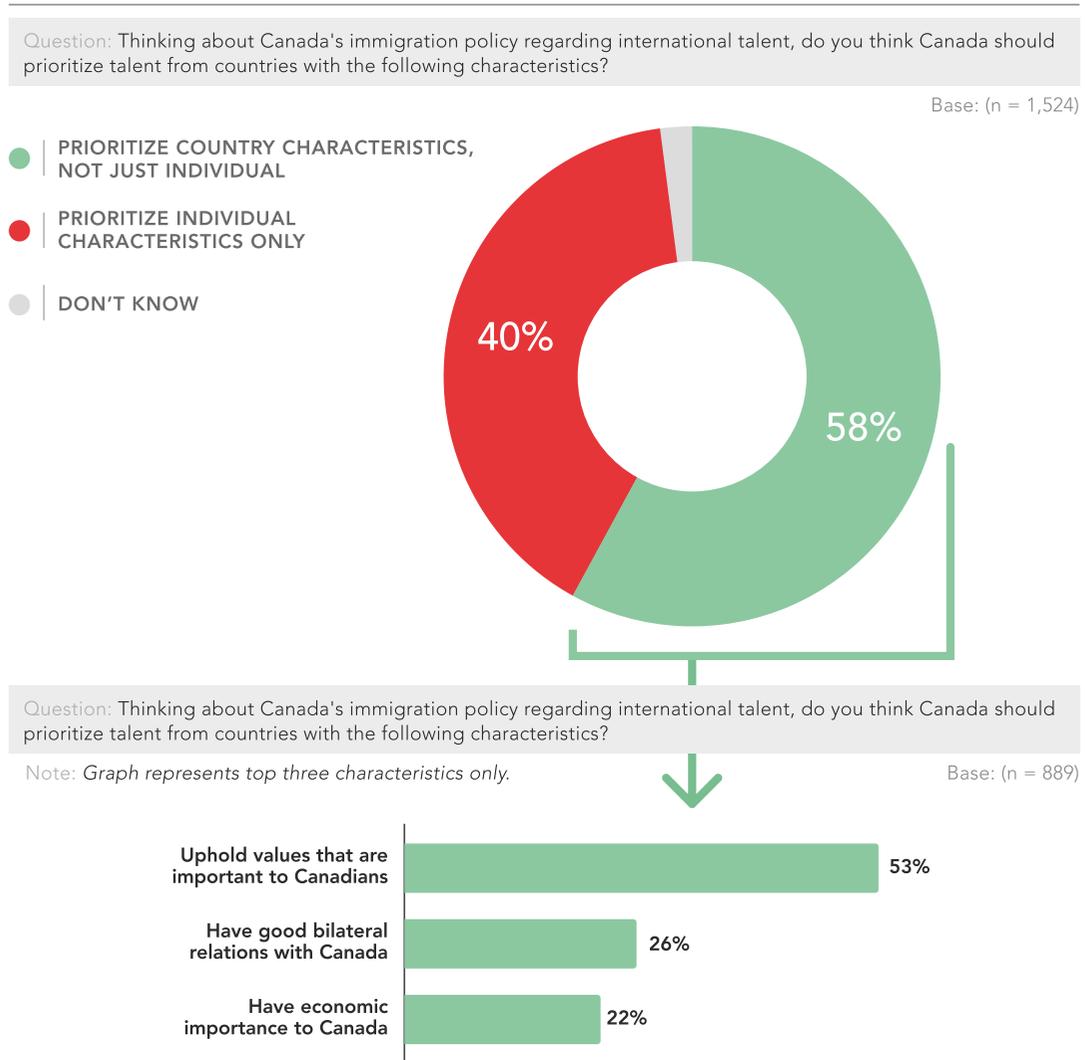
– **Yun, 28 years old, temporary worker, B.C.**

Yun’s reflection incorporates the insight of scholar Patrick Wolfe that settler colonization is not a single event that happened in the past, but is instead a structure that continually evolves through policy and with waves of migration that perpetuate the erasure of Indigenous claims to land and resources.<sup>2</sup>

This insight indicates a high level of learning and complex thinking surrounding race and settler colonialism developed as a student in Canada. With deeper reflection and education about Canada’s complicated and difficult racial and settler colonial history, participants present a desire to grapple with their own position and complicity in racial inequalities within official Canadian multiculturalism.

FIGURE 2

*Majority of Canadians want their government to prioritize "country characteristics" such as values, good bilateral relations, and the country's economic importance, in immigration policies aimed at international talent*



Source:  
National Opinion Poll 2019: Canadian Views on Human Capital from Asia, by Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

**Alvin**, a 25-year-old citizen in B.C., said before moving to Canada, he imagined it was not only diverse and multicultural, but also a place of mutual respect and understanding of different ethnicities. However, he has since moderated his views: “Most people are really nice, but I don’t think people have gathered too much understanding about [the] difference between cultures and people from other countries.”

One of the surveys mentioned in the previous section pointed to Canadians’ belief that theirs was a society that could serve as a role model for other multicultural societies. In a survey focused on Canada’s *contributions to the world*, this could be interpreted as a self-aggrandizing national narrative – a sense that we feel the world has more to learn from us rather than vice-versa. Alvin’s point suggests that the reverse may also be true.

Some Canadians might take issue with the characterization of their country as having become more insular and incurious about the world beyond our ‘cultural cousins,’ like the U.S., U.K., Australia, and Western Europe. Such a characterization may seem especially inapt given that Canada’s borders have remained open to immigration from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Nevertheless, when we try to overlay the ideal of Canadian multiculturalism and a genuine embrace of diversity with the reality, two gaps become apparent.

First, there has been no shortage of observations among leading Canadian thinkers that Canada is not always as attuned to the perspectives and experiences of the rest of the world as we like to think we are. Our counterparts in Asia and elsewhere have made similar observations about the increasingly short-term and transactional nature of our international engagement and commitments – a trend that transcends political party. Some of the most visible examples include our back-to-back failures to earn a spot on the UN Security Council; a foreign policy that has been insufficiently focused and is resourced at rates lower than our peers; and, our under-performance in sending our young people abroad for global experience in countries other than to the ‘cultural cousins’ noted above. The second gap is a separate but related issue: The beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours related to racial and cultural diversity within Canada. In the next section, we highlight the focus group discussions that shed light on the extent and nature of this gap.

## EAST ASIAN YOUNG ADULTS' PERSPECTIVES ON AND EXPERIENCES WITH ANTI-ASIAN RACISM

All five focus groups discussed the surge in anti-Asian racist attacks in response to the coronavirus pandemic. In the pre-focus group survey, there was almost universal agreement (92%) that since the COVID-19 outbreak, people from China or of Chinese (or other Asian) origins had been treated negatively by members of the Canadian public. They also perceived that an individual with East Asian facial features and wearing a mask was likely to be at a higher risk of verbal or physical assault now than in the past. One participant felt that the pandemic marked a shift in racial discrimination against Asians based on physical appearance rather than cultural differences.

Moreover, news and social media stories of Asians being stabbed, pushed, beat-up, and spat on had the participants worried about their own safety. Thirteen participants (54%) said that they themselves had experienced some form of racial abuse or attack, and 15 respondents (63%) said that someone close to them had also experienced some form of racial abuse/attack. John, a 21-year-old citizen in B.C., shared a recent incident he experienced while he was walking his dog:

*“On my sort of walk back, some guy, he was a white Canadian... he screamed out, ‘F\*\*\* you, China!’ to me. Like, whoa. And I am not ethnically Chinese so he’s got it wrong right from the get-go. Regardless, incredibly offensive overt racism at its finest, right?”*

– **John, 21 years, Canadian citizen, B.C.**

**John** said that despite his attempts to “shrug it off,” the incident lingered in his mind. He reiterated that behaviours like these pre-dated the current pandemic, saying, “I think mass media just has their attention sort of fixated towards these incidents because of COVID-19. I am willing to bet that incidences were happening before COVID-19.” In fact, as an elementary school student in Vancouver, John experienced physical and verbal abuse for “being a ‘chink.’”

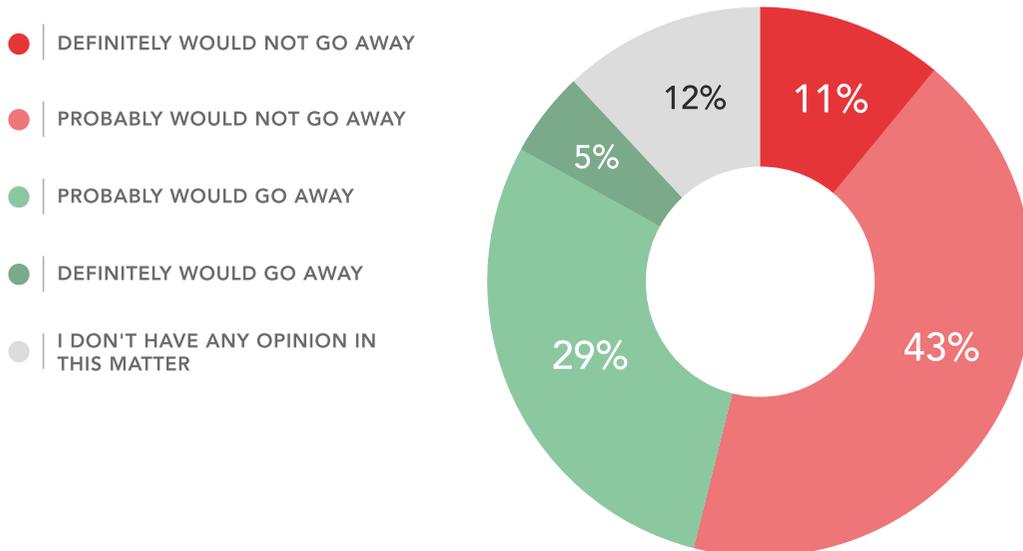
A prominent theme throughout the discussions was participants’ belief that anti-Asian hate did not materialize suddenly, but is an escalation of pre-existing prejudices. As **Peach**, a permanent resident from Ontario, observed, “I think COVID definitely exacerbated the problems that are already there.” Most of the participants were skeptical (58%) that anti-Asian racism would disappear once the pandemic ended; 38% said they were “not sure.” Only one respondent was optimistic that anti-Asian hostility would subside once the COVID-19 threat receded. In fact, much of the focus group discussions centred around the types of microaggressions directed against them and other people of Asian descent.

FIGURE 3

*The 2020 National Opinion Poll by APF Canada shows that 54% of Canadians are not very optimistic about anti-Asian hostility dying down in the time to come post COVID-19*

Question: Do you feel that the recent surge of anti-Asian sentiment and hostility in Canada will go away once the COVID-19 pandemic ends?

Base: All Respondents (n = 3,519)



Source: 2020 National Opinion Poll by Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

## Microaggressions

Microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group.”<sup>3</sup> Referring to these incidents as “micro” does not reflect the seriousness of their impact. Indeed, their subtle and sometimes indirect character is what makes them so difficult to address. In one widely cited study, the authors likened racial microaggressions to “carbon monoxide” – dangerous and harmful, even though – or especially because – they are not always readily detectable by everyone.<sup>4</sup>

A comment by **Ehmy**, a 20-year-old Canadian in B.C., shows the tendency to minimize these incidents.

*“I think... when we are talking about anti-Asian racism, that’s kind of beneath the surface and it’s more based on microaggressions. It’s so hard to capture because we can’t necessarily point to specific incidents where people walked away harmed. My ego might get a little bit bruised or it might get a little bit irritated over time, but we can’t point to specific things that are worth addressing at the policy sort of level.”*

**Xavier**, a 28-year-old citizen, recounted a recent experience in a computer programming boot camp, in which Xavier was only one of two Asian students. One day, a classmate came to class having shaved off his beard. Xavier recalled:

*“The Cantonese guy was like, ‘Oh hey, you shaved your beard,’ and he was like, ‘Oh yeah, it’s ‘cause your cousin from China gave [COVID] to me. It’s part of the COVID virus.’... Yes, it’s overt racism but, at the same time, it’s not overt racism – it’s sort of overt racism with a smiley face in a way, right? It’s meant as a joke that if you don’t laugh with it, you are the enemy. That you can’t take a joke.”*

In Xavier's example, the offender was explicit in his racial language, albeit in the guise of supposedly making a joke. However, **Sophie** and **Yvette** described aggression that was less explicit and conveyed more through tone, something that creates an additional burden for the recipient struggling to decipher whether the person's behaviour was racially motivated or not.

**Moderator:** *So I just wanted to get your understanding of what would you define as racism against an East Asian person in Canada?*

**Sophie:** *I think it would depend on the tone that they're saying it. Like, for example, some people might be saying it in a mocking way as in they're trying to make fun of you or make you feel bad... and then other people, it could be just a joking way... But I think the tone is really important...*

**Moderator:** *Mm-hmm.*

**Yvette:** *... some people would just yell out in my face when they first meet me and say, 'Oh, hey, ni hao,' or, 'konnichiwa.' ... I don't know if that is racist or not, but it does sound kind of disrespectful in a way. But sometimes, if their tone is more like a mocking or joking way, I would usually laugh back or just make a joke about this.... I just feel the tone is a good way to define it, but sometimes I feel like people don't really know if they are acting rude or racist to other groups."*

(Excerpt from Focus Group 2)

**Yvette's** dilemma is one that has been well documented elsewhere, specifically, people of Asian descent feeling frustrated that if they respond with anger or confront the person, it "generally [does] no good. It only serve[s] to make the victim appear 'paranoid' or suggest that the responder had some major personal problem."<sup>5</sup> **Nancy**, a 22-year-old citizen in B.C., concurs:

*“I think that that almost makes it worse because it very well could be racism, but you don’t know and it makes it harder to call out because you don’t want to be seen as over exaggerating, or seeing racism everywhere where there isn’t.”*

Although these types of interactions sometimes happen between peers or with other acquaintances, people of Asian descent often hold back from addressing the comments or behaviour, as doing so might result in “denial, defensiveness, and a negative outcome for the relationship.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time, they feel bothered by having to “make excuses’ for friends by rationalizing away their biases and by denying their own racial reality.”<sup>7</sup>

There are also ‘silent’ but nonetheless powerful gestures, such as **Peach**’s experience early on in the pandemic, when she and her friends sat down for a meal at a Vancouver restaurant and an older white man sitting next to them got up and moved far away from them. **Yun**, an international worker, pointed out that many Canadians mask their implicit bias behind politeness and good manners. The sometimes ‘hidden’ nature of race-based feelings can catch some newcomers off-guard. A participant in a 2007 study of international students in the American context described having to come to terms with the “different degrees of racism” she encountered on a daily basis, adding that “there are people who are racists and would still shake your hands, and think you are inferior.”<sup>8</sup>

## Stereotypes

In all five of the focus groups, the young adult participants discussed the continuing role of stereotypes about Asia and Asians. They noted that while some of these stereotypes may appear to be harmless or even positive, such as the model minority myth, these and other stereotypes can inform larger structural decisions and have detrimental and long-term effects on people's lives.

The stereotype with which most participants were familiar was the “model minority myth.” This idea, popularized in the American press during the 1960s, advanced the notion that Asians were especially high-performing academically and professionally, specifically in fields related to math and science. The myth extended to include a wide range of assumptions – for example, that Asians were less likely to engage in criminality or other types of stigmatized behaviours, that they did not experience poverty like other people of colour, and that they did not face racial challenges despite not being part of the racial majority. Nevertheless, while the model minority has been thoroughly discredited, its effects have remained stubbornly pervasive.

*“...growing up constantly hearing that to be Asian means to excel, to be good at math, and for anyone who doesn't fit that stereotype, that's a lot of pressure. And it's not just external from Canadian society generally. It's also something many of us, I believe, have internalized. And, you know, from our own communities.”*

**– Amy, 24 years, Canadian citizen, B.C.**

In addition, several studies of the model minority myth have shown that its ostensibly favourable aspects are in fact bound up with “subtle, deeper underlying attitudes” that are much more negative, including that Asians are lacking in warmth and are “untrustworthy and foreign,” leading others to have feelings of envy and dislike toward them.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the focus group participants mentioned a related and more recent stereotype – that of the ‘crazy rich Asian’ – which is also based on perceptions of Asians’ ‘success’ and that has

worked its way into the public imagination in Canada. Roji cited the reality TV show *Ultra Rich Asians of Vancouver*, which, although short-lived, contributed to the stereotype that all Vancouver-based Asians are wealthy. The 2018 film *Crazy Rich Asians*, although fictional, also became a point of reference for generalizing about Asians.

*“When that movie Crazy Rich Asian came up... I was meeting with a friend, that’s where I think he said, ‘Oh, sorry, you’re a UBC student, right?’ I was like, ‘Oh, yeah, I’m UBC.’ And then the second thing he said was, ‘Oh, so you definitely are a crazy rich Asian, right?’ And I was like, ‘No. What?’ Because he assumed all international students are super rich and then he assumed because I am Asian looking so I am definitely [an] international student.”*

**– Yvette, 22 years, Canadian citizen, B.C.**

Finally, one of the international student participants, 21-year-old **JK**, recounted a particular interaction she witnessed between her landlords, who immigrated from China, and their neighbours. The episode is so illustrative of the types of assumptions that ‘mainstream’ Canadians make about newcomers from Asia that it is worth relaying in some detail. This episode also demonstrates how negative beliefs about another person’s culture and their desire to ‘fit in’ can be communicated clearly without having to state it explicitly.

The situation **JK** described was one in which her landlords had cut down some branches on a tree they assumed was part of their property. However, their neighbours became upset because they also believed that the tree was part of their own property. One of the neighbours came over to the house where **JK** lives, and she was asked to act as an interpreter, as her landlords were not comfortable speaking in English. The neighbour not only expressed – politely – his displeasure at them having cut the branches, but also talked to them about the Canadian value of respecting nature. The landlords offered their apology for the misunderstanding, but sometime later, the neighbour’s wife also came over and gave them essentially the same ‘lecture.’ At that point, **JK** said, she found the interaction “kind of irritating because they

don't think that we can – [that] we are able to understand or we think that it is important to understand the laws and the rules here.”

**Nancy**, a B.C.-based citizen who was part of JK's group, added that while newcomers to Canada in all likelihood try their best to be respectful and fit in, there needs to be some allowance for periods of adjustment, or perhaps even more open-mindedness to what it is that makes up Canadian culture.

*“...expecting all immigrants to immediately assimilate and conform to whatever the dominant Canadian culture is at that time, which is predominantly white and European-influenced. I would say, a more equitable society would be more open to different cultures and have true diversity, not just, you know, diversity of skin tone. So that's something that I would like to see. And I think that in order to get to that point, we really need to sort of drop the hierarchy of this idea that Canadian or European is the ideal, the [top] progressive ideal kind of thing, and that all other cultures, that are mostly cultures of colour, that [they] are somehow inferior and that immigrants need to change.”*

– **Nancy, 22 years, Canadian citizen, B.C.**

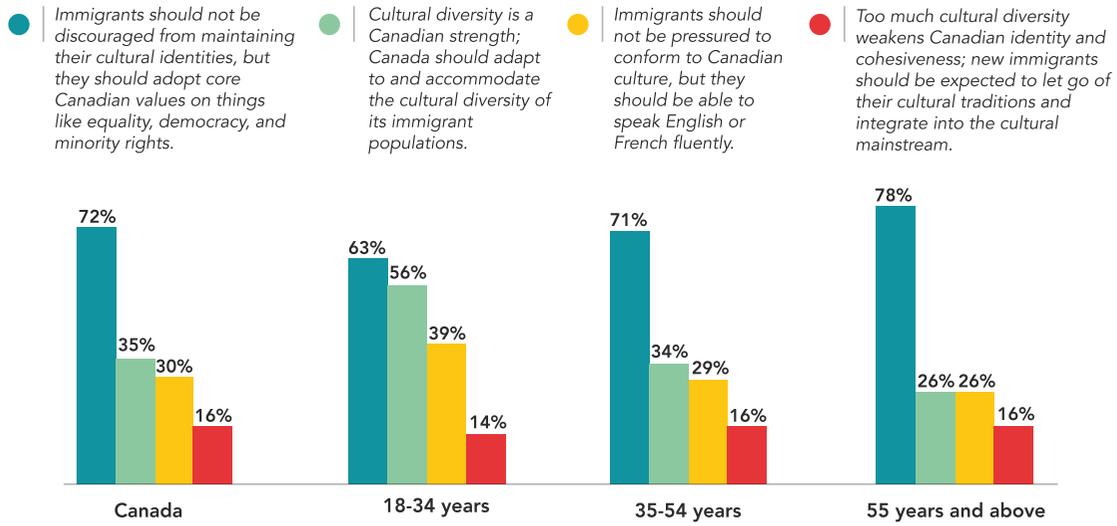
Nancy's desire to “drop the hierarchy” explicitly links the daily indignities of Asian stereotypes and the requirements of assimilation with an implicit racial hierarchy that values “white and European-influenced” culture, or a cultural white supremacy, within Canadian multiculturalism. As Nancy astutely observes, “true diversity” would not be predicated on a cultural ideal into which minorities should assimilate.

FIGURE 4

*Canadians generally support immigrants' rights to maintain their cultural identities, but majority of the Canadian youth believe "Cultural diversity is a Canadian strength" compared to older Canadians*

Question: The 2016 Census shows that one-fifth of Canadians are foreign-born. In your opinion, what is the appropriate balance between building a common Canadian identity and accommodating differences in culture, language, and values?

Base: 18 - 34 (n=774); 35-54 (n=1,166); 55+ (n=1,473); Canada (n=3,519)



Source: 2020 National Opinion Poll by Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

## Asian Attitudes Toward Racism

At various points throughout the different focus groups, some participants made broader remarks about attitudes toward racism within Asian cultures and communities in Canada. One set of comments focused on how many Asians and Canadians of Asian descent had internalized the tendency to refrain from reacting or speaking out when they observed or were the targets of racism. Other comments focused on the types of racist attitudes some Asians have toward other people of colour, including other Asians.

Regarding the first example, **Annabelle** and **Skye** observed that Asians sometimes tend to “conform” and “please,” as much as possible. **Annabelle** emphasized that this can have the unintended effect of reinforcing racist behaviour as acceptable and perpetuating the norm of systemic racism and microaggressions against Asians. **Peach** shared that often children in Asian

families are taught to be “kind of quiet, or just take it as we go along.” While she cautions that this may not hold for all Asian families, she observes that most of her friends try to avoid problems that may cause harm or create problems for others.

The spiral of silence around anti-Asian racism in Canada, whether it is experienced as covert racism, microaggressions, or stereotypes, has suppressed voices and feelings and led to a lack of discussion on how to remedy the social system. **Skye** described watching the ‘grin and bear it’ approach take a toll on her mother.

*“... she’d sometimes pass up on work opportunities ... even though she has a lot of knowledge in her subject matter, because she felt that she couldn’t, she wouldn’t be able to present herself well enough to other people that they take her seriously. Even though she has worked so hard, and when she was in China she did really well for herself. And she has the same brain, she doesn’t have anything different. But it’s all these things that kind of also whittle away at her confidence as well.”*

– **Skye, 23 years, Canadian citizen, B.C.**

The participants were cognizant that Asians and Canadians of Asian descent are not free of racist attitudes against other racial minority communities, including Black and Indigenous communities. **Isabelle**, a 23-year-old citizen in Montreal, added that there was also some discord between various groups of Asian descent in Canada – South Asians, East Asians, and Southeast Asians. Twenty-year-old **Ehmy**, a B.C.-based citizen, elaborated on this.

*“I’m sure everyone here, they’ve heard the term ‘jungle Asian,’ right? It was like people of Chinese, Japanese, Korean origin would call people like... Philippines, Thai, Taipei origin, ‘jungle Asian,’ right? Then there’s always that whole dimension around skin colour, where lighter-skinned Asians would be racist towards groups that tend to have darker skin...”*

– **Ehmy, 20, Canadian citizen, B.C.**

Sometimes the lack of tolerance of some people in Asian communities by others in those same communities is based not on skin colour but on a perceived lack of assimilation into ‘mainstream’ (White) Canadian culture. For example, **Skye** described a time when she and her mother were taking a walk in the park and chatting in English. A passerby, who was also of Asian descent, suddenly addressed Skye’s mother, who speaks “accented English,” telling her to go back to her country if she could not speak English properly. **Peter**, whose family has been in Canada for nearly 100 years, observed that members of his extended family took pride in having assimilated into Canadian culture and overcoming racial barriers in order to build a successful life here. However, he also expressed dismay that his family, to an extent, “discriminate[d] against other Chinese immigrants who have come later on... blam[ing] them for not being as integrated.”

One way of viewing this intra-group prejudice is that it is a type of “defensive othering” – an adaptive response to racial oppression, whereby people who are not part of the dominant racial group try to “distance themselves from the stigma linked to their status” as non-white.<sup>10</sup> By doing so, they perhaps inadvertently contribute to the overall system of racial oppression they and their older relatives have had to navigate.

It should be noted that in some ways, these young adults’ reflections on anti-Asian racism were tied up with comparisons with racism against the Black community, which they felt was more evident, visible, and pervasive. When these focus group conversations took place, in summer 2020, some participants reflected that anti-Asian racism would never gain as much visibility as Black Lives Matter, indicating a belief that social advancement and political visibility are finite resources to be competed over by racial minorities. “It [anti-Asian racism] doesn’t really raise that many flags for a lot of people because these stereotypes of this model minority, it’s not completely harming us,” said **Peach**, linking the perception of model minority success with a diminishment of harm against them relative to other communities.

Roji, a 21-year-old citizen in B.C., added:

*“I’ve seen a lot of people in my Asian community being advocates and kind of joining the Black Lives Matter movement. Because I think too a lot of Asian Canadians or Asian Americans, it’s really hard to target racism against Asians.”*

The young adults said it was imperative for Canadians of Asian descent and Asians to step up and denounce racism, not just against Asians but against all people of colour. Sallie noted that movements such as Black Lives Matter have been instrumental in helping people realize that being a “non-racist” is not enough. One needs to be “anti-racist” and actively call out racist attitudes and institutions. Several participants similarly underscored the need for Canadians of Asian descent to try to break out of the tendency to be conformist and start taking a stronger stand against all forms of racial injustice.

Finally, striking a more somber – and indeed, prophetic – note, **Kareem** suggested that if history is any guide, the situation in Canada for people of Asian descent could get worse, especially if the pandemic persists.

*“...in the past, for example, when the Canadian government deported the Japanese people during the World Wars, I mean, I don’t see that as not a possibility if COVID-19 gets worse. In terms of just the general Asian population in Canada.”*

His remark about people – including Canadian citizens – of Japanese descent being detained and dispossessed by the Canadian government during the Second World War was met with silent contemplation by the others in his group.

It is evident at this point that Canada needs to do more to achieve a balance as the society grows increasingly multicultural. The young adults shared their own experiences and reflections on two social institutions that can provide a way forward – education and mass media, discussed in detail in the next section.

## YOUNG ADULTS' IDEAS FOR BUILDING A MORE INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

The focus groups concluded with participants offering ideas about how we might improve the social and political climate in Canada for people of Asian descent. This part of the conversation was fairly open-ended. Participants were asked to consider actions that could be taken by governments and policy-makers, as well as by non-governmental organizations (including APF Canada). Most of their suggestions coalesced around two areas: Better education about Asia and Canadians of Asian (and other non-white) descent, and diversifying and being more attuned to Canadian media coverage of Asia and Asians' representation in popular culture.

### Making Canadian Education More Inclusive

According to APF Canada's [2017 National Opinion Poll](#), which focused on Canadian youth, two-thirds of respondents under the age of 35 felt their high-school education about Asia was insufficient. Interestingly, even people over the age of 35 shared similar views. Several of the focus group participants who had grown up in Canada also felt that their education not only overlooked Asian histories and cultures, but also did not make much space for learning about the experiences of Asian communities in Canada – something that researchers have referred to as “racial silencing.”<sup>11</sup>

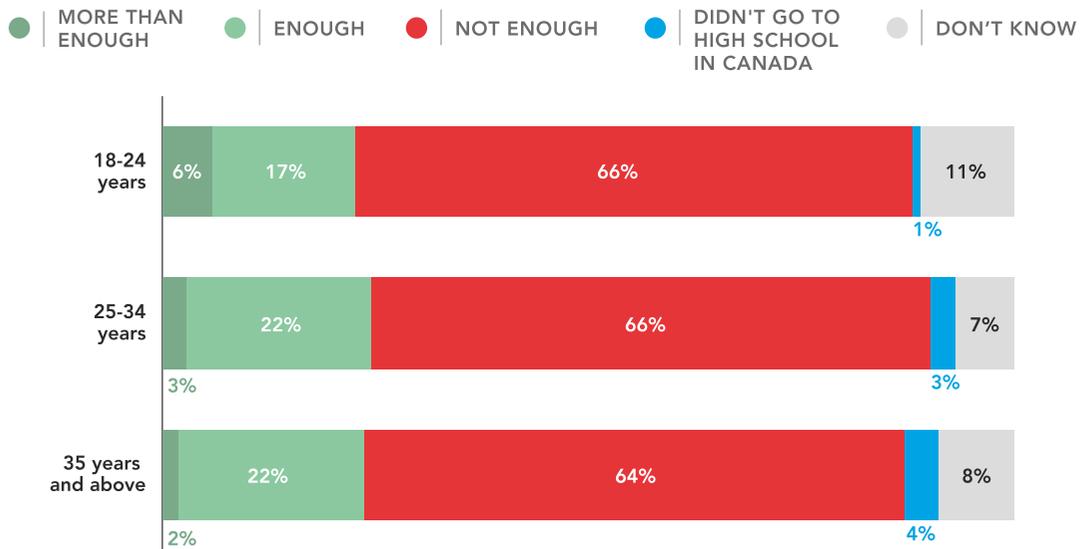
*“...right now, Canada already lacks in education of Indigenous populations or, Black Canadian history. To be completely honest, I think Asian Canadian history is at the very, very end of that list. So in that sense, I would really like to see more education, for example, Japanese internment in Canada, I would love to see more than one page of that in a textbook, or a course on that...”*  
– Peach, 21 years, Permanent Resident, Ontario

FIGURE 5

Canadians of all age-groups feel they had an insufficient exposure to Asia in their high school education

Question: In thinking about your high school education, do you think you had enough or not enough exposure to Asia (e.g., history, culture, geography, languages, politics, etc.)

Base: 18 - 24 (n=459); 25-34 (n=197); 35+ (n=871)



Source: 2017 National Opinion Poll: Canadian Millennial Views on Asia, by Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

Peter offered that perhaps Canada’s self-image as multicultural has been an obstacle to teaching Canadian history in a way that takes into account the country’s treatment of non-white communities.

*“So I think there’s a large racist history that Canada has to deal with. And I think a lot of communities are unaware of that. And I think to some extent it is because of that we have this narrative of multiculturalism. So I think that, you know, that’s something that really overshadows this history that we have. And I think by coming to terms with it as part of reconciliation, not only with First Nations, because that’s super important, and really enshrined within the history books as super important. But also with people of colour who have generally been neglected within the broader Canadian history.”*

– Peter, 20 years, Canadian citizen, B.C.

**Nancy** proposed that education about not only the history, but also about the current experiences of people of Asian descent could be effective in combating stereotypes and misinformation. **Yvette** offered that storytelling could be a powerful educational tool in building a genuinely multicultural society, stressing that such programs needed to start as early as primary school. “It’s kind of hard to change people’s minds [once] they pass a certain age,” she added. Both of these suggestions – using education to challenge stereotypes, and using storytelling to counter dominant narratives – have been identified by researchers as potentially powerful tools in pushing back against prejudice toward racialized groups.<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted there has been some movement in Canada around greater inclusion of Asian stories within primary and secondary school curricula. For example, in 2014, the B.C. government committed to a series of “[Legacy Projects](#)” as part of the province’s commitment to address historical wrongs against the Chinese community. These projects included an “[Education Supplement](#)” – a curriculum module created in consultation with members of the Chinese community. In 2020, the province [announced](#) a similar initiative with respect to B.C.’s Punjabi community, one that will also include the creation of educational materials.

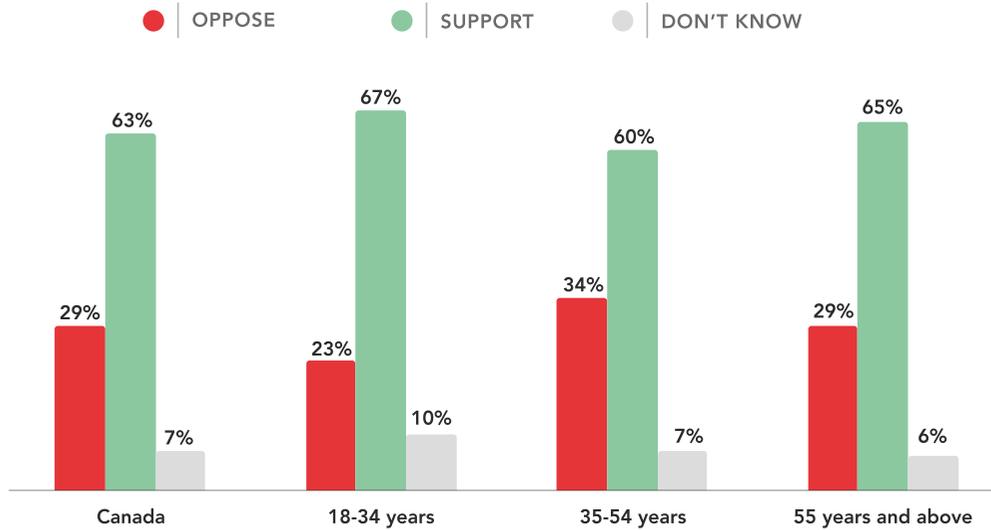
In addition, several government, academic, and community organizations have collaborated around the [Landscapes of Injustice](#) project to educate Canadians about the issue mentioned by **Peach** and **Kareem** – the internment and dispossession of people (including many citizens) of Japanese descent. APF Canada has also been piloting, in partnership with the B.C. Ministry of Education, the [Asia Pacific Curriculum](#) project, with a focus on working with B.C. teachers to support students in developing a deeper understanding and appreciation of Asian histories, cultures, and societies.

FIGURE 6

*Canadian Millennials (18 to 34 years) are more in favour of placing more emphasis on teaching about Asia than older generations*

Question: Would you support or oppose your provincial government doing each of the following to build stronger ties with Asia?: Place more emphasis on teaching about Asia in the education system (e.g. history, culture, politics, economics).

Base: 18 - 34 (n=774); 35-54 (n=1,166); 55+ (n=1,473); Canada (n=3,519)



Source: 2020 National Opinion Poll by Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

Collectively, these efforts may seem sufficient in addressing this lack of education. What’s more, according to **APF Canada’s 2020 National Opinion Poll**, a majority of the population in every province supports an increase in teaching about Asia. This support, moreover, has grown substantially over the past eight years. However, we note two important caveats.

First, teaching about Asia and Asians’ role in Canadian history remains under-represented in Canadian education, *despite current immigration patterns and children of Asian descent comprising a growing proportion of our student bodies*. This gap was highlighted in January by a team of teachers from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), which released a report titled “[Addressing anti-Asian racism: A resource for educators](#).” The authors, all of whom are of Asian descent, recounted their own personal experiences with racism. They also noted that nearly half (47%) of the TDSB’s student body – the largest in Canada – self-identifies as Asian (2011 Census). However, they astutely point out that such demographic factors alone often do not necessarily catalyze the type of attention and intentionality needed to tackle the problem:

*“Having a diverse school population alone does not shift fundamental power dynamics that enable racism to exist in society. Students and educators must understand what racism is, and how it looks and feels for racialized people whether your school community is diverse or homogenous (e.g., predominantly white or Asian populations).”<sup>13</sup>*

Second, while expanding and improving upon our teaching about Asia and Canadian communities of Asian descent is a necessary step, it is not sufficient in ushering in a more fundamental level of change. In one study on teaching about Asia in U.S. secondary schools, the researchers pointed out that classroom learning is only one node in a larger ecosystem of how Asia (and Asians) are represented. The larger systems include news, entertainment media, images, formal and informal conversations with friends and family, and so on.<sup>14</sup> The authors point out that many young people get exposed to representations of Asia and Asians in popular culture, which, the authors write, generally does not have as its major concern enhancing understanding of Asian cultures. Rather, they say, the media tend to be a “major source of perpetuating cultural biases and stereotypes of Asians.”<sup>15</sup>

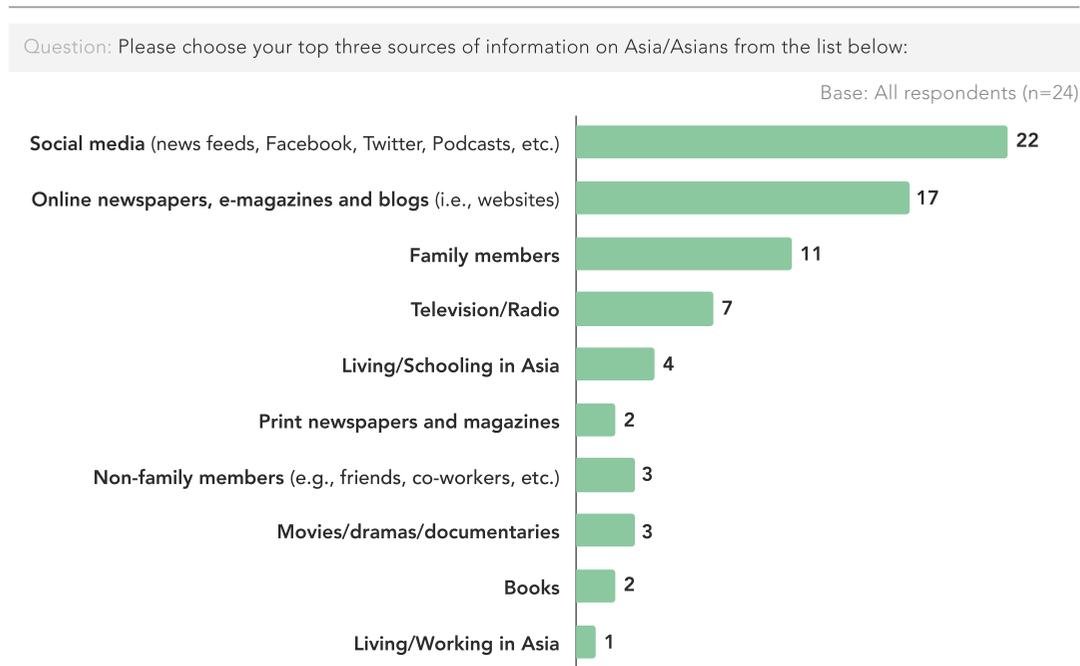
In the next section, we turn to various forms of media as tools for perpetuating stereotypes and narratives about people of Asian descent.

## Media Diversification and Representation

Discussion about media effects on shaping their and others’ perceptions of Asia and Canadians/Americans of Asian descent encompassed a wide range of sources of information – online news media, social media, and entertainment and popular culture.

FIGURE 7

*Social media, online newspapers, and family members among the top three sources of information about Asia/Asians for most study participants*



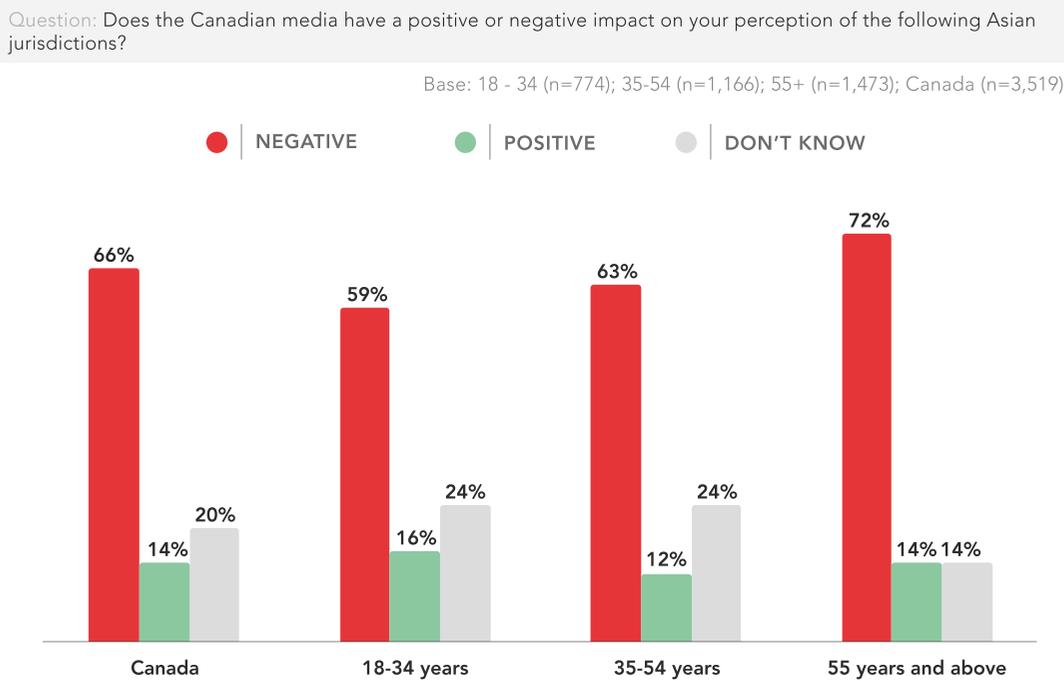
Note: The figure represents data gathered through the pre-focus group survey. The numbers are not percentages. One respondent was unable to join any of the focus groups but due to the anonymous nature of the survey their response could not be isolated and is therefore included in this figure.

In the pre-focus group survey, the young adults identified social media, online newspapers/websites, and family members among their top three sources of information on Asia/Asians. This result was largely consistent with a finding in our **APF Canada 2020 National Opinion Poll**, which showed that among 18- to 34-year-old Canadians of all ethnic and racial backgrounds, social media and online news sources are among their top sources for information about Asia and Asians.

Research on media effects has established the negative impacts of lack of representation and stereotypes in the mass media.<sup>16</sup> These effects become even more pronounced in today’s digital climate that has amplified the public’s dependency on mass media for information, entertainment, and social connections. Media producers’ framing of the narrative can further affect the message’s interpretation by the public and thereby impact public perceptions. Studies show that media framing can perpetuate negative stereotypes about minority communities such as impacts of advertising on perceptions of Asian Americans<sup>17</sup> or negative framing of the Muslim community in Chinese news media.<sup>18</sup>

FIGURE 8

*Canadian Youth (18 -34 years) are more likely to find Canadian media has a positive impact on their perception of **China**, compared to the older age groups*



Source: 2020 National Opinion Poll by Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

In popular culture and entertainment media, the narrative often fails to adequately reflect the diverse socio-cultural make-up of the society and thereby ceases to be representative. American and Canadian actors of Asian descent have long been fighting for [visibility](#). During the focus groups, the young adults identified that popular culture and media played a big role in their childhood and continue to today. Media framing of culturally diverse characters is also crucial in defining the ethnic and racial groups for the public that has little contact with diverse cultural groups.<sup>19</sup> This step can further aid in deconstructing the monolithic perceptions of Asia for the larger Canadian population.

Furthermore, visibility is only part of the problem. Earlier media depictions of non-white characters suffered from 'whitewashing' and branding culturally diverse characters with racial stereotypes, such as, as the geeky, awkward, broken English speaking, East Asian character who also knows martial arts.<sup>20</sup> Or the South Asian character who is definitely an engineer with broken [English](#), awkward, and with poor fashion sense, as illustrated by the character Raj from the popular sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*. While the issue of whitewashing is less common today, American and Canadian media still have a long way to go in terms of combatting the framing of media messages and ensuring sensitivity to culturally diverse groups of people.

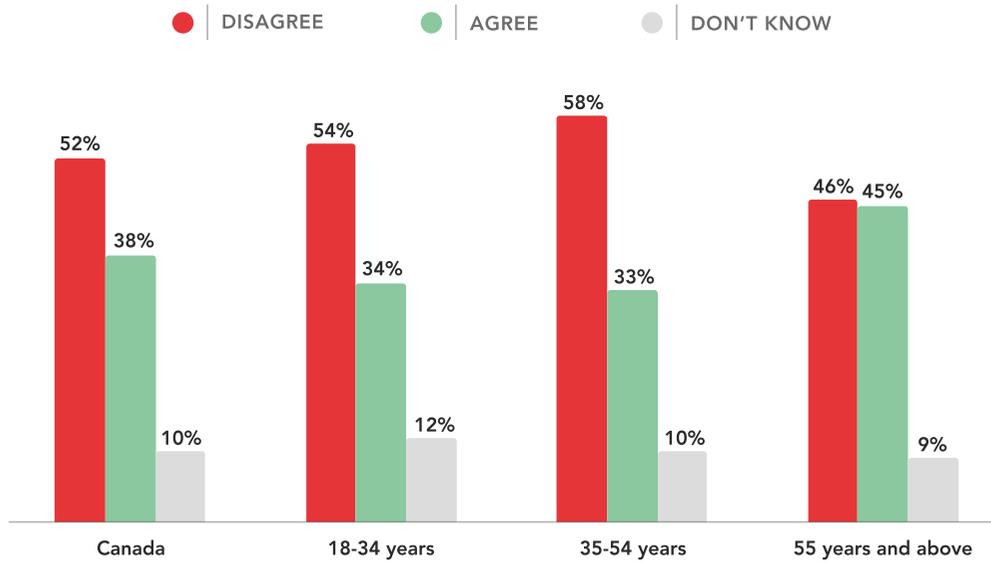
The character of Claudia Kishi in *The Babysitters' Club*, a Netflix production based on Ann M. Martin's book series, is a positive example of an American character of Asian descent who was not based on stereotypes, but rather, was complex and fiercely independent. In a Netflix documentary titled *The Claudia Kishi Club*, a group of creatives who were also of Asian descent shared how the tween character inspired their childhood aspirations and was someone with whom they could identify. One of the focus group participants, **Nancy**, described also being impacted by this character. However, it was also mentioned that Claudia Kishi remains much more the exception than the rule when it comes to Asian faces on the big screen or small screen. Canadian TV shows such as *Kim's Convenience* are helping to break that barrier with a cast primarily of people of Asian descent and a storyline depicting the community and cultures of Canadians with Korean heritage; but this too, is more an exception than the rule.

FIGURE 9

*Majority of the Canadian youth don't think Canadian news media provides adequate information on current issues and developments in Asia*

Question: Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Canadian news media provides adequate information on current issues and developments in Asia

Base: 18 - 34 (n=774); 35-54 (n=1,166); 55+ (n=1,473); Canada (n=3,519)



Source: 2020 National Opinion Poll by Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

Gatekeepers in the Canadian media industry also need to consider supplying a more diverse menu for consumers demanding this content. Diversity in the media sphere through inclusive domestic productions, sensitivity to diverse identity groups and communities, and providing a platform for foreign media can encourage visibility of different ethnicities and cultures, and also help promote more awareness and tolerance of multiculturalism.

## Deconstructing Asia as a Monolith

*“Instead of seeing Asia as one all encompassing category, entity, or whatever, try to understand different Asian cultures in that geographical area and how there’s so many more ethnic groups other than say Chinese or Indigenous people in East Asia, for example.” – Yun, 28 years, Temporary Worker, B.C.*

As Canada grows increasingly diverse, it is pertinent for Canadians to develop a better understanding of the diversity of ethnic groups that make up the category of ‘Asian.’ Such efforts and recommendations, however, are not without their challenges. In particular, any efforts to build awareness and address the anti-Asian prejudice at its roots must reach beyond people of Asian descent and work their way into the larger Canadian society.

*“My critique of the current efforts, you know, this kind of engagement, is that it’s not mainstream yet and it’s also concentrated in the sense that it seems everybody who’s already in that space, like the Asian communities or anybody who has ties to Asia, will naturally have an interest in that. But I think it needs to be expanded to people who know nothing about it. And that’s where our efforts maybe need to be redirected because that’s where it’s harder to reach.”*  
– Isabelle, 23 years, Canadian citizen, Quebec

Amy and Nancy from another focus group raised this same point. In fact, Amy, who had attended some of APF Canada’s youth-oriented events, noted, “I don’t see many white people there almost ever.” Nancy, while not familiar with APF Canada events, echoes the general sentiment about the importance of reaching a diverse audience through its programming. Alvin also felt that many of these efforts to educate and raise awareness often only reach the people who already seek out these ideas. They have not yet reached the mainstream, which is where he suggested we concentrate some of our efforts.

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

If the past year has taught us anything, it is that “enough is enough.” The young adults of Asian heritage in Canada today are not going to be silenced and they are speaking out, as documented in this report. Questions are being raised about the complacency and naïve belief in the Canadian ideal of multiculturalism, as the lived reality paints a very different picture. Studies, including this current one, indicate that racism against people of East Asian heritage in the U.S. and Canada go beyond egregious acts of violence and include a web of social indignities and barriers to opportunities. Such seemingly “innocuous” microaggressions often leave behind an indelible memory and can have social and psychological, if not physical, impacts – such as a climate of fear of speaking out against and silence surrounding racial discrimination. The shared experiences of such discrimination based on race is further complicated by migration status, ethnicity, gender, class, caste, and shared history.

As a society, we need to come together and take a stand against everyday and systemic racism, but there is also a pressing need to educate and build awareness. Incidents such as the [Atlanta](#) shooting in March and [Indianapolis](#) shooting in April 2021, where collectively at least 10 people of Asian descent lost their lives, marks a disturbing trend in racist attacks in our neighbouring country. But this also underscores the urgency for initiatives to build mass awareness and implement better policies addressing education and media to align the positive *ideal* of multiculturalism with the complicated *reality* in Canada.

Despite the myriad issues, young adults are hopeful and optimistic about the future, provided the Canadian government (both federal and provincial) and its people incorporate concrete changes in at least two of the larger social institutions – education and media. The public, both young and old, depend on these sources for gathering information, which in turn guides their perspectives. And, as mentioned in this report, the two institutions are not exclusive but are often interdependent.

Media literacy is one key piece that can be incorporated into the Canadian school curriculum. Racial stereotypes that are pervasive in the current media demand the need for engaging and educating students to be critical consumers of media products. Students can be engaged through exercises that help them deconstruct media content, recognize bias and stereotypes in the media frame, research their origin, and compare lived reality with media portrayals.<sup>21</sup>

But the buck doesn't stop at the social institutions of education and media. As the young adult participants note, there needs to be broader community, corporate, and political initiatives that provide a space for cross-cultural conversations and build actionable strategies on these insights. Care needs to be exercised that the initiatives are not just one-off, performative acts, but rather build into substantive, practical measures that are continuously applied and evolving. And as the young adults observed, these actions should be developed in consultation with minority communities and give voice to their concerns.

We still have a long way to go towards building a Canadian society that is equitable, respectful, and inclusive, but even as individuals we can take small steps towards this goal. The young adults' suggestions to get the ball rolling are multipronged and locally engaged: Document the histories and stories of different ethnic communities in Canada on a shareable platform; collaborate with local libraries for stories that incorporate authors from diverse communities; and, host or listen to podcasts and events featuring diverse communities discussing key issues across the world. And if looking for something more social, engaging in food or film events that capture diverse cultures and communities can help in building knowledge and networks. But above all, the lead researchers hope that this report also emphasizes the overarching message conveyed by the young adult participants – respect an individual's identity, agency, and space. It is with that first, foundational step that we can work towards a true multicultural reality for Canada.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## STRATEGIC ADVISORS

**Stewart Beck**  
President and CEO  
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

**Dr. Jeffrey Reeves**  
Vice-President, Research  
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

## EDITORIAL REVIEW

**Dr. A.W. Lee**  
Senior Program Manager, Diversity  
and Inclusive Growth Strategy for  
Women Entrepreneurs  
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

**Dr. Charles Labrecque**  
Research Manager  
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

**Michael Roberts**  
Communications Manager  
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

## CREATIVE DESIGN

**Jamie Curtis**  
Graphic Designer  
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

## LEAD RESEARCHERS

**Dr. Sreyoshi Dey**  
Program Manager, Perspectives Asia  
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

**Erin Williams**  
Senior Program Manager,  
Skills and Competencies  
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

## JUNIOR RESEARCHERS

**Jamie C.Y. Leung**  
Former Junior Research Scholar (2020)  
and Incoming Post-Graduate Research  
Scholar (2021-22)  
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

**Zining Wang**  
Former Project Coordinator,  
Curriculum and Youth Programming  
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

## COMMUNICATIONS

**Michael Roberts**  
Communications Manager  
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

**Camille Point**  
Social Media & Communications  
Specialist  
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

## RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CANADIANS OF ASIAN DESCENT, ALLYSHIP, AND TRAINING

### Government of Canada Resources

- [Anti-Racism Engagement Resources](#)
- [Building a Foundation for Change](#): Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2019–2022
- [Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat](#)

### Government of British Columbia Resources

- [Anti-Racism](#)
- BC's Office of the Human Rights [Commissioner](#)

### Organizations working against racism

- Canadian Race Relations [Foundation](#)
- Chinese Canadian National Council for Social [Justice](#)
  - [Stop the Spread](#) – A campaign against racism
- [Elimin8hate](#) - Report and record hate crimes [Canada]
- [Fight COVID Racism](#) – Report and record hate crimes [Canada]
  - Robust list of [Resources](#) on health and mental health, income support, legal support, police alternatives, and more.
- [HeartMob](#) by Hollaback – Report online harassment
- [Project 1907](#)
- Stop AAPI Hate Reporting [Centre](#) [US]

## Educational Resources

- [Addressing Anti-Asian Racism](#): A Resource for Educators by the Toronto District School Board, 2021
- [A Year of Racist Attacks](#): Anti-Asian racism across Canada one year into the COVID-19 pandemic by Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter, 2021
- [Anti-Racism for Kids](#): An Age-by-Age Guide to Fighting Hate, by Parents, 2021
- “Asian-American Professionals Push For Visibility at Work,” by Te-Ping Chen, [The Wall Street Journal](#), 2021
- “Corky Lee, Who Photographed Asian-American Life, Dies at 73,” by Neil Genzlinger [The New York Times](#), 2021
- [Chinese Exclusion Act](#) [US], September 2019
- [Colour Code](#), a podcast by The Globe and Mail
- [Guide to Allyship](#) by amélie lamont – An open source guidebook
- [“How to intervene in a racist attack,”](#) by Akshat Rathi, Quartz, 2016
- [Road to Justice](#) – The legal struggle for equal rights of Chinese Canadians
- [The Racial Healing Handbook](#): Practical Activities to Help You Challenge Privilege, Confront Systemic Racism, and Engage in Collective Healing [\[Handout\]](#)
- [Treating Yellow Peril](#): Resources to Address Coronavirus Racism by Professor Jason Oliver Chang, University of Connecticut
- “There’s a long, global history to today’s anti-Asian bias and violence,” by Kim Yi Dionne, Sarah Hayes, and Fulya Felicity Turkmen, [The Washington Post](#) (Monkey Cage), 2021
- “What it means to be anti-racist,” by Anna North, [Vox](#), 2020
- “Why Diversity Training Doesn’t Work – The challenge for Industry and Academia,” by Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev, [Anthropology Now](#), 2018

## Canadian Museums

- [Canadian Museum for Human Rights](#), Winnipeg, Manitoba
- [Chinese Canadian Museum](#), Vancouver, BC
- [Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre](#), Burnaby, BC
- Pacific Canada Heritage Centre – [Museum of Migration](#) (PCHC – MoM)
- [Royal Ontario Museum](#), Toronto
- [The Virtual Museum of Asian Canadian Cultural Heritage](#) by the Canadian Foundation for Asian Culture (Central Ontario) Inc.

## Training Resources

- Anti-Asian Violence [Resources](#)
- Anti-Racism Strategies for the Workplace by the [University of British Columbia](#)
- Bystander intervention trainings by [Asian Americans Advancing Justice](#)
- Bystander intervention trainings by [Ihollaback](#) (Also provides, anti-harassment trainings for workplace or street).
- Education and Training by [Canadian Race Relations Foundation](#)
- Training & Workshops by the [University of Toronto](#)

## Documentaries and Film Festivals

- [All Our Father's Relations](#), by Alejandro Yoshizawa, 2016
- Continuous Journey, by Ali Kazimi, 2004
- [Lost Years](#) by Kenda Gee and Tom Radford, 2011
- [One Big Hapa Family](#), by Jeff China Stearns, 2010
- [Sleeping Tigers](#): The Asahi Baseball Story, by Jari Osborne, 2003
- [Unwanted Soldiers](#), by Jari Osborne, 1999
- Toronto Reel Asian International Film [Festival](#)
- Vancouver Asian Film [Festival](#)

## Books by Canadians of Asian Descent

- *A Good Wife*, by Samra Zafar
- *A Fine Balance*, by Rohinton Mistry
- *Even this Page is White*, by Vivek Shraya
- *Funny Boy*, by Shyam Selvadurai
- *Familiar Face* by Michael DeForge
- *How to Pronounce Knife*, by Souvankham Thammavongsa
- *How Does A Single Blade Of Grass Thank The Sun?*, by Doretta Lau
- *Kay's Lucky Coin Variety*, by Ann K. Choi
- *Mysterious Dreams of the Dead*, by Terry Watada
- *Obasan*, by Joy Kogawa
- *Older Sister. Not Necessarily Related.*, by Jenny Heijun Wills
- *Polar Vortex*, by Shani Mootoo
- *The Hero's Walk*, by Anita Rau Badami
- *The Headmaster's Wager*, by Vincent Lam
- *The Translation Of Love*, by Lynne Kutsukake
- *Runaway*, by Evelyn Lau
- *We Have Always Been Here*, by Samra Habib

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Pyke, Karen and Tran Dang. "'FOB' and 'Whitewashed': Identity and Internalized Racism among Second Generation Asian Americans." *Qualitative Sociology* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 156.
- 2 Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4: 387-409.
- 3 Sue, Derald Wing, Christina M. Capodilupo, Gina C. Torino, Jennifer M. Bucceri, Aisha M. B. Holder, Kevin L. Nadal, and Marta Esquilin. "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice." *American Psychologist* (May-June 2007): 271-286, [https://www.cpedv.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/how\\_to\\_be\\_an\\_effective\\_ally-lessons\\_learned\\_microaggressions.pdf](https://www.cpedv.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/how_to_be_an_effective_ally-lessons_learned_microaggressions.pdf).
- 4 Sue, Derald Wing, Jennifer Bucceri, Annie I. Lin, Kevin L. Nadal, and Gina C. Torino, "Racial Microaggressions and the Asian American Experience." *Asian American Journal of Psychology* 5, no. 1 (2009): 88.
- 5 Ibid, 97
- 6 Ibid, 97
- 7 Ibid, 97
- 8 Lee, Jenny J. and Charles Rice. "Welcome to America? International Student Perceptions of Discrimination." *Higher Education* 53 (2007): 394.
- 9 Shih, Margaret J., Rebecca Stozler and Angelica S. Gutierrez. "Perspective-taking and Empathy: Generalizing the Reduction of Group Bias Towards Asian Americans to General Outgroups." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 4, no. 2 (2013): 79.
- 10 Pyke and Dang, op. cit., pp. 149, 152.
- 11 Iftikar, Jon S. and Samuel D. Museus. "On the Utility of Asian Critical (AsianCrit) Theory in the Field of Education." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 31, no. 10 (2018): 940.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Toronto District School Board. "Addressing Anti-Asian Racism: A Resource for Educators." December 2020, p. 40, <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/0/docs/Addressing%20Anti-Asian%20Racism%20Resource%20Booklet%20final%20web%20Jan%202024.pdf>.
- 14 Hong, Won-pyo and Anne-Lise Halvorsen. "Teaching Asia in US Secondary School Classrooms: A Curriculum of Othering." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 42, no. 3 (2010): 374.
- 15 Ibid, 385.
- 16 Downing, John D. and Charles Husband. *Representing Race: Racisms, Ethnicity and the Media*. Sage, 2005; Gorham, B.W. "Stereotypes in the Media: So What?" *Howard Journal of Communication* 10, no. 4 (1999); Zhang, Qin, "Asian Americans beyond the Model Minority Stereotype: The Nerdy and the Left Out." *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 3, no. 1 (2010).
- 17 Paek, Hye Jin, and Hemant Shah. "Racial Ideology, Model Minorities, and the 'Not-So-Silent Partner': Stereotyping of Asian Americans in US Magazine Advertising." *Howard Journal of Communication* 14, no. 4 (2003): 225-243.
- 18 Luwei Rose Luqiu and Fan Yang. "Islamophobia in China: News Coverage, Stereotypes, and Chinese Muslims' Perceptions of Themselves and Islam." *Asian Journal of Communication* 28, no. 6 (2008): 598-619, DOI: 10.1080/01292986.2018.1457063
- 19 Zhang op. cit.
- 20 Gorham op cit.; Zhang op cit.
- 21 Sharma, Andrew. "Multiculturalism, Diversity and Stereotypes: Engaging Students with Images in Media." *Media Watch* 8, no. 1 (2017).

PROTECT  
ASIAN  
LIVES



ASIA PACIFIC  
FOUNDATION  
OF CANADA

FONDATION  
ASIE PACIFIQUE  
DU CANADA

STOP  
ASIAN  
HATE

STOP  
ASIA  
HATE