

Fostering a Sense of Belonging on University Campus: A Case Study of Taiwanese  
Association

by

Minjeong Sung

B.A., Soonchunhyang University, 2008

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirement for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

University of Victoria

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University of Victoria

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## Abstract

Through the lens of a sense of belonging, this case study explores minority students' personal experience in the Taiwanese Association at the University of Victoria (UVic) and the impact of this organization on students' lives. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling following the two criteria: membership in the Association with a minimum duration of six months and identifying as racial/ethnic minority students with Taiwanese heritage. A one-hour-long individual interview with each participant was the main source of data and the Association's official Facebook page was also used as a reference. The interviews were video-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed based on Tesch's coding process described by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Three main themes related to a sense of belonging emerged from the data analysis: connectedness, a combination of cultural brokering and an Asian value of 'a senior-junior relationship', and dynamism. The findings suggest that for the participants, who represented ethnic minority students, participating in the Association was essential to their sense of belonging and feeling connected which correlated to their academic success and involvement on campus. More experienced members of the Association acted as a significant source of support because these individuals could recognize the participants' cultural and academic challenges and offer their support. Overall, the participants acknowledged their positive experience which led them to smooth psychological transition and adaptation to a new cultural, social, or academic environment despite the negative factors such as homesickness, cultural ignorance and insensitivity, and self-recognition as a minority. Implications for future research and recommendations for university community as well as Asian minority students on campus are discussed.

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## Acknowledgement

Above all, I acknowledge and respect the lək'wəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory this study was conducted and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. I am grateful for being able to study around such beautiful nature which lək'wəŋən peoples have well preserved for over 12,000 years. Also, I would like to show my deepest condolences to indigenous communities on the unthinkable loss of 215 Indigenous children found at a former residential school in the province of British Columbia.

First, I would like to show my deep gratitude to the five participants who gave their precious time for this study and shared their feelings and experience with me. I hope that your stories and contribution to the Taiwanese Association will help to recognize minority students' home cultures, especially the Taiwanese culture, raise the awareness of all existing cultures on campus, and promote cultural inclusiveness and diversity on campus.

In addition, I would like to thank my friend, Jessy Lu, for inviting me to the icebreaker event and introducing me to the Association for the first time. That experience in the Association eventually led me to conduct this case study. Also, thank you to the two former presidents of the Association, James Weng and Tony Lin, for supporting this study and spreading the word to the members of the Association.

I am also sending a big hug to my friends, Amy Sun, Emma Rose Edmunds, Jessica Joelle Willows, and Lita Lopez-Shortill for believing in me and the value of this study and for supporting me to be a better academic writer. Also, to the amazing UVic staff and faculty members in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, the Center for Academic Communication, the Thesis Boot Camp, and special temporary study spaces for this COVID pandemic situation. Your academic expertise and excellence in academic writing and thesis completion helped me so much to improve my academic writing throughout my

school years and accelerated the process of writing my thesis with confidence. Also, your kindness and words of encouragement helped me to go forward to this far, slowly but steadily, in this globally challenging situation.

Last, but not least, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my marvelous supervisory committee members, Dr. Tatiana Gounko and Dr. Willow Samara Allen. This study would not have been the same without your support and wise guidance. My supervisor, Dr. Tatiana Gounko, has been so patient and supportive throughout this study completion. Thank you for spending your valuable time with me whenever I asked for your advice and guidance, sharing your academic expertise and challenging my thinking. Your support encouraged me not to give up but go forward instead. Dr. Willow Allen, thank you so much for being always supportive, even when I doubted myself and sharing your thoughtful comments and valuable perspectives. Your support allowed me to keep pushing myself and come this far.

## **Dedications**

My time and effort on this case study are dedicated to all the students out there, who are passionate, brave, and open to step out of their comfort zone, explore a new world, and live their life as they wish despite all challenges, biases, and struggles.

And to my family.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Context

This study started with my personal challenges as an international student from South Korea and observations of other international students' lives. My first studying abroad experience happened in Hawai'i, U.S. back in 2006. The reason why I chose Hawai'i for my exchange program was that Hawai'i was well-known to be racially and culturally diverse. The overall positive experience of studying in Hawai'i surely encouraged me to study abroad again after five years of my career as a teacher. Unfortunately, my experience as an international student in Canada was not that positive, especially in the beginning, and, in fact, it was quite different from what I had experienced before.

The biggest challenge for me was that I could not be true to my feelings while dealing with other people's cultural ignorance and racial bias. I felt that some people thought that Asians are "just Asians" and that we are always good people, polite and patient and we should work harder than others. Although everybody I met said they were genuinely interested in anti-racism and cultural diversity issues, in my daily life, I often had to deal with microaggression and bias towards Asians, both conscious and unconscious.

For instance, although I was the first to arrive in a campus office or a restaurant, I was often helped after others, mostly Caucasians, and was treated differently. One time, my friend and I had to wait for half an hour to pay for our meal although the restaurant was not busy at all. A young Caucasian server came to us after joking around with her coworkers and helping all other customers who came later than us. I felt even shocked with the realization that some people regardless of their age and education were not used to serving Asians perhaps because they were so used to being served by them.

In addition, I had to learn to ignore the fact that many people carelessly assumed that I was Chinese since I am East Asian looking. When working at a café, one of the customers

asked me in an irritated tone why I could not speak Chinese. The question was asked right after I told the person that I was Korean. I certainly did not expect such an out of date question in this global era. That was another moment of truth – I have realized that although Canada is promoted as one of the most culturally diverse countries many people are not interested in or educated about Asian countries.

When I arrived in Canada, I expected to be actively socializing with local students at least in class. However, some group of local students paid zero attention to international students' presentations, talking with each other, and often remained silent during a small group discussion with us. It was very frustrating and upsetting to be treated as insignificant or even invisible, with no rational reasons. However, this type of behavior was very subtle at the same time as a microaggression. Only you would feel if you were the one mistreated and not being paid attention to.

Overall, I felt very frustrated and upset that my voice was not heard in my own matters. What I mean is that some people talked about how much Black community and indigenous people have suffered from racism and microaggressions and they did not pay attention to my personal experience. I have had multiple opportunities to learn about the tragic history of indigenous and black communities here in Canada. However, I could not still understand why anti-Asian racism and what I was experiencing were not taken seriously. I believe that racist behaviors and comments are all discriminatory, toxic, and totally wrong and they are not something to compare with one another to judge their seriousness.

Contrary to my expectations, I found out that there were no guidelines or protocols to follow when acts of racism happen. Once I shared what happened to me with someone in charge, they tended to put all the pressure on me to resolve the situations, asking what I wanted them to do, or made me think if I took everything too personally, defending the person who exhibited racist or culturally ignorant behaviors. I realized that the more I spoke,

the more I was viewed as a weird sensitive foreigner. I felt depressed, isolated, and greatly disappointed with the fact that I could not be true to my feelings because people in the mainstream decided if my experience was enough to be considered and if I deserved to feel how I felt.

The more I thought about why I was mistreated and tried to fit into the dominant culture to overcome the feeling of isolation, the more I felt I was losing myself; I was not honest with my own feelings. Cultural interactions with others were not often reciprocal, and both subconscious and conscious bias towards East Asians seemed to be hidden underneath a thin veneer of politeness. The series of such negative experiences in the community and on campus influenced other parts of my life here in Canada including my academic work. I started developing my academic interests in learning about student experiences with the Taiwanese Association on campus. I thought it was worth exploring this organization for two main reasons.

First, when I initially joined the organization, I felt its members' sense of agency and leadership that they had developed over time by organizing social events, contacting local resources, and collaborating with other campus organizations. The organization is student led and has its own administrative system that serves this function. For example, within the organization, participants take a leading role to communicate with local sponsors and other fellow associations. This experience helps them to improve their sense of belonging and connection to their campus community. Second, even though it is an organization catering to any students with Taiwanese heritage, I felt the environment in this student group was inclusive. For international students from Taiwan, it became 'a home away from home.' I observed that my friends, mostly Taiwanese, who I met through the organization looked fully settled down and handled both social and academic situations really well although they had also experienced some of the challenges I faced.

**The University of Victoria (UVic) Taiwanese Association (The Association)**

For this study, I wanted to explore the impact of the UVic Taiwanese Association on minority students. As a member of the Association, I have the background knowledge of the Association. The Association relies on social media to reach its members and communicate about its activities. In particular, the Association's Facebook page shows that the organization has grown its numbers of the social artifacts, such as videos, images, and text, which were generated by the users. Since 2007, the Taiwanese Association has been using its Facebook page as a main platform to communicate with other students on campus which provides essential information about the Association. This publicly available information also provided a meaningful source for my present research (Franz, Marsh, Chen, & Teo, 2019).

According to the Association's Facebook page (The University of Victoria Taiwanese Association (n.d.)), the Association was established in 2004. It has executive members in four different departments: Event, Public Relationship (PR), Internal Relationship (IR), and Treasury. The executive members and the head of the Event department organize major events such as ice breaker events, camping and ski trips, and the end of the academic year party. The PR department takes the role of communicating with sponsors and promoting the Association to the public. The IR department handles personal inquiries and internal communication with members of the Association. The Treasury department deals with the Association's budget and finances.

The Association has a primary purpose of sharing the Taiwanese culture and supporting Taiwanese students. However, based on some features found on the web page (The University of Victoria Taiwanese Association, n.d.), it also intends to run as one of the campus' clubs and associations welcoming all UVic students. The majority of the members in the Association are Asian including Taiwanese, Chinese, and Korean and Taiwanese students have the biggest number. The Facebook page of the Association publicly indicates the

accumulated total of 655 members, which includes current UVic students and alumni.

The Association seems to strive to be inclusive and approachable to all current and potential members on campus. For instance, an executive member application form does not include nationality as a qualification to join the Association, which means that non-Taiwanese members can take a leadership role if they want to. In addition, they changed their logo from the map of Taiwan to a cartoon of a Formosan bear, which represents their cultural identity in a more approachable way. Formosan bears with a white V-shaped mark on the chest are well-known to represent Taiwan since they have inhabited the area for a long time (“Guardian God of the Forest”, 2007).

On the Facebook page of the Association, most of the posts are shared by the leadership of the Association. The posted topics are all about promoting upcoming events and their reviews supported with photos and videos. The posts are mostly written in English and sometimes in both English and traditional Chinese, one of the main languages of the Taiwanese people. The themes of the organization’s events are various and broad, targeting all UVic students. For example, their annual events include ice breaker events, camping and ski trips, Valentine’s Day, sport events, Halloween days, Lunar New Year’s Day events, and the end of the academic year party. Before the current global pandemic situation, those events were held regularly and almost monthly. From the photos and videos of the events, it appears that most of the participants are East Asians. Although the Association is a racial/ethnic group, the wide variety of their events provide a venue for non-Asian students to get a sense of Taiwanese culture or other Asian cultures in a broader sense and for Asian students, especially Taiwanese, to socialize with other students on campus.

For Taiwanese students, the Association and its Facebook page can be a home away from home where they can still feel connected to their home country and be supported. The posts uploaded by individual members are often personal inquiries regarding studying at

UVic and living in Victoria. These posts are written in traditional Chinese, and at least one or two informative comments are posted by fellow UVic Taiwanese students in response to these questions. Therefore, although this web page in general does not include a large number of interactive comments, the overall atmosphere seemed still inclusive and caring.

### **Rationale**

According to the Canadian government report, from 2014 to 2018, the number of international students in Canada rose up to 68%. In 2018, the number of international students was 721,205 at all levels of education, including post-secondary education (Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) (2018). The report also pointed out significant economic benefits coming from the continuous influx of international students to Canada. For instance, in 2018, the overall expenses of international students in Canada amounted to \$21.6 billion, which supported approximately 170,000 jobs for Canadians. Simply put, international education in Canada made a significant contribution to the Canadian economy over the past few years.

However, the literature has not clearly and fully shown whether international students studying in Canada experience personal satisfaction. Although the international student survey (CBIE, 2018) shows high rates of student satisfaction in the post-secondary level education, with 55% and 38% of the total survey participants' responding respectively as very satisfied and satisfied with their decision to study in Canada, this data does not represent the details of international students' experience and satisfaction as a whole. It is because the factors which can affect international students' experiences, such as educational achievements, vary from their personal backgrounds. Experiences such as working a part time job, living and interacting off campus, and institutional resources are all aspects that are not represented in a survey. The personal combination of these factors contributes to student experience (Baker, 2008; Grayson, 2008; Peltier, Laden, & Matranga, 2000).

Furthermore, such national surveys could limit participant feedback because it does not provide incentives for them to evaluate the effectiveness of their respective international education programs which in turn will not facilitate any institutional changes. Additionally, the over-generalized survey results do not precisely indicate the challenges and diverse needs of international students studying in Canada.

Although the Canadian government promotes Canada as one of the most culturally diverse and welcoming societies, there are underlying biases towards visible minorities that are not necessarily acknowledged (Government of Canada, 2019; EduCanada, n.d.). There is a possibility that the diverse population in Canada is a result of low entry qualifications attracting many prospective international students and immigrants to the Canadian society.

Asiedu (2020) argued that collecting demographic information on minority students has been neglected by schools, and it has made international students' frustrating experiences untenable and brought no positive changes to universities. As the only Black student in her program in the University of Alberta, Asiedu shared that being a PhD candidate had been both the greatest fortune and the biggest challenge for her dealing with many people's racial bias against Black people on a daily basis. Specifically, she stated that:

Black people have endured a brutally violent and tragic history in North America, and that history continues to this day. In the ongoing fight for basic human rights, Black people die every day because in the eyes of many, Black people aren't really people...For as long as I can remember, my parents told me I have to work harder than anyone else. This doesn't just apply to my career. It means carrying a heavier emotional load than my friends and peers. It means learning to smile when I'm hurt so that others can be comfortable. It means accepting that my very existence is threatening to some and I must become more palatable if I want to advance (Asiedu, 2020, para. 4-5).

In a CBC news article, McDonald and Ward (2017) reported the lack of specific data about campus racial diversity in many Canadian universities. They indicated that many Canadian universities proudly advertise how diverse and inclusive their campuses are, but most do not collect data about their students' racial identities. However, the investigation shared the voices of two people, a Tamil-Canadian student at Ryerson University and Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission who talked about the importance of hearing visible minority students' opinions and the benefit of collecting race-based data in universities.

The student from Ryerson University said she would be willing to share her background as she was proud of who she was. She added that her parents encouraged her to appreciate her culture through various community events. In addition, the Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission stated that to genuinely serve various student populations, knowing who is in your campus population, would be necessary, and it could be beneficial to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to explore how the selected members of the Taiwanese Association describe their personal experience in this Association and whether their involvement in the Association has affected their overall student experience at the University of Victoria.

### **Significance of the Study**

Since the high population of international students or minority students do not necessarily talk about the quality of their campus experience, the study will encourage all members of a school community to focus on individual student's personal stories and to apply their voices to create a positive and inclusive campus culture for all, which will contribute to genuine campus diversity. This study is especially significant and timely

because the current COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the rise in anti-Asian hatred cases and crimes across the United States and Canada. This study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the personal experiences of Taiwanese students in a Canadian campus, and its findings will add to the existing literature on East Asian minority student experiences in Canadian settings. Through the recommendations that put forward in this study, it will support university communities to create a positive and inclusive campus culture and everyone freely represents their cultural backgrounds.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative study is guided by the following research questions:

1. *How do participants describe their experiences with the Taiwanese Association?*
2. *How does the Association impact the participants' lives?*

### **Definitions of Terms**

#### **International Students**

Since this study focuses on Taiwanese students at the University of Victoria, a Canadian university, the terms “minority students” and “international students” will be primarily defined based on the definition in the Statistics Canada (2010) which considers international students as foreign students/residents who are legally allowed to study in Canada on a temporary basis. In this study, some literature groups international students into a group of minority students.

#### **Minority Students**

In this study, the term “minority students” refers to visible minority students. According to the Statistics Canada (n.d.), the definition of visible minority groups follows the Employment Equity Act which states that visible minorities are “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” Based on the definition, the visible minority mainly includes the following groups “Chinese, South Asian, Black, Arab, West Asian, Filipino, Southeast Asian, Latin American, Japanese, and Korean.”

This study adds ethnicity to the criteria to distinguish visible minority groups along with race and skin color. Specifically, this study focuses on a group of students with Taiwanese backgrounds or those from East Asian countries, such as Korea and China.

### **Cultural Brokering**

Cultural Brokering is defined as connecting the mainstream culture and various ethnic cultures. A cultural broker is a person who takes a role of bestriding both cultures, understanding mainstream values, and sharing that with other ethnic cultures (Gentemann & Whitehead, 1983). This concept will be more discussed in Chapter 4.

### **Senior Students**

In this study, “senior students” refers to a meaning of “seniors” in East Asian cultures. It means a person who first joins an organization, such as a company and school and becomes a role model and mentor sharing own experience and core values of their organization and supporting “a junior” who join the organization later to successfully settle down (Chen & Chung, 1994; Qie et al., 2019).

### **Predominantly White**

Human grouping by race or ethnicity can cause essentialism, in which individuals are perceived in a homogeneous or fixed boundary of race or ethnicity, instead of understanding many different perspectives in one individual (Kubota & Lin, 2009; Williams, 1999). In this study and the referenced interdisciplinary literature, the term “predominantly white” does not include the intention of homogenizing different groups of people in one racial category. The term speaks to a dominant population and institutional culture mostly in Canadian and American settings with the understanding that people are under the influence of socially categorized races, which carry the issue of entitlement, power, and social injustice (Canel-Çinarbaş & Yohani, 2019; Kubota & Lin, 2009). For instance, in the study of Gonzalez (2003), the term refers to the majority middle-class white Euro-American settlers.

Researchers Canel-Çınarbaş and Yohani (2019) use this term to describe the dominant Euro-Canadian settlers in Canada.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Challenges Faced by Racial/ Ethnic Minority Students**

Since the participants of this study are racial/ethnic minority students here in Canada, this part of the literature review focuses on racial/ethnic minority students' challenges and coping strategies. The first two challenges such as language barriers and cultural differences are related to international students in general while the last challenges are meaningful for racial/ethnic minority students.

With abundant and continuous research on the relationship between students' academic success and the campus environment, it has been understood that active campus participation is an important element for students' successful social and academic experience. However, research has shown that racial/ethnic minority students including international students encounter various barriers within the dominant culture of predominantly White institutions in this circumstance. In the circumstance, social interactions have been consistently talked about as a significant element of students' social and academic lives, many researchers have argued that student organizations take an important role for racial/ethnic minority students in predominantly White post-secondary institutions (Gonzalez, 2003; Lewis, Chesler, & Forman 2000; Museus, 2008).

Previous research has shown that racial/ethnic minority students especially experience difficulties in academic and socio-cultural domains (Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wei, Heppner, Mallen, Ku, Liao, & Wu, 2007; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). These difficulties often lead to psychological problems such as anxiety, loneliness, and depression (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wei et al., 2007; Wu et al., 2015). In addition, racial/ethnic minority students are regularly confronted with different academic and social norms and expectations in their host countries. Many students experience a number of barriers that prevent them from fully enjoying campus life. These barriers include language

barriers, cultural differences, and microaggressions.

### **Language Barriers**

Many international students experience difficulties adjusting to new academic and social contexts because of language barriers (Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wu et al., 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2013). To be specific, international students struggle with the choice of vocabulary, the rate of speech, and different pronunciations (Wu et al., 2015). Also, they often get challenged with communicating with their professors and peers in class and writing academic papers (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000; Wu et al., 2015; Zhang & Zhou, 2010). Especially, during the first few weeks of their study, the active participation in group discussions is a big challenge for the international students (Zhang & Zhou, 2010). The research shows that language barriers caused students to feel isolated from their peers during their classes (Wu et al., 2015).

Misra and Castillo (2004) stated that even though international students get stressed out by the academic challenges, their overall stress may be under-reported as they may consider acknowledging stress as shameful and as a sign of weakness. As an adjustment strategy for international students to deal with language challenges, the researchers suggest accessing campus resources, such as a campus writing center, various campus activities, and different student organizations (Wu et al., 2015), which can be a general suggestion.

### **Cultural Differences**

In addition to the language barrier, research showed that general cultural differences may negatively affect the lives of international students. The work of Liberman (1994) and Smith and Khawaja (2011) specifically focused on Asian international students in the U.S. The researchers commented on the difficult adjustment to an interactive teaching style in American universities. For example, in terms of classroom participation, some Asian international students have a hard time contributing to an ongoing classroom discussion since

they tend to wait for their professor to give them a chance to speak (Wu et al., 2015). The researchers also described various cultural differences existing outside of classrooms, which caused the participants to feel uneasy or awkward in social interactions. For instance, one of the participants shared their own experience of feeling embarrassed when being asked to unwrap gifts and read out the cards on site. This happened because the participant was not familiar with the custom of unwrapping gifts with other invited people. Such cultural differences, which are neither communicated nor shared, may lead to misunderstanding and distance.

Limited resources address specific cultural differences found in Canada. Although not specific to a university setting, the research by Guo (2012) with parents who live in Canada and represent 15 different countries described similar examples. For instance, a South Korean parent shared a story of a female teacher's misunderstanding of their son. The teacher thought the young man did not respect women based on his behavior of not looking straight at the teacher, but rather looking down. The parent had to explain that such behavior was in fact a sign of respect in the Korean culture.

### **Microaggressions**

The third challenge that racial/ethnic minority students often deal with is racial/ethnic microaggressions in a predominantly White campus. Racial/ethnic microaggressions can be defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 1).

Since perpetrators of microaggressions often tend to be unaware of them and as the term micro implies, microaggressions refer to the individual or private aspects of racism and aggressions (Sue et al., 2007), some White people may deny that such microaggressions are

happening around them or may engage in racist attitude intentionally or unintentionally (Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019).

However, racial/ethnic minority students experience microaggressions daily on campus, in class, and in any social interactions with their White peers and instructors (Houshmand, Spanierman, & Tafarodi, 2014; Kim & Kim, 2010; Lewis et al, 2000; Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressions are based on cultural ignorance, invalidation, and insensitivity exhibited by the domestic White people whether on campus or in the community (Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019; Houshmand et al., 2014; Kim & Kim, 2010; Lewis et al., 2000).

For example, Kim and Kim (2010) discussed cultural ignorance when instructors, failing to recognize different cultural values and communication styles, give international students bad grades for participation due to their lack of active questioning or commenting. Their research shows that students are expected to speak up in class to get a good grade no matter where they are from and what their communication style is practiced in their countries. Another example of cultural ignorance is an assumption of homogeneity. A Taiwanese student experienced being mistakenly considered as Chinese. To them, it delivers an underlined message that “you are all the same” (Kim & Kim, 2010).

Speaking of cultural insensitivity, the research participants shared that their domestic White peers are unaware about international issues and perspectives (Kim & Kim, 2010; Houshmand et al., 2014). The participants in one study felt that the peers did not care about what they thought and only relied on their own culture (Houshmand et al., 2014) and curriculum, which mainly focused on the perspectives of the dominant/majority’s culture (Kim & Kim, 2010). Under these circumstances, racial/ethnic minority students are discouraged to actively participate during class and become uncomfortable with their peers and instructors (Houshmand et al., 2014; Kim & Kim, 2010).

In terms of cultural invalidation, racial/ethnic minority students experience social exclusion and avoidance (Canel-Çınarbaşı & Yohani, 2019; Houshmand et al., 2014; Kim & Kim, 2010; Lewis et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007). International students found their domestic White peers told jokes and used slangs only referencing their culture in an open group conversation (Houshmand et al., 2014; Kim & Kim, 2010). The participant in the studies shared that they often felt out of place and awkward about not being able to laugh or join conversations. In some cases, ethnic/minority students saw their domestic White peers literally ignore their presence in a lab and during class, they also felt that their White peers did not respect their ideas during group discussions (Houshmand et al., 2014; Kim & Kim, 2010).

Furthermore, when an Asian participant brought an Asian American perspective in a class discussion of racial issues, their White peers continued focusing on Black-White racial relations and diverted the discussion, replying “Yeah, that’s nice, but here’s a real issue” (Lewis et al., 2000). However, the study pointed out that racial/ethnic relations remained in the White students’ perspective versus racial/ethnic minority students’ perspective. Rather, racial issues should be discussed and based on the perspectives of all different racial/ethnic student groups. White students can participate but not lead the discussion.

In addition, according to Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, and Sriken (2014), different races experience microaggression differently. White participants experienced microaggressions less frequently than other races. Black participants often experienced the second-class citizenship and criminality microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2014), which means that they were considered a danger or potential criminal to people or they would be easily mistaken for a service worker, not a customer (Sue et al., 2007). Asian participants experienced environmental microaggressions, which are more obvious at a systematic level. For example, since the biggest population of international students are Asian and they are

considered to be from wealthy families (Houshmand et al., 2014), the university funding for international students is insufficient and they are not allowed to work off-campus full time or to be part-time students (Sue et al., 2007).

Experiences of microaggression negatively affects racial/ethnic minority students' psychological well-being. To be specific, microaggression can cause the feeling of anger, confusion about what proper reactions are, sadness (Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019) and even clinical symptoms of depression (Wei et al., 2007). For international students, this can be a major source of homesickness (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

In addition, microaggressions and discrimination can negatively impact on racial/ethnic minority students' self-esteem development (Nadal et al., 2014). Given that most international students do not have their relatives or acquaintances in their host countries when they start their studies, they often feel socially isolated (Wu et al., 2015). Microaggressions could make their situation worse. It is important to note that many international students are willing to share their backgrounds with their American friends in various ways to help the American friends gain a better understanding of who they are. International students believe that the prejudice and discrimination targeting them are based on the lack of knowledge and cultural awareness (Wu et al., 2015).

To the best of my knowledge, in the literature about microaggressions and racial/ethnic minority students, most of the research has been situated in America. Although American research data is applicable to Canadian circumstances because of their cultural similarities, more research in specific Canadian settings need to be conducted to have a better understanding of their distinctive situations.

### **Coping Strategies Used by Racial/Ethnic Minority Students**

Racial/ ethnic minority students can actively cope with the difficulties both passively and actively by withdrawing themselves from challenging situations (Houshmand et al.,

2014). For instance, East Asian - Chinese and Korean - participants in the study by Houshmand et al. (2014) shared that they either skipped or dropped the course in which they were ridiculed for their accents. Students can also use various on campus resources which include racial and cultural groups on campus (Houshmand et al., 2014), student organizations, writing centers, counselling services, and leisure facilities (Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Wu et al., 2015).

In addition, a high level of social support can especially help international students to overcome the obstacles mentioned above. Smith and Khawaja (2011) stated that friends from the same country or other fellow international students can become a great source of social support. For example, international students' personal stories about the challenges they faced in the host universities and coping strategies shared with other international students can help them better cope with similar problems (Wu et al., 2015). Furthermore, sufficient social support from significant others can help international students overcome many psychological issues. As racial/ethnic student organizations on campus are one of the school resources where students can get the social support, various research studies have specifically focused on them.

### **Racial/Ethnic Student Organizations on Campus**

According to Harper and Hurtado (2007) racial/ethnic organizations not only offer minority students some academic and social counter spaces to cope with subtle racial microaggressions but they also can function as a significant venue for minority students in social engagement which includes rich social interactions (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quayle, 2007; Houshmand et al., 2014).

Guiffrida (2003) specified the categories of racial/ethnic organizations' contributions to minority students' experiences including interacting with faculty from the same racial/ethnic backgrounds, giving back to the same racial/ethnic communities outside of their

campuses, and feeling comfortable with the people who share the same racial/ethnic backgrounds. With such social support, racial/ethnic students can develop their sense of belonging on campus (Museus, 2008; Houshmand et al., 2014).

These types of organizations can help students in developing their cultural identity and achieving greater success in their academic performance (Baker 2008; Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Guiffrida 2003), although the relationship between school organizations and students' academic performance can differ for each racial/ ethnic and gender group (Baker 2008; Barajas & Pierce, 2001).

Furthermore, Gonzalez (2003) indicated that if there are not enough subcultures on campus where minority students can experience and express their cultural heritage, they may experience cultural starvation which can be as problematic as physical starvation. Racial/ethnic student organizations can function as minority students' families, home base, or home away from home (Museus, 2008: Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederse, & Allen, 1999). Researchers believe that such student organizations contribute to minority students' positive experiences and achievements (Gonzalez, 2003; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Kuh & Love, 2000). Researchers argued that racial/ethnic student organizations provide opportunities for students to experience cultural familiarity, express their cultural identity, and advocate for cultural diversity and inclusivity on campus. Sharing their cultural heritage can culturally empower them, and they will be able to freely express their cultural identity and to have other campus community members appreciate their cultural backgrounds. At the same time, with the support from cultural brokers in the organizations, racial/ethnic student organizations can also give students a chance to learn about the culture of their host countries through interactions with more experienced members in the organizations.

### ***Cultural Familiarity***

Racial/ethnic student organizations are authentic spaces for cultural familiarity (Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus, 2008). Museus (2008) explained that cultural familiarity includes three main elements: sharing common cultural contents or common ground with students from similar racial/ethnic backgrounds, empathizing with each other's experiences and difficulties, and connecting through racial/ethnic organizations. Cultural familiarity enables minority students to share their cultural/ethnic identities and deal with the stereotypes they face as a minority student (Maramba & Palmer, 2014).

### ***Cultural Expression, Identity, and Advocacy***

Through participating in racial/ethnic organizations, minority students express their cultural and racial identities (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Inkelas, 2004; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995; White, 1998). With the example of the Latino students in their racial/ethnic organizations, Acevedo and Stodolska (2019) argued that the participation in racial/ethnic student organizations ensured that students continuously acquire the knowledge of their culture, develop their cultural identity, feel proud about their cultural heritage and ultimately improve their campus experience. This idea resonates with earlier research by Harper and Quaye (2007) and Museus (2008) who suggested that engagement in racial/ethnic organizations helps minority students in developing their cultural identity and contributes to positive college experience.

In addition, according to Maramba and Palmer (2014) and Museus (2008), these organizations can support their members by allowing them to show their cultural identity, to share their cultural heritage and to advocate for cultural diversity and inclusivity on campus. In other words, minority students can advocate for cultural change and diversity on campus by expressing their cultural identity through various ethnic and service events and raising cultural awareness on campus. Ultimately, racial/ethnic organizations take an important role

in developing students' cultural and social identities as well as by providing community spaces for minority students on campus (Maramba & Palmer, 2014).

### ***Cultural Empowerment***

Delgado-Romero and Hernandez (2002) insisted that ethnic or cultural groups can and should be a positive resource for students to build their cultural identity with other fellow students from the same or similar cultures and culturally empower themselves. Cultural empowerment can help minority students release the hidden pressure associated with adjustment to the dominant culture while still supporting their cultural identity. Moreover, continuous involvement in the cultural communities or minority students' organizations on campus can positively influence the students' satisfaction, academic performance, retention, and graduation (Delgado-Romero & Hernandez, 2002; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997).

### ***Cultural Validation***

Rendon (1994) defined cultural validation as student interactions with various groups of their campus communities. In line with the suggested definition, the researcher insisted that cultural validation includes respect and appreciation of students and their original communities. The importance of cultural validation has been discussed by many researchers including Maramba and Palmer (2014). Cultural validation is also strongly related to the existence of racial/ethnic student organizations since they provide students with a welcoming environment in which they feel accepted and supported at their institutions.

With such emotional and cultural support, minority students can initiate social connections with students from other racial/ethnic backgrounds (Hurtado et al., 1999). Bowman, Park, and Denson (2015) indicated that racial/ethnic student organizations do not only offer a comfortable home base to minority students and further a sense of belonging but, with the authentic cross-cultural interactions during their study, students prepare for

participation in the broader communities even after graduation (Bowman & Park, 2014).

### ***Cultural Brokering***

Gentemann and Whitehead (1983) defined a cultural broker as a person who connects the mainstream culture and various ethnic cultures. The roles of a cultural broker are to bestride both cultures, understand mainstream values, and share that with the ethnic/cultures (Gentemann & Whitehead, 1983). Cultural brokers often come from the same ethnic background and are more empathetic to new international students because they understand the challenges the latter experience when trying to adjust to the dominant culture. Since many minority students often deal with cultural barriers and unwelcoming environments, cultural brokers can help these students navigate and interpret the mainstream academic and social systems and also provide practical assistance with social and communication skills and other important practical matters such as finding employment (Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007).

### **Conceptual Framework: A Sense of Belonging**

In the past decades, research examining the importance of a sense of belonging among international students in the higher education field has significantly increased. Using the concept of sense of belonging, researchers examined experiences of international and minority students, especially for first-year students, recognizing the close relations between an individual's sense of belonging and their social and academic success in a new environment (Cureton & Gravestock, 2010; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005; Rivas, Hale, & Burke, 2019).

In the following paragraphs, three key characteristics of a sense of belonging will be discussed. These characteristics are important for understanding how sense of belonging contributes to student success in the higher education setting. The three characteristics include: subjectivity, connectedness, and dynamism. In general, in the perspectives of human

development, individuals are influenced by people surrounding them such as family, schools, and neighbors (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). The literature indicates that in a new living environment, away from their original intimate support network, students will be directly affected by campus climates and resources.

### **Subjectivity**

Individuals perceive a sense of belonging subjectively, depending on their individual feelings of being valued, secure, respected, or engaged (Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008; Mahar, Cobigo, & Stuart, 2012; Zumbrunn, McKim, Buhs, & Hawley, 2014; Strayhorn, 2018). Since individual experience occurs and improves to a certain extent, based on such personal feelings, research indicates that an individual's sense of belonging is context-oriented, unique, and deeply personal (Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008; Strayhorn, 2018).

Since developing a sense of belonging is a greatly subjective process, it is necessary to differentiate this concept from individuals' official membership or physical participation with a referent group (Hoffman, Perillo, Hawthorne Calizo, Hadfield, & Lee, 2005; Mahar et al., 2012). A referent group refers to an external entity anchoring an individuals' feelings and holistic experience and learning (Cooper, 2009; Mahar et al., 2012). Therefore, Mahar and her colleagues suggested that individuals may feel a sense of belonging to multiple referent groups at the same time as long as they find their own feelings and experiences positive and supportive in a series of particular reciprocal contexts in each referent group. This assumption is supported by the literature on identity, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and citizenship (Maher et al., 2012).

In the higher education setting, students interact with various possible referent groups. Institutions themselves, classrooms with an instructor and peers, and cohort groups in a program are examples of referent groups (Mahar et al., 2012). Outside of classes, athletic groups, cultural student organizations, and student government organizations can also be

referent groups for students (Peltier et al., 2000).

### **Connectedness**

Based on research, a sense of connectedness is identified as another essential characteristic of a sense of belonging (Mahar et al., 2012; Zumbrunn et al., 2014). As indicated in the literature, the sense of connectedness is important for people as it makes them feel valued, respected, or engaged with their referent groups and deeply associated with reciprocal interactions, involvements, and activities in referent groups (Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008; Mahar, et al., 2012; Zumbrunn et al., 2014). The level of an individual's psychological connection to a referent group is correlated to a level of comfort they feel. Through meaningful interactions, individuals can discover commonality or similarity, share feelings, experiences, or understandings with other people within their referent groups (Mahar et al., 2012) and feel supported and recognized (Cooper, 2019). Feeling connected is foundational for an individual because it ultimately fosters a sense of belonging to their referent groups.

Commonality refers to having similar visible or physical characteristics with other individuals, which may include race, nationality, and ethnic culture (Mahar et al, 2012; Mwangi, 2016). Students can feel a sense of commonality more to a group of students with the same ethnicity or nationality than to a group with the same racial background. For example, Black international students felt less connected to the Black US students because they did not come from the same culture and country (Mwangi, 2016).

Moreover, for non-White students in a higher education setting, ethnic-based differences and the quality of relationships on campus correlate with minority students' sense of belonging (Cureton & Gravestock, 2019; Rivas et al., 2019; Strayhorn, 2018). However, researchers pointed out that the commonality coming from visible, intellectual, or behavioral features also can act as a double-edged sword and can also exclude some people from a referent group based on these features (Mahar et al., 2012).

Shared values, feelings, experience, and understandings also contribute to an individual's sense of connectedness and her sense of belonging (Mahar et al., 2012). In a higher education setting, the frequent involvement in campus activities, both academic and social, can contribute to developing a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2018). For example, participating in campus clubs, organizations, and committees is positively associated with students' sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2018; Walseth, 2006). Specifically for international students, sharing similar experiences or challenges as an international student with other international students can make them feel connected (Mwangi, 2016).

Support and recognition from other people in a referent group can contribute to building a sense of connectedness by fostering the positive personal feelings of security, trust, acceptance, or respect (Cooper, 2009; Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008; Sedgwick, Oosterbroek, Ponomar, 2014). Cooper (2009) defined support as understanding students' situations, offering comfort and care, and leading them to possible resources on campus. Recognition refers to acknowledging achievement, ensuring individuals know they matter, recognizing other people's challenges and respecting differences from others in the same referent group (Cooper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2018).

In a higher education setting, Cooper (2009) explained that forming a single solid campus culture is impossible or even unnecessary. He suggested that it would be better to maintain various positive and healthy campus cultures under the umbrella of a larger school community. In addition, in such an inclusive circumstance, there can be a place or a culture where each student can feel that they belong, including students who inevitably feel isolated at their schools, especially if they are first-year students and international students.

### **Dynamism**

Dynamism is another notable characteristic of a sense of belonging discussed in the literature (Cureton & Gravestock, 2019; Mahar et al., 2012). It means that since the formation

of a sense of belonging is associated with the dynamic interactions among positive and negative factors in an individual's life (Mahar et al., 2012), the nature of a sense of belonging is often unstable and changing over time (Cureton & Gravestock, 2019).

The factors contributing to sense of belonging can be divided into physical and social factors. According to Mahar et al. (2012) physical factors may refer to geographic areas, visible interactions, and similarity with a defined group, which an individual may feel she belongs to. For instance, in the study of Norwegian Muslim women with sport interaction, Walseth (2006) described that the visible minority athletes' involvement and success in sports affected other minorities and fostered their sense of belonging to their country.

On the other hand, social factors may include both positive factors such as support and recognition from others and active participation and negative factors such as self-recognition as a visible minority and behaviors of a group towards an individual, such as ignorance, microaggressions, and discriminations (De Araujo, 2011; Mahar et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2018). Furthermore, Strayhorn (2018) noted that although social involvement is normally categorized as a positive factor, too much social involvement, such as being a member of a sorority, also can decrease a student's sense of belonging to their school, taking their attention away from studying, reading for class, socializing with classmates and faculty. Taking into account the dynamic nature of a sense of belonging in a higher education setting, it would be significant or even necessary for stakeholders, faculties, and staff to be aware of possible negative factors for students' sense of belonging and apply specific strategies to diminish such factors on campus.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the three characteristics of a sense of belonging described in the literature which include subjectivity, connectedness, and dynamism, a sense of belonging can be defined as an individual's sensory/ psychological web constructed by a series of personal

interactions in a certain group of people and the corresponding feelings, such as a feeling of connection and trust. Different personal experiences and feelings are correlated with and affected by each other which contributes to the dynamic and changeable nature of an individual's sense of belonging. In this regard, a sense of belonging suits this study best as a conceptual framework. It will be a great analytical tool to understand the overall personal experience of this study's participants in a new cultural or academic setting regarding their cultural background and their participation in the Association.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter contains the description of methodology and methods applied in this study, which includes the worldview and methodology, two main research questions, the employed data collection and analysis methods. This chapter also presents details of the participant selection, ethical considerations, trustworthiness and limitations of this study.

#### **Worldview and Methodology**

This study was based on the social constructivist worldview. Under the influence of Vygotsky's cognitive development theory, social interactions and socio-cultural contexts are key in individuals' constructing knowledge or meaning in this worldview (Talja, Tuominen, & Savolainen, 2005). Individuals desire to understand society or environment where they live in and they generate the meaning about their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Based on this worldview, the subjective meanings of a sense of belonging were explored with the participants from the minority student group in a campus context defined by predominately white students and where inequality inevitably exists (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016).

This study explored how selected student-members of the Taiwanese Association, who have Taiwanese heritage, describe their personal experience in the Association and on campus in the conceptual framework of a sense of belonging, which is considered as context-oriented and subjective (Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008; Strayhorn, 2018). This study aimed to interpret various meanings of the study participants' experiences which are constructed through social interactions in the Association and on campus as a whole.

#### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by two main questions:

- (1) How do participants describe their experiences with the Taiwanese Association?*
- (2) How does this Association impact the participants' lives?*

To respond to these research questions and find out what participants thought about their experiences, a qualitative case study approach was employed. This research approach is appropriate when a researcher is seeking an in-depth understanding of an intrinsically bounded single unit, such as one particular program or one particular group of people (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 2009). According to Baxter and Jack (2008) and Merriam (2009), a case study is conducted within a real context, with data resources such as interviews, observations, and documents.

According to Merriam (2009), for case study research it is important to determine the object of the study and establish a certain boundary, process, or concern, also known as a bounded system. Qualitative case studies can be described as heuristic, descriptive, and particularistic (Yazan, 2015). This means that case studies concentrate on a specific phenomenon, illuminate readers' understanding of the phenomenon, and generate a rich and in-depth description of it. However, the most salient feature of a case study is the unit of analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In case study research, researchers focus on one particular program, one particular group of individuals, or one particular individual selected, based on its typicality and uniqueness (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yazan, 2015). For instance, the Taiwanese Association is an example or a case of racial and ethnic student organizations on campus that supports racial and ethnic minority students and creates an inclusive and diverse campus culture.

Through individual interviews, this study focused on the Taiwanese Association, a racial and ethnic student club at the University of Victoria (UVic) and Taiwanese students' personal experiences in this club. In addition, under this constructivism worldview, individual participant's personal experiences and responses became a major source of the data. Each unique story and its meaning contributed to our understanding of personal experiences of racial/ethnic minority students in the predominantly white campus.

### **Selection of Participants**

In case study research, the selection of participants is often based on snowball sampling, the most common type of purposeful sampling (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is also known as chain sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam (2009), purposeful sampling is effective for researchers who explore and gain the insight of a research target. It is different from probability sampling, the other type of sampling, which randomly collects research samples in order to generalize research results to the population which the samples are chosen from.

In the snowball sampling, researchers start with a few key participants who have related experience or knowledge to their studies or people who know any potential participants. The first few contacts refer to another and it continues to expand the number of participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Considering the fact that sharing personal stories can be not easy to potential participants, and it could be hard to distinguish who is Taiwanese among all members in the Association, two presidents of the Association, who had close bonds with the members and a good knowledge of individual members' personal background, were initially contacted and asked to identify a few Taiwanese members who would be interested in sharing their personal experiences.

The participants of this study were selected based on the following two criteria. The first criterion required that the participants were the members of the Association for at least six months. This was important because this research originated from researcher's interests in the UVic Taiwanese Association and focused on an in-depth understanding of students' individual experiences in that specific organization. The second selection criterion required that the participants were racial/ethnic minority students with Taiwanese heritage. This is

significant as I want to access Taiwanese students' personal experience in the Taiwanese Association where they can have an easier access to students with similar cultural, social, and academic challenges, empower their cultural identity and lead a satisfying student life. The residency status of the potential participants was not significant for this study: the participants could be international students, permanent residents, or Canadian citizens.

International students are defined as “non-Canadian students who do not have ‘permanent resident’ status and have had to obtain the authorization of the Canadian government to enter Canada with the intention of pursuing an education” (Statistics Canada, 2010). However, the three different groups could be under an umbrella term of racial/ethnic minority students. Also, since students' own experiences do not depend on their current legal status, their feelings and experiences while studying in the predominantly white campus are considered a valuable source of data for this study.

Based on the above two inclusion criteria, I invited five Taiwanese students to participate in this study: two participants were current international students, other two immigrated to Canada when they were in high school, and the last participant, a Taiwanese Canadian, lived in Taiwan for about ten years before. Due to a very small number of participants, I shared limited details in this thesis to protect their identity. For the same reason, I also provided the participants with pseudonyms and that was how I referenced them. At the time of the research interviews, two of the participants were in their second year of studies, one participant was in their last term studying at the UVic, one participant had just graduated, and the last one was in their third year of study. All the participants were between twenty to twenty-five years of age. Their membership in the Taiwanese Association varied from six months to five years.

### **Profiles of the Participants**

To keep participants' anonymity, the gender-neutral pseudonyms and pronouns are used throughout this thesis. First, the backgrounds of all five participants are listed below.

*Alex:* Alex graduated from UVic last year. They are Taiwanese Canadian, who immigrated to Canada about ten years ago. Since they had some reliable resources to learn from about Canadian culture, other than communicating in English, they did not have any major challenges living in Canada, even after their initial arrival. At the time of the study, they were part of the Taiwanese Association for three years, and they had assumed some leadership roles meanwhile.

*Blake:* Blake is a second-year UVic student. They also identified themselves as a Taiwanese Canadian. They were born in Canada but they had lived in Taiwan for 10 years in the early stage of their life. One of the reasons why they decided to join the Association was because they wanted to stay connected to Taiwanese culture. They moved to Victoria for their studies and this was the first time they were away from their family. For about two years, starting as a member, they have been an executive member and have taken a leadership role in the Association.

*Jordan:* Jordan is a third-year UVic student. They are international students from Taiwan. As of the date of the interview, they had been with the Association for about six months. They attended only one official event held by the Association, which was their icebreaker event in the beginning of the spring term 2020. Since this event, they socialized and kept in touch with other members of the Association.

*Taylor:* Taylor graduated from UVic in June 2020. They are Taiwanese Canadian, who immigrated to Canada when they were in high school. They joined the Association in the second year and they actively participated in the Association in leadership roles ever since. Although they had been studying in Canada for three to four years, they felt lonely sometimes

and were shy before joining the Association.

*Kyle:* Kyle is a second-year UVic student. They are international students from Taiwan. When the interview was conducted, they had been with the Association for about six months. Since they had spent their entire life in Taiwan before coming to Canada, they struggled in the very beginning of the first year as an Asian student in the predominantly White campus. They had difficulties adjusting to the Canadian culture and lifestyles and had to take an additional English course.

All the five participants of this study described their personal experience in the Taiwanese Association positively. Based on the participants' narratives, joining the Association made them feel at "home" where they felt belonged; they considered other members as their brothers and sisters. Jordan described the Associations as their "comfort zone", where they can be "carefree" as Blake described. Also, to Kyle, the Association is a "second home", which takes the role of a "confidence booster" and a "stepping stone" for them to pursue a better life in Canada. Through the data analysis process of all the five participants' narratives, the following three main themes emerged: connectedness, cultural brokering and an Asian value of 'a senior-junior relationship', and dynamism. These themes will be elaborated on further in this chapter.

### **Data Collection**

Individual interviews were employed as the main data source for this study. Additionally, the Facebook page of the Association was also used as a source of data to grasp the general understanding of the Association operation. Three data collection methods were planned initially – observations, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. This would have guaranteed robust and well-developed analysis and interpretations and ensured the validity of this qualitative research (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Hyett et al., 2014; Merriam 2009). However, with the unexpected impact of the current

COVID-19 pandemic, it was challenging if not impossible to conduct observations and focus group interviews since the UVic campus shut down in the middle of the 2020 spring term, and specific health regulations were implemented across the campus. Additionally, some participants were considering going back to Taiwan due to the pandemic. Therefore, the data for the study was collected through in-depth individual interviews.

First, the Association's Facebook page was referenced to gather basic information regarding the Association and its activities, since it is one of the most active platforms where the Association interacts with UVic students. For this reason, it is a valuable resource to get a general understanding of the Association. On its Facebook page, the Association is categorized as a public group, which means that anyone can post information and see what has been posted on the page. After examining all the posts in the year of 2018 and 2019, I divided posts into different types: posts uploaded by the Association executive members, posts by other organizations, such as the UVic International Students Association and Victoria Taiwanese Film Festival, and posts by individual members of this Facebook page.

Interviewing is an effective method to conduct case studies of a few selected participants since researchers can capture the deep understanding of a particular phenomenon in the individuals' own words, who are directly involved in a particular context by interacting with the individuals (Hancock, & Algozzine, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the individual interviews, study participants could freely share their understanding of and experience with the Association.

Before conducting interviews with the study participants, a pilot interview was performed, and some of the initial interview questions were revised. This helped make the interview questions less confusing and clearer to participants (Merriam, 2009). The actual interviews lasted approximately for forty minutes to an hour and were conducted using Zoom. Before each interview, consent forms, written invitations which included the purpose

of this study, and the description of the interview process were sent to all five participants. These materials can be found in Appendix A and B.

Once each participant replied to my email, they received a Zoom link based on their schedules. At the start of each interview, I asked participants whether their interview could be recorded for the purpose of analyzing data and whether they had reviewed and signed the consent form for participation in this study. In addition, the individual interviews for this study were less structured, and I did not necessarily preselect wording and order (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to create an informal and relaxed environment for the participants to freely share their stories, although there was a sheet of guiding interview questions (see Appendix C).

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the data collected from the interviews I followed the data analysis process suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018). This process consists of several important steps. First, all the raw interview data were transcribed verbatim and saved in a Microsoft Word document with a password. Since the raw data were initially organized by interview questions, the second step of organizing data was skipped. All the raw data were initially read through to start the coding process following Tesch's coding process as a main reference (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Initially, one individual interview from the raw data was selected, and meaningful words or phrases were highlighted, such as “introverted in the beginning”, “a hard-fought battle”, and “a second home”. Then, with the question of “what this is about,” the chosen interview was read again to discover an underlying meaning of each highlighted part. This step was repeated with four other interview data. After that, the interview data were clustered by similar keywords or topics, such as “the sense of belonging”, “feeling connected”, “same topics and interests.” In the clustering process, all five interviews were also separated with

five different colors to understand each participant's experience as a whole with the topics based on the discovered key topics. The three main themes: connectedness, a combination cultural brokering and an Asian value of 'a senior-junior relationship', and dynamism, emerged from the analysis and related key topics were categorized under these main themes.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Since this study involved human participants during individual interviews, ethical considerations were reviewed by the UVic Human Research Ethics Board which granted a Certificate of Approval to carry on this study (see Appendix D). The considered ethical issues included the following: (1) How would participants' anonymity be assured? (2) How would the limits of confidentiality be addressed to participants?

To protect participant's anonymity, audio files and transcriptions were stored digitally and protected by passwords. Since gender is not a variable in data analysis of this study, gender neutral pseudonyms, such as Alex, Blake, Jordan, Taylor, and Kyle and gender neutral pronouns were adopted to refer to each individuals' data

Because the two presidents of the Association helped recruit participants, confidentiality of participants is limited. However, they did not get involved in the final selection. Their involvement was limited to sharing the information of this study with current members of the Association and connecting the researcher to those who showed interest in this study. Once the connection was made, then potential participants were contacted directly through Facebook messenger. With the written consent form and the verbal consent process before asking interview questions, the limits to the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were explained. The participants were also informed that the final selection of participants would be only shared with my thesis supervisor, the principal investigator.

### **Limitations**

This study has a limitation due to a single method of data collection - in-depth individual interviews. Although the data collection triangulation strategy, or using multiple data collection methods, is frequently used in qualitative research to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), this was difficult to achieve due to the current situation caused by the COVID-19 health restrictions.

To address these limitations, other strategies were utilized. After the data collection stage, a brief member checking was involved to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The interview transcripts were shared with the study participants to ensure accuracy. Some information was removed from the transcripts before the data analysis process upon the participants' request. In addition, the detailed profile of each participant was stated in Chapter 4, and the debriefing strategy was used after the initial coding and interpretation. Some themes were deleted or discussed in this chapter depending on whether the participants' interviews fully supported them or not.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in a qualitative research is a parallel concept to reliability and validity in a quantitative research (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). In qualitative research, data collection triangulation, which means using multiple data collection methods, is a common strategy to ensure the trustworthiness of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). However, since only a single method was used due to time limit and unexpected global health crisis in 2020, more focus is put on assuring this study's trustworthiness in the data analysis process. To supplement interviews, the public posts and documents on its Facebook page and my own reflections as a former member of the Association were considered for this study. In addition, I, as a researcher, am aware that my personal experience as an international student from an East Asian country, Korea, studying

in a Canadian university with predominantly white students and faculty, can shape my interpretation on the collected data.

After the original interviews were transcribed, the participants were asked to read the transcripts of the interviews and to ensure that they agreed with all the written data from their interviews. In addition, rich and thick descriptions and debriefing were used to ensure trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Rich and thick descriptions refer to the detailed description of the research target setting including various narratives about each theme (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In Chapter 4, I added the detailed description of the participants including the duration of their stay in their home country, Taiwan, the initial purpose of coming to Canada, and specific situations or activities they participated in since joining the Association. After the initial coding and interpretation, I had several opportunities for debriefing with the principal investigator, my thesis supervisor. During this process, some of the discovered themes were found not to be fully supported by the narratives of the participants, such as subjectivity, so they were deleted or moved to the discussion chapter to be suggested for further study.

### **Chapter 4: Findings**

This chapter presents the major findings in response to the two research questions: (1) How do participants describe their experiences with the Taiwanese Association? (2) How does the Taiwanese Association impact the participants' lives? The chapter is organized into four sections: the first section briefly describes the background of participants. In the next two sections, the first research question is addressed and three main themes of connectedness, cultural brokering and an Asian value of 'a senior-junior relationship' that emerged from the analysis are elucidated. Finally, the last section addresses the second research question and discusses the concept of dynamism as a significant characteristic of a sense of belonging.

#### **Main Themes**

The three major themes that emerged from the data analysis were: connectedness, dynamism, and the combination of cultural brokering and the Asian value of 'a senior-junior relationship.' Each theme embraces several discovered topics. The topics are organically interrelated both within and across the three themes in the formation of each participant's sense of belonging to the Association and possibly their academic and emotional stability.

The first theme - connectedness - includes three topics: commonality, a sense of inclusion and security, and reciprocity. The second theme of cultural brokering and the Asian value of 'a senior-junior relationship' includes shared experience as a minority student in a predominantly white campus, emotional and academic support from senior students, and the Asian value of 'a senior-junior relationship.' The first two themes are already introduced in the review of the literature. The last theme - dynamism - embraces an individual student's attitude to life and emotional status, which can change over time depending on an individual's experience.

**Theme 1: Connectedness**

Connectedness emerged as the foundational concept for an individual to develop their sense of belonging to a group of people. It is because feeling connectedness implies the group of people create an inclusive and safe environment where individuals feel valued, respected, and recognized through active social interactions, and they feel free to keep sharing their time together and their personal backgrounds within the group. Regarding connectedness, here are the three common topics the study participants' responses converged around: commonality, a sense of inclusion and security, and reciprocity. These topics are related as they create a feeling of being recognized, respected, and accepted which allows the participants to experience a sense of connectedness and belonging.

***Commonality***

The first component of connectedness was commonality. To be specific, the participants shared cultural/national commonality with other Taiwanese members, and through repeated reciprocal social interactions, they generated other commonalities with both Taiwanese and non-Taiwanese members, sharing personal interests and challenges. First, the participants felt secure in and connected to the Association based on their identical cultural/national background. For example, Alex described the Association as “an easy way to start a relationship with people”, especially with those who speak the same language and understand what they are talking about, people who share similar interests about Taiwan. In addition, Jordan explained the commonality as they felt they were in “the same vibe or frequency” with other Taiwanese students.

Also, all the study participants shared that the commonality shared with the Taiwanese nationals brought comfort to them. Jordan said that before joining the Association, they were lonely although they made some non-Taiwanese friends through their school years. However, they could not feel “very deeply connected” to their friends due to cultural gaps.

They experienced the challenges of understanding their friends' jokes and humor. They also felt it would take a long time to learn each other's cultures and to fully understand each other without any additional explanation although they were willing to try to get to know their friends better.

Second, this study's participants discovered a variety of commonalities with other members of the Association through the consistent participation in its various events throughout their school years. For example, Alex, a former executive member of the Association, shared that the Taiwanese Association created regular monthly events with the expectation that its members could consistently socialize with each other, share common interests, and become friends. With this expectation, the events themes were a mix of something general, such as camping and ski trips, sport cup events, or Halloween days and others related to Taiwanese culture, such as a Bubble tea making event. Such events were organized to let participants feel free to have fun and get to know more people personally.

For example, Blake said "[In the camping trip, the seniors in the Association] were just giving chances for us to learn about each other but [not in an awkward way], playing small games by the campfire or something." Blake added that such events or simple meet-ups in between were great breaks from all the school work. They said, "Since everyone is in [the same school], we kind of have the same schedule. As soon as finals are done or something, we'll all celebrate together and it's kind of just bringing everyone together." Through the personal experience, Blake felt when people share the same interests with each other the bonds stay strong and last longer. In addition, Kyle said that they were "really thankful" to be invited to one of the Association's annual events, a camping trip. Since it was soon after Kyle started their first term at UVic, the trip was very helpful for them to get to know other UVic students for the first time.

*A Sense of Inclusion and Security*

Sharing the same cultural/national background is not the only source of connectedness for the participants, but rather its initial source. Having the same cultural/national background would not be enough for people to feel connected to each other. However, it allowed them to feel free to be who they are without any major cultural gaps or even judgements. In regards, as the second source of connectedness, a sense of inclusion and security emerged from the participants' interviews. To answer the question about why having the same vibe or frequency is important, Jordan answered that it is because the same vibe or frequency defines their "comfort zone." The "comfort zone" in turn represents a sense of security. Jordan explained it as below:

...when I talk to them [other members in the Association)], I don't really need to be careful [about] what I'm saying...sometimes when I talk to some friends from China, I really need to pay attention to what I'm saying, like the word I'm using. I need to say the terms that they know and I cannot say something that can be offensive to them.

Although some people believe that Taiwanese and Chinese are still from the same culture or country, the participants felt excluded or uncomfortable while socializing with some Chinese students. Jordan said that they really had to pay attention not to say the words or expressions which could be offensive to the Chinese students. They did not share much details but their comment can imply the political disagreement between the two countries about Taiwan's status. In the same line with Jordan's experience, Taylor also said, "The more I knew them [Chinese], the more I felt we had so much difference in our culture."

For example, Taylor found that due to the Chinese government's censorship some news that the Chinese students read was quite different from what they read in Taiwanese press. Even some Chinese students did not understand that Taylor was from a different

culture, even a different country in Taylor's perspective. On top of that, some Chinese students made Taylor become disconnected because these students wanted to convince Taylor to agree with their political point of view related to the two countries' ongoing tensions. Jordan and Taylor had similar experiences which can be connected to another comment of the three participants', Jordan, Taylor, and Blake. They said that they could be carefree and felt secure communicating with people who understand them and will not judge them for what they do. It is because they could be honest with their own thoughts and cultural identity and they would not need to deal with the political tension between Taiwan and China in their daily lives.

Blake also shared that the Association is "like a family" because they feel everyone really cares about each other, and people in the association do not want to leave anyone out. Therefore, even if people are away from home, they can still have that family away from home. On the annual club day, when all the campus clubs can introduce themselves to new students, Blake also felt the inclusive vibe as below:

...I was at the Club Fair one day and then I was just going through all the clubs and seeing what I'm interested in and then but all the other clubs...the representatives doesn't seem that interested and they're kind of just sitting there...When I pass by [the Association booth] and they were really welcoming and then they're like, asking me a lot of questions and telling me I should really come to their Icebreaker and then I'll make a lot of friends and then if I'm too shy or too afraid to talk to people they can help me out as well.

### ***Reciprocity***

The third component of feeling connected to the Association is reciprocity. The connectedness the participants experienced in the Association was not only because the participants felt accepted and secure among other Taiwanese students, but also because they

could make friends who had similar interests and interests during regular events hosted by the Association. To be specific, the participants felt that their relationships were reciprocal and they found opportunities to find friends with similar interests regularly through the events hosted by the Association.

In addition, Blake explained that the Association engaged in planning events relatively regularly with general themes, such as a camping, a Halloween party, a ski trip, or a year-end party, which can be “a break from school” and which can bring any UVic students together consistently. Blake also shared their camping trip experience:

... [The Association] were just giving chances [for us] to learn about each other but not in a so awkward way, playing small games by the campfire or something...I feel all the staff wanted everyone to fit in and then kind of find their own group of friends who has the same interests or share the same experience or culture with you so you can actually have people to talk to and friends to hang out with when you need it. Yeah, and I did meet a lot of my friends from there as well.

In addition to regular events with generally interesting themes for university students, the value of reciprocity is well shown in the participants' narratives. For instance, Alex shared their personal experience building personal relationships on campus and creating events as a part of the leadership of the Association:

Well, I don't know if you have this experience when you participate in one event and then the other day or a month later, you don't talk to any person at all anymore because you [didn't] have any connection with them. Or you [didn't] share any common values with them...

Based on this experience, Alex explained that they put the priority on creating chances for event participants to “connect” more and “understand” each other throughout an event. They believed that such “meaningful” events enabled the same event participants to

continue joining their events and build long-term relationships with other participants as Blake made many of their friends through their events. In the same vein, Alex also said that sharing cultures and common values with others are important for them.

To sum up, connectedness featured as the first component which enabled the participants of this study to consider the Association their “second home”, “family”, and “the best experience” in their school. Through the commonality they shared with other Taiwanese students, inclusive and open atmosphere of the Association, and consistent reciprocal interactions with their peers, the participants of this study felt recognized, accepted, and respected for who they were, they were able to share their deep feelings, and experienced family-like relationships within the Association.

### **Theme 2: Cultural Brokering and an Asian Value of ‘a Senior-Junior Relationship’**

The second important feature that made the study participants describe their experience in the Association in a positive way was the presence of “senior students” or as they are called in the literature “cultural brokers” in the Association. Kyle mentioned that academically and culturally experienced students – senior students - helped them to get through any challenges they encountered; they described these students as “a stepping stone” to their adjustment and better understanding of the host cultures. Additionally, Kyle and Blake said that the experienced students gave them practical advice for their specific courses and encouraged them to keep trying in certain situations, especially in the case of Kyle, when they hesitated to ask for help from academic advisors or school staff due to the lack of confidence and psychological bonds. Blake also shared:

[The Taiwanese Association] has made Victoria not just a city that I study in and but actually [the] city that I would explore and enjoy my time in ...without [the Association], I don't think I would have gone to so many places on the Vancouver Island and probably wouldn't have explore Victoria that much. Seniors really [liked]

bringing me around town when I was new. Yeah, they really [liked] to show things around for me and introduced me to coffee shops, to places to study.

The concept of a cultural broker combined with the Asian value of ‘a senior-junior relationship’ and the synergy of the two concepts created the inclusive and supportive internal culture of the Association and positively affected the study participants’ experience. A senior-junior relationship in Asian countries is similar to other mentoring or peer relationships but it also has some distinctive characteristics. Confucianism and collectivism are the base of ‘a senior- junior relationship’ in most Asian nations, especially the so-called five Asian dragons, China, Korean, Japan, Taiwan, and Singapore (Chen & Chung, 1994; Chen & Chung, 2002; Hofstede & Bond, 1988). In collectivist and Confucian perspectives, people tend to focus on interpersonal relationships in groups, to prioritize group harmony, and to distinguish in-group and out-outgroup members (Chen & Chung, 1994; Qie et al., 2019; Yum, 1988).

One of the key elements in Confucianism is ‘Jen’, which means the warm caring relations among people and reciprocity, which is long-term, unequal, and hierarchical (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Yum, 1988). In this context, in organizations, seniors feel strong responsibilities to support juniors so that the latter can understand their group cultures and to be role models as their seniors did for them. Juniors, in turn, respect their seniors and follow their guidelines (Chen & Chung, 1994; Qie et al., 2019). Although there may be a drawback related to a senior’s power or authority stemming from a hierarchical position (Chen & Starosta, 1997-1998), healthy senior-junior relationships can be lifelong based on emotional bonds and commitment between two people and people’s tendency of avoiding uncertainty or unfamiliarity in social interactions (Lawler & Yoon, 1996).

The concept of a senior emerged from the words the participants used during their interviews, such as “responsibility”, “a senior”, and “have to”, a modal verb of expressing

necessity. In my interpretation, seniors in the Association are the safe bridges between participants of this study and their school, city, and host country. Also they are trustworthy resources for emotional and academic support for the participants.

To be specific, Taylor shared that when they were invited to become a part of Association staff, they felt a great responsibility for contributing to the Association. Taylor also stated that they were pleased to use their time for the good work in the Association's leadership role. In addition, Blake and Alex showed a sense of duty and responsibility to the community and considered their position a necessary one for running the Association successfully. After their experience in a leadership role, Blake thought that every event ran smoothly as all the people in the leadership roles got their work done. Alex felt the responsibility to "bring the Taiwanese Association into a next level" meant developing it as a well-known student club on campus, not just a racial/ethnic student club only for Taiwanese students.

In conclusion, the participants of the study described their experience in the Association as very meaningful especially with the presence of many experienced students. They felt that experienced students-seniors-who studied in the same department or faculty acted as cultural brokers in the Association. They possessed Taiwanese heritage and rich cultural knowledge of Canada and supported the participants who faced various challenges such as cultural, emotional, and academic as a first-year, international student, or minority student. With the support from these senior students, the participants of this study were themselves able to support Association's new members, thus continuing this positive cycle of care and support.

### **Theme 3: Dynamism**

Dynamism is another distinguishing characteristic of a sense of belonging as defined in Chapter 2. It shows an individual's sense of belonging is formed with the dynamics among

positive and negative factors around their lives. The theme of dynamism emerged in the study participants' stories and it will be closely related to the second research question, (2) How does this Association impact the participants' lives?

Describing the time before joining the Association, Jordan, and Taylor, who came to Canada for their study, said that they were "lonely" and "shy." Kyle described his experience in a more negative tone stating that they were "super lost and pessimistic" and "miserable." In my interpretation, those feelings include their experience of being away from their trustworthy social resources that the participants enjoyed back in Taiwan and generally dealing with cultural shock living in a predominantly White campus as an Asian student. This was compounded by the lack of cultural recognition of their home country on campus.

While the extent of the feeling of loneliness and isolation varied among the three participants, it can be described as "being in quarantine." The only difference was its duration: while a quarantine can last for a certain period of time, for the study participants this lasted much longer until they were able to find new trustworthy friends and family-like people on and outside university campus. For instance, Kyle and Taylor described themselves before joining the Association as being "shy" and "introverted." However, in such challenging circumstances, as Kyle said, they faced the lack of confidence and they might end up being more hesitant and less active.

Besides feeling lonely and isolated, some participants shared that for the first time, they recognized what it meant to be a visible minority and to experience discrimination, ignorance and microaggression. During the interview, Taylor explicitly mentioned that since Taiwanese were a "minority" group, they felt the responsibility to promote the Association to other members of the UVic community. They added that otherwise, the Association would disappear eventually. Alex also was clearly aware that they were a small group at UVic and understood that if nobody was responsible for running the Association, it would not exist

anymore. In other words, they had a shared understanding that the recognition of their home culture was insufficient, and that campus cultures were not truly diverse, there was a clear but embedded binary between minority and majority cultures on campus.

During the interview, Kyle shared several examples of microaggression a minority individual can encounter. They described their experience of living with three other roommates as unfortunate. Although they lived together sharing common spaces, the roommates were “grumpy” and “anti-social.” That was a part of Kyle’s culture shock which broke their stereotype of “all Canadians are nice.” Kyle felt very homesick and needed emotional support and socialization with people.

However, the participants’ positive and meaningful experience in the Association was cited as a significant positive factor in building their sense of belonging to the Association. Their participation counteracted the effect of the two negative factors - the self-recognition as a minority and the experience of mistreatment by a majority. The participants’ sense of belonging to the Association was also a resource for the positive changes in some of the participants’ campus lives. To be specific, participants’ lives were positively affected due to the commonality they shared with other Taiwanese students, both emotional and academic support from other members in the Association, and the consistent opportunity to build reciprocal relationships through fun events, and being part of the Association.

For instance, Jordan and Taylor said that they used to just kill their time at home although they were aware that it would not be that productive. Now, during exam periods, Jordan would drop by one of the campus buildings where their friends from the Association often studied and join them. Taylor said that it felt good to help run the Association with other fellow members. Kyle described the beginning of their new life in Canada as “a hard-fought battle.” Initially, it was so challenging in various respects that they wanted to go back to Taiwan. However, once they felt connected to others and experienced a sense of belonging

in the Association in a family-like atmosphere, they took action to overcome the challenges they had faced. Kyle added that the Association encouraged them enough to get back to be themselves and actively socialize with all the students. They said that the Association was “a confidence booster” and “a stepping stone” to settle down in school socially and academically.

Also, Blake affirmed that Victoria could have been just a city where they studied had it not been for the participation in the Association and the experience with its senior members that brought a personal meaning to the city. Also, taking a leadership role and leading a sub team in the Association helped them come out of their comfort zone and gain certain confidence in themselves. According to Blake, joining the Association was “the best thing” that happened in their student life.

To sum up, the details of two themes, connectedness and the combination of cultural brokering and an Asian value of ‘a senior-junior relationship’ explain how their participation in the Association helped them build connections and contributed to their sense of belonging. The three components of connectedness, commonality, a sense of inclusion and security, and reciprocity were correlated and affected by each other. As a result, the participants felt connected to the Association. In addition, the combination of cultural brokering and an Asian value of ‘a senior-junior relationship’ offered genuine support to the participants and helped them recognize their cultural identity and personal challenges as students. Connectedness and the combination of cultural brokering and an Asian value of ‘a senior-junior relationship’ were the two major positive aspects of the participants’ student experience at the university. These aspects enabled the study participants to eventually enjoy an overall positive student experience at UVic despite the negative factors such as the initial sense of loneliness from being away from home, self-recognition as a minority from the incidents related to cultural ignorance, cultural invalidation, and personal insensitivity towards minority cultures.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions**

This case study explored the personal experiences of five Taiwanese students participating in the UVic Taiwanese Association. The purpose of the study was to explore how the five participants describe their personal experience in the Association and whether their involvement in the Association affected their overall student experience at UVic. In this chapter, the main findings of the study will be discussed in light of the current literature. Specific recommendations for universities and those in leadership roles on how to support minority students and promote cultural diversity and awareness of minority students' cultural identity on campus will be suggested.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

Research on various issues related to minority students' challenges, such as social, cultural, and academic, has been consistently conducted. Many studies have focused on the close relationship between individual students' sense of belonging and positive personal psychological factors. According to the literature, an individual's building a sense of belonging to a certain group of people is subject to their personal experience and feelings within a series of specific contexts in the group (Mahar et al, 2012; Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008; Strayhorn, 2018; Zumbrunn et al, 2014).

To be specific, previous studies have demonstrated that the sense of belonging is the key part of minority students' success on campus (Baker 2008; Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Bronfenbrenner, 2009; Cureton & Gravestock, 2010; Guiffrida 2003; Hausmann et al., 2009; Nora et al., 2005; Rivas et al., 2019). In this study, the five participants identified as Taiwanese, but four of them came to Victoria, Canada for the first time to attend an educational institution, either high school or university. Initially it was psychologically challenging for them to be away from home and all the things they were used to in their home country. Joining the Association was a significant turning point for the participants which

helped them to pursue a more meaningful student life and to become emotionally settled. Based on the previous research and findings, the following discussion shows how important it was to the participants to join the Association and how the Association affected their student lives.

In response to *Research Question 1. How do participants describe their experiences with the Taiwanese Association?*, the majority of this study's participants described their experiences with the Association as positive and meaningful. Their participation in the Association resulted in developing close relationships with other students and contributed to participants' sense of belonging and their overall positive campus experience. These findings echo previous studies about the close relations between minority students' sense of belonging and their social/ academic success in their new educational setting (Cureton & Gravestock, 2010; Hausmann et al., 2009; Nora et al., 2005; Rivas et al., 2019). Connectedness, one of the most significant aspects of a sense of belonging, was often referred to by the study participants as they described their experience in the Taiwanese Association. Being part of the Association provided participants with a sense of inclusion and security and shared commonality; and allowed them to maintain reciprocal interactions with their fellow students, which contributed to their feeling of connectedness.

First, the participants of this study felt comfortable and connected to the Association due to existing cultural commonality they shared with other Taiwanese student-members. This is consistent with the literature about the relationship between the level of comfort an individual could feel and their sense of connectedness (Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008; Mahar et al., 2012; Zumbrunn et al., 2014). For example, Jordan described the Association as their "comfort zone" and "like home." They added that they felt connected, welcomed and comfortable while engaging with other Taiwanese students. They could finally feel deeply connected to people while still being away from their home. Alex described joining the

Association as an easy way to socialize with other students since they spoke the same mother tongue, shared the same culture, and instantly understood what they talked about without additional cultural explanations.

In addition, as other previous studies about racial/ethnic student organizations on campus have explained (Acevedo, 2019; Delgado-Romero & Hernandez, 2002; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Inkelas, 2004; Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus, 2018; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995; White, 1998), sharing cultural backgrounds and identity with other Asians, specifically with Taiwanese in the Association, and understanding each other's experiences and difficulties let the participants of this study feel good about their cultural identity and their home culture. Moreover, this experience empowered them culturally and eased the pressure associated with adjustment to the dominant Canadian culture. The cultural commonality and the awareness of Taiwanese culture were especially significant for the participants since their national and cultural identity as Taiwanese collided with the current political status of Taiwan as a result of historical conflicts between Taiwan and China.

Taiwan has had a dynamic history, starting with the cultures of the indigenous people on the islands. Since 1626, Taiwan had been occupied by the Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch, and Japanese. Then, the history was influenced by the military and economic aid from U.S. after World War II, the retreat of the Republic of China government to Taiwan after the Chinese civil war, and its consequential oppression of the non-Chinese by the government (Dreyer, Gold, & Rigger, 2003; Government of the Republic of China (Taiwan), n.d.; Maizland, 2021). Due to these complexities, people's identity in Taiwan is affected by many aspects including provincial origin, nationality, citizenship, and whether one considers

Taiwan an independent country or advocates for the unification with China (Cabestan, 2017; Dreyer et al., 2003).

During the last two decades, the Taiwanese culture and identity have been considered predominant in Taiwan. At the same time, many Taiwanese acknowledge that they can just have multiple identities without provoking any further social or political conflicts (Cabestan, 2017). After the Chinese civil war, China faced major changes under the influence of the communist government (Dreyer et al., 2003). In contrast, Taiwan pursued its democratization in the late 1980s. However, the government of China, officially also known as People's Republic of China, considers Taiwan as a part of its territory based on their One China principle (Maizland, 2021).

Due to such historical or political background, it could be considered that the feeling of comfort and the validation of their cultural identity as Taiwanese brings a sense of inclusion and security to the participants, which was related to a genuine feeling of connectedness as demonstrated in the previous studies (Mahar et al., 2012; Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008; Strayhorn, 2018; Zumbrunn et al., 2014). Also, it matters to this study's participants as they initially did not feel included or welcomed on campus, often experiencing cultural ignorance, invalidation, and insensitivity, which made them aware they were minority at UVic. This will be discussed further with the second research question below. For example, Blake, Jordan, and Taylor said that they could be just themselves around other members of the Association, without worrying about being judged for their actions or thoughts in such an inclusive and safe circumstance, which felt as if they were with their family.

However, the commonality the participants shared in the Association was not limited to only being Taiwanese, but it was expanded to other personal factors, such as being UVic students, studying in specific majors, or being interested in Taiwanese cultures. It originated

from the participants' general understanding that the Association was a valuable place where they could socialize with other UVic students. Reciprocal and regular interactions with other student-members in the Association were another primary source of the participants' connectedness since it kept providing them with the opportunity to share their interests and values with other members, both Taiwanese and non-Taiwanese, and to create their new social network at UVic or in Canada for some participants.

As previous studies have shown (e.g., Mahar et al., 2012; Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008; Zumbrunn et al., 2014), reciprocal interactions with others and the opportunities to share feelings, experiences, and personal interests with other members of the Association were essential for the participants who felt appreciated and connected. Also, as Strayhorn (2018) stated, frequent participation in any campus activities which includes such reciprocal interactions can help students to develop their sense of belonging in the university setting. For instance, the Association focused on hosting regular events with specific themes appealing to all UVic students to encourage their members to find others who have similar common interests and to have meaningful interactions, leading to long-term trustworthy friendships.

For example, Alex, a former executive member of the Association, shared that the Taiwanese Association created regular monthly events with the expectation that its members could socialize with each other, share common interests, and become friends. The chosen event themes varied from the Lunar New Year's Day event to Halloween and year-end parties. In addition, Blake reiterated that the members of the Association tried hard to allow all the event participants to learn about each other and find their groups of friends in a comfortable and inclusive environment, which included playing various games and enjoying a campfire. Blake added that they had met many of their good friends through these events.

Reciprocal interactions based on commonality that can be shared with other members are meaningful because students can be active in creating their own social networks and feel equal when socializing with members of the Association. Previous studies indicated the positive relationship between reciprocal interactions and long-lasting relationships among students (Leask, 2009). Due to the prevailing view that minority students need to adjust to their host culture, their relationships with students from the majority culture can be one-sided and temporary since minority students can be considered as culturally deficient (Leask, 2009). Therefore, reciprocal interactions are important for long-term meaningful relationships because students need to feel valued and equal in their interactions with others.

In responding to *Research Question 2. How does the Association impact the participants' lives?*, the findings of this study showed the positive impact of the Association on the lives of this study's participants who often referred to the sense of belonging they felt while participating in the Association. Previous studies have explained that a sense of belonging emerges through the dynamic interactions of positive and negative factors in individuals' lives (Cureton & Gravestock, 2019; Mahar et al., 2012), so such dynamism shows unstable and changeable aspects of a sense of belonging.

For example, before joining the Association, this study's participants felt either lonely or isolated, being away from friends and family, and as outsiders and as a minority or an international student. Researchers describe how cultural ignorance, invalidation, individual insensitivity and both intentional and unintentional racism and microaggressions can negatively affect minority people experience in their daily lives (Canel-Çınarbaşı & Yohani, 2019; Houshmand et al., 2014; Kim & Kim, 2010; Lewis et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007). In university settings, the word, minority, refers to different groups of students including international students and minority students who are citizens of host countries.

With the impact of the negative circumstances, this study participants experienced temporary change of personal characteristics such as shyness and introversion. For example, three participants - Jordan, Taylor, and Kyle - described that they had been shy and introverted in the early stages of their student life. Kyle had been unconfident and pessimistic about their ability in their academic work and hesitated to ask for some help from academic professionals on campus. The negative circumstances had affected their psychological status and academic work. The majority of the literature has focused on the external challenges and its impact on students' academic work and general mental health. Adding to the literature, further research specifically on the negative circumstances minority students are in and its impact on their personality would be interesting to be conducted.

Although this study's participants did not share any instances of discrimination or racism during their interviews, they were aware of their minority status at UVic based on their personal experiences related to cultural ignorance, invalidation, and insensitivity. Many researchers have demonstrated that self-recognition as a visible minority is one of the negative factors which discourages individuals from developing a sense of belonging to a certain group (De Araujo, 2011; Mahar et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2019). Since such individual's identification as a minority is based on students' personal experience, it raises significant questions - if our campuses are truly culturally diverse and whether the majority of campus community is aware of various existing home cultures on campus, ready to consider them as important as its dominant home culture, and willing to learn about different cultures.

In the interviews, this study's participants shared that they strongly felt the need for promoting the Association to other students on campus and making it one of the most active organizations on campus. In that way, more people would learn about Taiwan and Taiwanese students on campus. This idea originated from the participants' personal experiences related

to the lack of cultural interests or respect towards Asian countries, and specifically Taiwanese culture.

For Jordan and Taylor, it was not surprising anymore to find out that people think that China and Taiwan are the same. Although they did not agree with the common misunderstanding, they often put their political tensions aside. Taylor mentioned that some Chinese students kept talking about political tensions between China and Taiwan, although Taylor just wanted to socialize with them and become friends. Jordan and Taylor always felt that they should be careful talking with Chinese students in order not to offend them. These experiences had a negative effect on the participants, leading them to leave their previous social groups where they had the negative experience and to start looking for a better group that they could feel connected to, such as the Taiwanese Association.

Overall, the study's participants agreed that joining the Association was a significant positive factor in their lives. After joining the Association, the participants finally felt appreciated, connected, and settled, which helped them to gain their confidence, come out of their comfort zone, focus on their studies, and take the initiative to socialize with other students on campus. On top of the findings regarding a sense of belonging, especially connectedness, such psychological changes in this study participants' lives were closely related to support and recognition they experienced in the Association. The participants themselves enabled the Association to maintain an inclusive and supportive environment. This is consistent with the previous studies describing positive effects of other people's support and recognition in the same group or organization on building a sense of belonging among group members (Cooper, 2009; Museus, 2008; Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008; Sedgwick et al, 2014).

As stated earlier, more experienced members in the Association were a great source of social, psychological, and academic support for the participants of the study. Since the

majority of the experienced members were Taiwanese, they recognized the participants' cultural identity as Taiwanese and could relate to the challenges the participants faced as international or first-year students because the experienced members had grappled with similar challenges as well. This finding of the study can add to the literature on the minority students' cultural empowerment. Through their willingness to support new members, the more experienced members of the Association manifested a unique Asian value of a senior-junior relationship which they had learned from their home culture. The common value in the Association allowed the culture of supporting new members to be passed on to those who joined the Association later.

To be specific, this study participants' meaningful interactions with the experienced members, who according to the Asian values embodied a senior-junior relationship, helped the participants to build a cognitive bridge between their host (Canadian) and home culture (Taiwanese) and to deal with various challenges more effectively. For instance, Blake shared that they joined other senior members exploring Victoria and the entire Vancouver Island or studying together outside campus. They said that those interactions made the city so meaningful and special to them. In addition, Kyle and Blake spoke about the experienced members' practical academic advice regarding certain courses. The experienced members of the Association had a better understanding of the different academic cultures (i.e., Taiwanese and Canadian), recognized specific academic challenges faced by the study participants and were able to offer help to the participants before they felt comfortable or confident enough to reach out to academic professionals.

In addition, the participants who were in the senior position showed willingness and responsibility to contribute to creating supportive and inclusive environment for the junior members in the Association as their seniors had done for them. Alex and Taylor described the responsibility they had carried out as senior members and how they had supported other

members who were first-year or international students by welcoming them and helping them to be successful in their academic work. Based on their personal experience as a first-year or an international student, they clearly acknowledged that minority students' academic and social life could be very challenging, and they would need some trustworthy people to understand them and help them to get through. As juniors, Blake and Kyle shared how helpful and supportive their seniors had been in helping them to deal with their academic challenges and giving them an opportunity to enjoy the best moments of their time at UVic and on Vancouver Island.

In conclusion, the Association had a significant impact on all five Taiwanese participants. It offered them a sense of connectedness, provided support and recognition from senior members of the Association. In turn, this created a sense of belonging and loyalty towards the Association. To be specific, the Association provided shared commonality, including the shared Taiwanese cultural commonality, a sense of inclusion and security, opportunities for reciprocal interactions through regularly hosted events, recognition and social, cultural, and academic support from the Association's senior members. Essentially, student participation in the Association empowered the participants to overcome their social, cultural, and academic challenges as minority, international and/or first year students. The combination of these positive opportunities offered by the Association enabled the study participants to validate their own feelings and identity and take initiative to improve their student lives.

In the Association, the participants did not feel as a minority. Instead, the Association offered a comfortable and natural atmosphere for engaging in fun activities or interacting with others. Such a positive atmosphere ensured that each participant could feel free to be who they were, share their thoughts, interests, or feelings, build up their new long-term friendships or social networks, and successfully deal with their academic challenges (Baker

2008; Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Bronfenbrenner, 2009; Cureton & Gravestock, 2010; Guiffrida 2003; Hausmann et al., 2009; Nora et al., 2005; Rivas et al., 2019).

Overall, the findings of this study support the previous findings discussed in the existing literature regarding the close relationship between minority students' sense of belonging and their successful student lives. The findings also confirm that campus racial/ethnic organizations have an important role in creating a positive campus environment for minority students. Among the characteristics of a sense of belonging, a sense of connectedness was often discussed by this study's participants who spoke about a sense of inclusion and security, shared commonality, and consistent reciprocal interactions they found in the Association.

In addition, the findings showed another characteristic of a sense of belonging - dynamism – related to the participants' psychological transition, as discussed in the literature. General cultural ignorance and invalidation, and individual insensitivity towards Taiwanese culture were the major negative factors that the participants described, which did not create a sense of belonging on campus and caused the participants to self-recognize as visible minorities on a predominantly White campus. On the other hand, joining the Association was a positive factor that encouraged the participants to feel a sense of belonging on campus. On top of the positive findings regarding the sense of connectedness, the support and recognition from the experienced members of the Association, who acted as cultural brokers and seniors following the unique Asian value, were key positive factors that contributed to the participants' student lives.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The participants of this study eventually had a smooth transition to either a Canadian educational and cultural setting or a higher educational setting. Joining the Taiwanese Association played an important role in such a smooth transition. This could not be simply

explained by the positive relationship between the transition and participants' personal experience in the Association in terms of a common assumption that this happened because the participants were Taiwanese and the Association catered to the Taiwanese only. Rather, the series of positive experiences and feelings the participants expressed while in the Association contributed to the smooth transition, which connoted a sense of belonging the participants built, specifically a sense of connectedness, and the genuine support and recognition from more experienced members in the Association. Sharing the common cultural identity and values as Taiwanese and continuously having reciprocal interactions based on shared personal interests and background contributed to their sense of connectedness.

The pressure associated with the adaptation to the dominant Canadian culture was eased because shared cultural identity empowered the participants. Their cultural commonality and other students' awareness of unique Taiwanese culture were especially meaningful for the participants since their cultural identity as Taiwanese collided with the current political status of Taiwan in regard to historical conflicts between Taiwan and China. In addition, repeated reciprocal interactions and various events and activities helped the participants to be active in socializing and in creating their personal networks, which were trustworthy and not temporary.

Despite some negative experiences related to their minority status such as cultural ignorance, invalidation, and insensitivity towards Taiwan and Taiwanese culture, the Association was central to the study's participants who managed to find their community and ultimately experience a sense of belonging on campus. It is through the support and recognition from more experienced members of the Association, the participants successfully addressed social, psychological, and academic challenges.

The willingness was partially affected by the Asian value of a good senior-junior relationship and this study's participants wanted to contribute to the Association as seniors, similar to how their seniors did for them. The experienced members, mostly Taiwanese, recognized and shared a lot with the participants regarding the identical cultural identity as Taiwanese on a daily basis. Based on their own previous experience, the experienced members also fully resonated with the participants' ongoing challenges as international or first-year students and their support was practical and genuine. With the full support and recognition from the experienced members, the participants took their time to learn about a new cultural and academic circumstance and take an initiative to deal with their own challenge. The overall support and recognition of the experienced members contributed to create a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all members and event participants in the Association.

Because the vast majority of previous studies about minority students in the post-secondary level were conducted in U.S. settings, further research on minority students' cultural identity, experiences and advocacy is needed in Canadian university settings. Studies that involve minority students from various racial/ethnic groups would expand our knowledge on students' experience and help us better understand the challenges faced by students from different national and cultural backgrounds. This research data on experiences of students from various national and cultural backgrounds in Canadian settings will provide Canadian universities, such as UVic, with insights on specific challenges minority student populations face and how to address these challenges and enhance student experience.

### **Recommendations for Universities**

Previous research has focused on the significance of minority students' cultural identity (Acevedo, 2019; Delgado-Romero & Hernandez, 2002; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Inkelas, 2004; Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus, 2018; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995;

White, 1998). Keeping cultural identity allows minority students to improve their experience in universities. However, the literature has continuously mentioned minority students' self-perception as a minority and its negative influence on their academic and social achievements, which is also related to what this study's participants shared in their interviews. In the related literature, Gonzales (2003) warned that cultural starvation experienced by minority students who could not advocate for their cultural heritage is as problematic as physical starvation. For this reason, it will be essential for campus community members, who interact with students and initially support them, to recognize and validate minority students' first cultural identity. It would be the first step in creating a diverse and inclusive campus culture, which everyone on campus could appreciate and experience.

The analysis of this study's participant interviews and various previous studies (Bowman et al., 2015; Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus, 2008) demonstrated the positive impact of racial/ethnic organizations on campus. Such organizations could take the role of cultural brokers, introducing their home cultures and contributing to cross-cultural interactions on campus, despite the general stereotype towards racial/ethnic organizations that they could aggravate cultural gaps or separations among various communities on campus. These organizations are full of cultural brokers, who have a deep understanding of both their home culture and host culture. Their insights will be valuable and genuine since they built up their understanding through their personal experience. They are the great human resource for schools in creating a culturally diverse campus, which students can enjoy in their daily life. In designing student support programs for all students from the perspective of cultural diversity, cooperative work with such organizations will be necessary and beneficial.

Universities need to be more involved in introducing and promoting all different student organizations, including racial/ethnic student organizations on campus. As the literature stated (Mahar et al., 2012), a sense of belonging can be generated to multiple

groups at the same time on one condition that individuals feel supported and included in continuous reciprocal interactions in each group. The more students know about different organizations, the more chances they have to develop their sense of belonging to their institution.

University websites or social media can be great permanent platforms to inform students, especially first-year or international students about various organizations available for them on campus. In the case of UVic, although they host a club fair every year, it has the limitation of time and physical location. On the UVic webpage of Diversity and Equity Resources, different student organizations are introduced but some information about them is outdated or limited. For instance, for the Taiwanese Association, instead of only sharing the email link, the University can provide the link of its Facebook page and the short description of each organization. In addition, unfortunately, the Korean Students Association does not exist anymore, but its email link still remains on the university website. The university can reactivate the webpage introducing student organizations on campus and promote them using social media platforms and physical posters on campus. It will be meaningful to share these recommendations with the University of Victoria Students' Society which represents the entire group of undergraduate students and supports their student lives.

### **Recommendations for Other Asian Minority Students at UVic**

This case study provides other minority students at UVic, especially Asian international students with a meaningful insight about how psychological or emotional support can be the foundation to the success in student life. To be specific, a sense of belonging developed to any campus groups or communities would help minority students feel settled, secure, and included as they normally feel in their home cultures or countries. It is therefore important for students to get involved in campus activities. Based on the experience of this study's participants, interestingly, active involvement and ongoing connection to their

home culture through racial/ethnic student groups can be an important part of building a sense of belonging and experiencing psychological comfort in a culturally new environment where students often struggle to find some instant commonality with others. This is essential because the active involvement and connection to others include recognition and respect towards their home culture and its values.

The pressure to quickly adapt the new cultural values and customs and fit into the new dominant culture can bring a combination of negative feelings, such as loneliness and depression, to minority students. As the participant of this study, Jordan shared, it takes time to get used to new cultural values and customs and feel comfortable in the new environment. Also, connection to a new culture does not mean disconnection from one's own home culture. As the literature demonstrated (Maher et al., 2012), individuals are able to build a sense of belonging to multiple groups on campus, so it is possible to keep a balance between adapting to a new environment and keeping connected to one's home environment. The most important thing to consider is whether the groups can facilitate positive feelings, such as a feeling of comfort, inclusion, and security to develop their own sense of belonging on campus among minority students.

In addition, since building a sense of belonging is a personal, contextual, and unique process (Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008; Strayhorn, 2018), it is important for the minority students to understand that they do not need to force themselves to fit in some groups where they cannot feel comfortable and welcomed. All minority students' experience and feelings should be valid in any context and it could happen that the groups where every other student builds their sense of belonging could not be the right place for the minority students to feel comfortable, secured, and connected.

In conclusion, other minority students, especially Asians, on university campuses may want to find one or more campus groups where they build a sense of belonging. This

process could be as significant to their academic success since their psychological wellbeing is based on their sense of belonging and is related to students' academic success and enjoyment as was observed by this study's participants. Although it is common for minority students, especially international students to feel pressure to quickly fit into a new environment, it does not necessarily mean that they should discard their home culture. Rather, solid ongoing connection to their home culture could bring a combination of positive feelings, such as a feeling of comfort and connectedness which can be a foundation of successful student life. As these recommendations will be beneficial to other Asian students on campus, it will be great if I can share them with the leadership of the Taiwanese Association.

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## Appendix A: Participant Consent Form



University  
of Victoria

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

#### Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “The Case Study of Taiwanese Association: The Pursuit of Cultural Empowerment and Diverse Campus Cultures.” The study is conducted by Leadership Studies MA student – Minjeong Sung, supervised by Dr. Tatiana Gounko (EPLS). We ask you to participate in Skype-mediated interviews about your personal experience in the Taiwanese Association.

#### Purpose of the Proposed Research

The purpose of this study is to explore experiences of racial/ethnic minority students who participate in the activities of the Taiwanese Association on the University of Victoria campus. The results of this study can add to the scholarly literature on minority students’ experiences on Canadian campuses, assist and encourage universities to focus more on minority students’ real-life experiences and the quality of their lives, and to promote sensitivity and respect for cultural diversity among campus community members.

#### Participation

- You are asked to participate in this study because of your experience as a member of the Taiwanese Association. Your responses will be valuable for this study.
- Your demographic information (e.g. name, gender, nationality, school year, etc.) will be asked before any research questions.
- Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.
- You will be asked to respond to open-ended interview questions via Skype. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to an hour of your time.

#### Inconvenience

This study will not cause you any inconvenience; the interview will be scheduled according to your availability.

#### Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you from participating in this study. However, if you have any concerns or emotional discomfort during your participation, you may contact the supervisor of this study, Dr. Tatiana Gounko via email: [tgounko@uvic.ca](mailto:tgounko@uvic.ca). In addition, in the beginning of your interview session, the student researcher, Minjeong Sung will share the way of reaching out to the UVic counselling services.

#### Benefits

You will have an opportunity to reflect upon your experiences in the TA and contribute to research on the quality of minority students’ campus lives and the role of racial/ ethnic social organizations on campus.

#### Withdrawal of Participation:

- You may withdraw at any time without explanation or consequences.
- If you choose to withdraw at any point, your interview data will not be used and will be destroyed.
- Your relationship with the student researcher will not be affected by your withdrawal.

**Anonymity and Confidentiality**

- The participant selection within a relatively small pool of the Taiwanese Association can limit your anonymity and confidentiality.
- However, the final selection of participants will be shared only between the student researcher and her supervisor as well as the responses of selected participants.
- A neutral gender pronoun and a code number assigned by the student researcher will be used in place of your gender and name.
- All electronic data will be password protected.

**Research Results will be Used/Disseminated in the Following Ways:**

In MA thesis; for a scholarly publication; for internet dissemination via UVicSpace and/or conference presentation.

**Disposal of Data**

The data will be password protected. All files will be deleted after 5 years.

**Questions or Concerns**

- If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact either Minjeong Sung by email: [minjeongs@uvic.ca](mailto:minjeongs@uvic.ca) or by phone: 250-884-1577, or Dr. Tatiana Gounko by email: [tgounko@uvic.ca](mailto:tgounko@uvic.ca).
- In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

This consent form is sent to make sure to give you some time to consider the nature of your participation in this study and develop any related questions in advance of the interview. Your consent to this study will be verbally asked in the beginning of the interview and the student researcher will answer your questions about this consent form and your research participation.

**Appendix B: Invitation Letter****INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN GRADUATE COURSE RESEARCH**

Dear Fellow Members of the Taiwanese Association,

You are invited to participate in the research study entitled “The Case Study of Taiwanese Association: The Pursuit of Cultural Empowerment and Diverse Campus Cultures.” The study is conducted by Leadership Studies MA student – Minjeong Sung, supervised by Dr. Tatiana Gounko (EPLS).

The objective of this study is to explore experiences of racial/ethnic minority students from Taiwan who participate in the activities of the Taiwanese Association on the University of Victoria campus. The results of this study can add to the scholarly literature on minority students’ experiences on Canadian campuses, assist and encourage universities to focus more on minority students’ real-life experiences and the quality of their lives, and promote sensitivity and respect for cultural diversity among campus community members. The following questions will guide the study: (1) how do participants describe their experiences with the Taiwanese Association? and (2) how does this Association impact the participants’ lives?

The study was reviewed and received ethics approval through the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board (Ethics Protocol Number 19-0568).

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. In this research, since the Taiwanese Association is a relatively small pool for participant selection, your anonymity and confidentiality can be limited. However, I will try my best to protect your identity. Your responses will be anonymized; a neutral gender pronoun and a code number assigned by the student researcher will be used in place of your gender and name. You may withdraw at any time without explanation or consequences. Also, I would like to clarify that both your availability of participating in this research and your withdrawal will not affect any parts of our current relationships.

In advance of any interviews, you will be asked to read a Consent Form to help you to understand the nature of your participation in this study and develop any related questions. Your consent to this study will be verbally asked in the beginning of the interview and I, the student researcher, will answer your questions about this consent form and your research participation. Then, you will be interviewed via Skype by me, the student-researcher.

If you have any questions or need more information about this research you may contact me at [minjeongs@uvic.ca](mailto:minjeongs@uvic.ca).

Sincerely,

Minjeong Sung  
MA Candidate  
Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

**Appendix C: Sample Interview Questions****Sample Interview Questions  
For Zoom**

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. (Demographic information: name, gender, nationality, school year, the year of coming to Canada as an international student)
2. How would you describe your experience of studying at UVic?
3. Why did you decide to join the Taiwanese Association?
4. How would you describe your experience with the Taiwanese Association? Does it affect you in anyway? If so, how?
5. How would you describe the activities and general environments of the Taiwanese Association?
6. What do you think about the activities offered by the TA?
7. Do you have any suggestions to the TA regarding its activities?
8. What does your participation in the TA mean to you?
9. Do/ Did you have any expectations or suggestions to UVic to continue the TA more effectively?

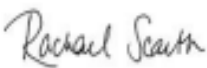
**Appendix D: Approval for Human Participant Research – University of Victoria**



**University  
of Victoria**

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board  
 Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada  
 T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

**Certificate of Approval**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                        |                               |                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Tatiana Gounko (Supervisor)</b>                     | <b>ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER</b> | <b>19-0568</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                        | Expedited review - delegated  |                |
| <b>PRINCIPAL APPLICANT</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Minjeong Sung<br/>Master's student</b>              | <b>ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE</b> | 02-Jun-2020    |
| <b>UVIC DEPARTMENT</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Educational Psychology &amp; Leadership Studies</b> | <b>APPROVED ON</b>            | 02-Jun-2020    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                        | <b>APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE</b>   | 01-Jun-2021    |
| <b>PROJECT TITLE</b> The Case Study of Taiwanese Association: The Pursuit of Cultural Empowerment and Diverse Campus Cultures                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                        |                               |                |
| <b>RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS</b> None                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                        |                               |                |
| <b>DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING</b> None                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                        |                               |                |
| <b>DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL</b><br>Invitation Letter_Minjeong Sung_Revised.docx - 01-Jun-2020<br>Consent Form_Minjeong Sung_Revised.docx - 01-Jun-2020<br>Sample Interview Questions_Minjeong Sung_Revised.docx - 01-Jun-2020                                                                                                                                  |                                                        |                               |                |
| <b>CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                        |                               |                |
| This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                        |                               |                |
| <b>Modifications</b><br>To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.                                                                                                                                           |                                                        |                               |                |
| <b>Renewals</b><br>Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date. |                                                        |                               |                |
| <b>Project Closures</b><br>When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.                                                                                                                                  |                                                        |                               |                |
| <b>Certification</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                        |                               |                |
| This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.                                                                            |                                                        |                               |                |
| <br>_____<br>Dr. Rachael Scarth<br>Associate VP Research Operations                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                        |                               |                |

Certificate issued On: 02-Jun-2020