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I think we should do that one more time.

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Yeah? Yeah. Okay, here we go. You wanna lead it?

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You can do it. Oh, I can lead it. Okay, let me try again.

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Welcome back to our first podcast episode. My name is Tommy I'm your co-host, joined with me today is Youngji. We will also have a special guest here, Vinh. Hi.

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Nice. This is very special moment here the three of us together virtually except for Youngji, she's my roommate. First, Vinh can you introduce yourself? Who are you, where are you from, where are you now, and what brought you here?

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Oh okay. I'm Vinh and then I'm Vietnamese. I moved to Canada last four years and my first time here in Canada is in Toronto. Lived there for more than 2 years and then because of the weather, I think Vancouver could be better for me that's why I chose to move to Vancouver and now I think Vancouver is the best city in Canada [inaudible].

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I think it's the best city in Canada too. I've been to Toronto I didn't really enjoy it.

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Yeah. The weather in Toronto is very complicated. The winter is colder, and the summer is hotter.

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Oh yeah. I think that's what I always hear as well. So, I met Vinh recently at ShareTea Bubble tea and I was surprised to learn that he's also Vietnamese and I'm also Vietnamese. So, for me it's very rare for me to meet Vietnamese people so it was very exciting to meet another person who is from I guess the same background but also like who have the same accent. To me, that's another big thing. I'm not very good at listening to northern Vietnamese accent and central Vietnamese accent but we had a really good conversation, Vinh and I, and I thought he'd be perfect to be a guest for this. So that's why I brought you on, Vinh, because it was very relevant. A lot of the conversation we talked about I was learning about it at the same time in this course which is Asian Cultural Migration.

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First thing we're going to talk about is identity. How do you define yourself and your identity?

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Oh yes. So, I define myself as a Chinese Vietnamese because my grandparents are Chinese, and I can say 50% of my genetics is Chinese and the other is Vietnamese and maybe a little bit Cambodian. So that's how I learned about myself and whenever someone asks me if I'm Vietnamese. So yes, I am Vietnamese but Chinese Vietnamese. And yeah, that's could be a wonderful thing for me because whenever I was in Vietnam. Whenever people look at me, they know I am a Chinese Vietnamese because the way I talk, the way I look, and my outlook, maybe, I don't know. Or maybe the way I show up. But, it doesn't matter because anyway, I'm still Vietnamese.

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I think like cuz I'm actually also part-Chinese as well we've talked about this before my grandpa is ethnically Chinese in all ways except he learned Vietnamese. But I never really saw that and it's very strange because I grew up thinking I was just Vietnamese. I knew my grandpa spoke Chinese but I grew up just thinking I was just Vietnamese and that's cuz I grew up with my grandparents like here, actually in California, and then with my parents here in Canada but I recently learned from my mom that when she was in Vietnam, she saw herself mixed like she knew she was part Chinese and the world around her, the Vietnamese society, made her aware that she was also part-Chinese. Do you feel the same? Do you feel more Chinese when you were in Vietnam?

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Oh it's been changing from when I was a child until I grow up. Just because when I lived with my family before, my family tried to maintain the Chinese traditions so they always remind me as a Chinese who live in Vietnam, not a Vietnamese. But when I grow up, I go to school and I read the book, I learned something more and I tried to learn more about my ancestors and I feel that I'm not really a Chinese but I'm a Chinese Vietnamese because part of my blood, my genetics, is also Vietnamese and a little bit Cambodian as I told you. So yeah, it's a bit complicated during the time, it's just like a trip to learn about myself, to figure out what-who I am.

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Do you think you're comfortable with your identity now? I know there are people who don't really go through the whole effort to learn about their identity. Like they're content with just "Oh this is, like I know this much and I'm okay with it" and there are people who go through the extra mile to fully understand what their identity entails. Do you feel like you've gotten to a point where you understand your identity enough that you're comfortable with it and you are comfortable as in you know enough about it that you're at ease or do you still feel like there's more to learn and there's something missing or something like that?

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Oh you know it's, it's truly interesting to me, very interesting because as I say, it's like a trip. So, on the way to figure out, to learn about myself, I learned a lot of things. I learned about the cultures, I learned about the food, I learned about- when I learned about who I am. I also learned about how my parents, how my grandparents are. So, it's very interesting to me because I lived in a hometown, in a small town near the water between Vietnam and Cambodia. So up in the town, we have lots of

Vietnamese, of course, but some Cambodians, some Chinese so sometimes I can see the Cambodians in my town and every time I always ask myself "Why are they here? Why are they in Vietnam? Do they have any connection with this land or do I have any connection with those Cambodians? Or sometimes when I go to the small Chinatown, it's just like a street but so many Chinese live on the street and I always ask myself whether I have any connection with those Chinese and later on, later on, when I learn about myself more. I know my grandparents, some from Chinese, some lived in Vietnam before, some half Chinese half Cambodian and then at that time, I feel like I have a big connection, so many connections with many people around me, not only Vietnamese but Chinese and Cambodians. And it makes me happy because it feels like we're like a big family and have so many relatives everywhere. That's what I feel.

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I thought that was really interesting what you just shared because I actually didn't know you were part Chinese part Vietnamese. I was under the impression that you were just Vietnamese. But listening to what you just said, it kinda reminded me of my own experience and also what we talked about during the lecture which is that individuals that are biracial as in like more than ethnicity or 2nd generation immigrants who are ethnically one culture but grow up in another culture, they spend so much more time explicitly thinking about their sense of self and identity. Typically, people that grow up in the same place that their parents did and they don't really travel around as much, they don't have to think about it as often. But for people like us, it's something that we kind of think about every day so I thought that was really interesting that you were like "oh you know I have all these different people like these Chinese individuals and Cambodian and I feel like we're a family" because in my personal experience, I felt like if the people that I was around wasn't Korean-Canadian like me then I didn't feel like I fit in. Just because I felt like our experiences were so different. So, for you, would you say that you felt like you felt like you fit in in your environment even though you guys were different ethnicities? Did you go through similar experiences to make you feel like you could relate to everyone else just as much?

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I had an important time when I was a child. It's just because my family immigrated from Cambodia to Vietnam around 1972 and part of them are Chinese Vietnamese and part of them are real Vietnamese and like also a part of them have Chinese Cambodian Vietnamese inside their blood. So, that's why when they moved- when they immigrated to Vietnam in 1972, they also not only maintained the Chinese traditions but sometime there's still something related to Cambodians and of course Vietnamese. As I know, when my grandparents lived in Cambodia before, they also maintained Vietnamese traditions on Cambodian lands and when they immigrated to Vietnam, they also not only maintained one Chinese tradition but they maintained maybe 3 Chinese traditions in the family. So yeah, I got used to those traditions when I was a child.

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Yeah so you're saying that your family also had a large mix of Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian so they all kind of participated in various

traditions together so it never felt like it was too out of place? Yes, yes. Oh, that's so wonderful!

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Yeah, you know, foods-the food- I think the food is the most important one that whenever we talk about the culture because in my experience, food is just like a bridge. It connects one culture to another culture. When you can enjoy, you can eat the food, it means you are connected to a new culture and that's what my family did to me. Whenever they have a small party, not only Vietnamese but a little bit Chinese food, a little bit Cambodian food, and when I was a child, I always asked myself "Oh uh I've never seen this food outside the street" I mean in Vietnam, not every Vietnamese know this food but there are some Chinese some Cambodian food in my family so I asked myself "what's the connection between me and those food and is there anything related to, to my ancestors?"

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So we were saying. Yeah, we got disconnected so this is us starting again but you were talking about food and that's really interesting when you talk about food because when I grew up, I never thought about Vietnamese culture, I didn't know what that was. I knew I was Vietnamese, but I didn't know what Vietnamese culture was and it became even harder to understand when I moved to Canada from California, because in California I was surrounded by mostly Hispanics so it was easier for me to tell that, "Oh, I'm Asian and this is what it's like." But when I was in Canada or in Vancouver all of my friends were Cantonese, so the culture kind of blur a little bit like a lot of my Cantonese friends had like similar cultural background at home to me. So, I didn't know what was different, but I knew that the food was different and that was what made me know and understand what Vietnamese was like, like Vietnamese is the food and there's all of this, but there's also the language like to me, food and language was the biggest part about culture. And then, when I went to Vietnam, that was all I knew as well so when I met people on the street, they were like, "Oh you know this food, or you know, you can speak the language like you know everything about being Vietnamese" and I felt like that was just such a strong indicator to being Vietnamese." So, when you mentioned food again that's what stands out to me the most.

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Yeah, I, in my opinion, there's always some stories behind the foods like whenever you eat food, don't just eating. If you want to figure out about something behind the food. You can read, you can ask, and then you also learn lots of things behind that. For example, there are some foods in the south of Vietnam and when you eat it, if you have some question about it, there should be so many question because why is it related to a little bit to Chinese, related a little bit to Cambodian and also, you found is a Vietnamese like it's very popular, but when you compare it to Chinese and Cambodia foods its have something similar. And that's when you will learn something.

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We're talking about like identity again and you talked about how you were kind of like a second generation in Vietnam. And that's interesting because you know we are second generation here in Canada. So, I feel like

we, we definitely noticed a lot of differences between, you know, other people here in Canada who have been here longer and like built a long lineage in their family here, but what was it like being a second generation Vietnamese in Vietnam.

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So, I think it's easy for me to, to understand my identity, when I was in Vietnam because you know from the, from the color of the skin, between Chinese Vietnam, Chinese Vietnamese, and Cambodian. It's not really different, like sometimes a little bit darker, sometimes a little bit brighter but it's not really different. So, it's easy for me to feel comfortable between cultures. But I think it would be more difficult for Asians Asian generations, I mean the second generations here in Canada.

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Do you still feel like you had difficulty understanding the culture or like fitting in though, despite that you match in skin, do you felt like there was an underlying difference?

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Oh no, I feel nothing difference between me and people around me when I was in Vietnam. Between Chinese between me and Cambodians. No, there's no difference.

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Yeah, that makes sense because you did mention how your family would incorporate all these different traditions so I can see how our experiences would be different there, because for us when we come over to Canada, we don't have family that are already Canadian, right? So, I feel like it's harder for us to feel like we fit in when we haven't already had traditions that were exposing us to that culture.

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Um, you know, there's one thing I want to mention about here about discrimination and racism. When I was in Vietnam, I didn't know much about this. But since I live here in Canada, I feel like there's not much discrimination or racism here in Canada than in America. I have some friends who come to America for study and some relative who live in America for a long time. And I talked with them a lot and also these day, we also know some news about anti Asian event in America. And right now, when I'm here in Vancouver, or in Canada. There's nothing. It's a big difference.

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That's interesting that you say that because actually I would disagree a little bit in that I don't think there's a big difference in discrimination, but it's actually the type of discrimination. Because I feel like in America it's a little bit more obvious because you know, it tends to be like violence or like arguments or some big thing that people can record on their phones, but my experience living in Canada has been that discrimination and racism is a lot harder to detect because they hide it very well because of the stereotype that Canadians are very nice. So instead of outwardly saying, "Oh, go back to your country" it will be small things like assuming you're not from Canada or assuming that you

have these certain characteristics just because you look a certain way, right. So, but I also feel like that's different because thinking about the reaction of second-generation immigrants, versus people that I guess are first generation. I always find that individuals that are either like Japanese American, Korean Canadian, these are the people that have been bullied or picked on because of these cultural differences. So, they tend to be a lot more quick to point out, discrimination, compared to people from overseas because people overseas tend to not have as much experience in racism and discrimination.

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So, yeah, it's, it just could be my experience I don't know how it is to other international students not really exactly.

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Yeah, I feel like it would also vary like depending on like your English skills. I feel like a big thing already just yeah city, region like your education, like these are all things people will take into account when they assess people, I guess, and judge. But I would assume an immigrant from Vietnam who doesn't know the language coming to Vancouver might have a totally different experience from you. But I'm very glad that you feel like, so far you felt very safe and comfortable. And actually, I felt like I've been very lucky as well like I grew up feeling very safe and comfortable like this whole idea of Asian discrimination only kind of popped up to me recently. And it had me like think about the way I was raised and the people around me and all that. I felt like I'm not so much experiencing racism or discrimination now, I'm recollecting old memories that where I'm like, "oh maybe that was like discrimination" where I'll be "They did say that thing that you know like that, that wasn't the nicest thing to say." I don't know. I don't know, Vinh, if you've experienced this but as a kid I know like I've had friends that would like, grab their hands and put it on their eyes and they'll pull their eyes and make it smaller, and that was like something people would do for fun to be "oh you have small eyes like it looks like this." I mean, back then I was like, "oh I mean I guess I do, right? Like I have a little bit of like this kind of like flat and smaller side." Yeah, so, but like that's not a very nice thing to do to someone.

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I believe that discrimination and racism is the nature of human, because as I told you guys, I can't feel any discrimination during the time, I live here too much. But if talking about me, my family and some of Vietnamese I know, they also have some discriminations between them and other people from another countries. Like when I was in Vietnam before, my family usually discriminate us, between Chinese and Vietnamese. And I know some Vietnamese, they also discriminate them between Vietnamese and Cambodians because we live nearby Cambodia, right. So, I think that's our nature. But the point is how we control it, how we learn about it, and how we see the connection or like the same things between human and human.

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Yeah, I actually really agree with that because coming from my psyc, psychology background. We learn about in groups and out groups. So

basically, in groups are people that we think are like us, similar to us and out group are people that we think are not like us. And by default, our brain is wired for us to prefer our ingroup and not favor the outgroup, just because you know, there's so many things happening in our brain we need to figure out some shortcuts in order for us to function properly in daily life, right. Without having to think about everything. So, I agree with you in that I think discrimination, or I think preferring, some people internally is in our nature. But what is really important is what you said about how we act on that and how we control that. So, even if we feel like that on the inside I feel like if we are able to be fair and treat everyone equally outwardly with our actions and behaviors and words, it gets rid of so many problems. But because we aren't able to do that that's what creates discrimination and racism, right. So, I agree with you on that point.

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Yeah. Speaking of all the ins and outgroups, that made me remember something because Vinh was talking about how having like these multiple background of his allows him to connect with many different people. And you said that you didn't be like that like having multiple background helped you. You felt like having multiple background put you in this like specific niche bucket that would isolate you from everyone else. I think like I'm really unique and like Vinh well but at the same time, I felt like YoungJi where I was isolated from everyone. Like I didn't know any Vietnamese people growing up here in Vancouver. So, I had to like look for groups to, I guess like, identify myself with. And when I found out I was like part Chinese. I made that like a big part of my identity, and I would create a new like identity for myself, almost, and associated myself purely with all the Cantonese kids. So in a way like, I'm applying what Vinh did where he was able to relate to more people. But I almost felt like I put so much emphasis in my part Chinese self it without knowing anything about my Chinese background like I just know that I have Chinese blood, and I can like one to 10 and Cantonese and then I put all that work to like connect with all these, you know, Cantonese people and I don't know I felt like that was, at that time, it was very nice but I eventually ran into, like a wall when I felt like I could no longer connect with these people. It only went as far as like, "oh you know yeah I will kind of look like you and I know a bit of the language and we share similar background" because Vinh has told me there's a lot of Chinese culture that exists in Vietnamese culture is already. And it was, it was difficult for me because eventually I felt like I could no longer relate to them like, I mentioned earlier food then, like not all the food were the same, not all the cultural practices were the same and I went back to just isolated myself again and now I'm like, "I don't fit in, I'm, you know I tried so hard to connect with this Chinese background of mine but really I am Chinese Vietnamese" and something about that made me feel isolated again and that that brings me to today like I still feel like that, but this course has helped me kind of understand that more and is like, I'm still in the process of looking for more people like me and Vinh was actually the first person I met that is really really similar to me and gave me like a, like some sort of comfort. But I think I'm still in like I'm in this searching state still, but that's my experience I want to share that.

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Yeah, I just wanted to add on to that and say throughout the interview or throughout the conversation, it sounded like, Vinh, you had so much support from your family and it sounds like you're really connected with your family. I don't know if you're talking mostly about like your immediate family or if you were talking more extended like aunties and uncles and stuff like that, but I felt like that was a big difference that I could feel between Tommy and my experience and your experience is that you had people around you that were able to help connect you with the culture that you were connected to by blood. So, these people could teach you about these different things and introduce you to these separate different foods. Whereas, there was only so much that my parents could do to teach me about Korean culture, even less so about Canadian culture. So, I was really glad to hear that, "Oh, you know, there are individuals who have this kind of support and how family plays such a big role in connecting the parts- the separate parts of yourself"

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I'll tell you something that would make you guys surprised. I may say my family got me on the process of learning about myself, but I don't think my cousins have the same experience like me, and maybe only me or my younger sister have the same experience. Because my mother, she always talk about the ancestors, talk about this story, that story. So we learned about her a lot. But I could say it just 30 or 40% of the story and the rest of it, it depends on me. Because see, on the way. I learned about myself, I grow up. I also read a lot. I read about all the culture, I read about the food. I try to experience in different communities in Vietnam like in Cambodian community Chinese community. And also, I have so many questions. So that's why I try to answer those questions. And on the way to, to answer the questions, I learned something, and that's when I learned about my root. It's a long trip, it's a very long process. It's not only seem as simple as you think like when I grow up in a family and my family support me a lot and that's it because only me, maybe until now only me so the one who, who have the understandings between cultures in my family.

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Yeah, that's very admirable. I feel like not a lot of people put that much effort in, and I think that's really impressive and really cool that you put all that effort into answering all the questions that you had. But I also wanted to ask a while you've kind of said like you try to answer all those questions and you had so many questions but did you have like a motivation for answering those questions like, what made you want to put so much effort into learning about the food and the culture and stuff like that and doing your own research.

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Of course, as I mentioned before, because I grew up in a family that's have so many kinds of food between many different cultures. So I asked myself why why do I, why do, why do my family have so many kinds of food why that my friends' family only have some kinds of food some Vietnamese food, but my family's have been Vietnamese Chinese and Cambodians why's not only Vietnamese and Chinese. Why's not only Vietnamese Cambodians. So, I learned something about that. So whenever whenever I have some



questions, I don't answer right away but I keep it there. And, as I told you that my mother is usually talk about our family's story. And that's when I learned something a bit about it. And also, I learned something about history. For example, when my family immigrated from Cambodia to Vietnam in 1972. I also have a question why? Why do they have, why did they have to immigrated from Cambodia to here. Why is not come immigrated from Cambodia to anywhere else of the world. And that's when I tried to read something about that, and I know "Yeah, there was an event at that time in 1972." So that's why many Vietnamese Cambodian or Chinese Cambodians, they have to immigrate it to other countries. And that's just an example in the big story. And I have so many questions and then I answer like by reading by asking. Yeah.

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Right. I know like 1972 around that time was a very dangerous time in Cambodia and I know my mom was reading about that when she was younger. She was telling me like she couldn't get any of these information as a kid, but she was very interested, she would like dig up magazines and learn about like the massacre going on in Cambodia and it was a very, I also know this is actually right before the Vietnam War ended too. So, it was not even like the greatest experience on either side. Given all your cultural background and I also know that you're- you truly love like Vietnam the country and the people there and you want to give back to the community there. How important do you feel that is the country to you and the people and what it's like nationalism to you in Vietnam.

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Um, this is an interesting question. And also, I would have like, could be a long story about it, but I will chop it off. As I grow up in a Chinese family, Chinese Vietnamese family. My parents or my grandparents, always remind me about Chinese traditions, more than other traditions. So, when I was a child, I always think about I'm Chinese who live on Vietnam, not a Vietnamese. But when I grow up as I told you, I learned more about my ancestors. I learned more about the history of Vietnamese, and it would make me so surprised that not every Vietnamese on the south part of Vietnam are Vietnamese, but they're also, they used to be a Chinese- used to be Chinese before for hundred years. And Vietnam is the land that welcome them to settle down, to grow up, to live. And that's when I learned that I should be a Vietnamese because this land, welcome us welcome me welcome other people from hundred years ago until now. So, I should be a Vietnamese because I owe a lot from this country. And when I learned something more about the history of Vietnam, I also know not every Chinese in the south part of Chinese are Chinese now. Like, for example, 2000 years ago some of Vietnamese who live in Vietnam now used to immigrate- used to live in the south of China and before, and some Chinese who live in the south of China, and Vietnamese here in Vietnam. They have relations to each other in genetics. So, I can say like Vietnamese and Chinese are not a big difference. It just about where we grow up, where we-where we learn the culture, where we owe something for like, for example, me. I grow up in Vietnam, I owe my country something, and have to give it back to my country. And that's what made me go through on the way to, to be a Vietnamese.

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Now that you're in, in, like you're living Canada now, at least for the time being. Do you feel like that kind of feeling you have has changed in any way?

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No, I'm four years living on Canada, living in Canada. I always think about my country Vietnam. And I learned about- a lot about my country because deep inside me, I just always worried that one day I will be like someone else who live in another- who live abroad for so long, they would forget their, their identity, or they would forget their old country. So, since the day I come to Canada I always try to maintain myself to make me remember that I'm a Vietnamese, and I should have a duty to my country.

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So, I'd like to ask then you mentioned that you'd like to, you know, give back to your country you have a duty to your country. So, what would it look like for you to give back to Vietnam?

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There's so many issues in Vietnam now because we are developing country. And so many poor people, and the education is not as really good as here in Canada. The environment is also is damaged, because they are developing and they're destroying so many forest, destroyed environments so much. So that's would be a lots of things to do, but I just have two topics that I really like is about is, education and environment. So, one day if I come back to my country, so that would be two area I will support to.

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That's that's great That sounds like you sound like a superhero. Oh no. Never. I'm just a normal man in a big country. That sounds like a, like a movie title.

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You know from in high school no- in primary school and until high school. We always talk about loving our country. So, when I grow up and when I go abroad, I always remind myself that I have- I need to love my country because that's the root. That's where I grow up. That's where, where I have my family, I have friends.

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That's interesting because like I love Canada is, it's given me my home it's great and all but I don't have this sense of nationalism, like you do. Yeah, and YoungJi I know she's very similar to me, and I like to ask these questions about nationalism to a lot of people but I feel like I can't really commentate on it much for my-for my own. I mean, I feel like with Canada, because, Canada is so proud of being this very multicultural country and they kind of try to push that image. So, I feel like it's very hard for people that grow up here to have a specific culture because there kind of is no specific Canadian culture. Like, I guess if you grew up in Vancouver or Toronto then maybe you could have some stuff that are specific to those areas, but as a country, I don't feel connected to Canada, especially because it's so big and everyone, like, if you live in like Yukon, or if you live in Alberta, it's so different from living in

BC right so I feel like there's not as much unity within the country and its inhabitants. So it's hard for me and Tommy, to feel that connection because there is no connection really unless you're white and I guess your family has lived here for like generations. Yeah. Even when I was taught like nationalism in school like I lived in California for a bit and like every day you know you're looking at the American flag, and it's on your heart, and you sing this song, this pledge to the flag and the country. And it just felt so off and forced, and maybe if I had lived there longer I'll have like a stronger connection to the States, but after experiencing that and come to Canada and I see like this, you know, different form like sing O Canada every-our anthem, every Friday and then I go home to my Asian family and I don't speak English anymore and then I go to school and I see-and the school I went to was all Asians, pretty much. So, it was it was very strange I guess, and now thinking back like what is nationalism like what is, was it like to be Canadian, I'm just thinking more like I'm Asian Canadian and there's a lot more I need to understand what my Asian background so Canada is really just housing me temporarily, I guess, and I'm like gonna go off to like, I talked to Vinh before and he was telling me I should go to Vietnam and you know I think I'll do that and try to learn more about my Vietnamese background maybe I'll go to China as well like, you know, so. Yeah I'm similar in that I also feel like I feel more nationalism towards Korea than I do, to Canada, I feel weird even calling myself a Korean Canadian because I just feel like a Korean. So, I feel similarly, Vinh, the way you do towards Vietnam towards Korea, so I feel like I want to give back to Korea, I want to go and live there someday and share what I've learned living abroad because I feel like living in Canada. There's a lot of aspects of Canadian, or I guess Western more like Western society that I would like to see in Korea, because Korea is such a high intensity pressured society where everyone's really working hard to like get a lot of money and it's just super fast living so, um, yeah that's interesting that uh although I have grown up in Canada, I feel more nationalism towards Korea.

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It makes sense, you know, because before figuring out me as a Vietnamese, I learned a lot about Chinese and Cambodian through my family's story. And I think it's one of the impacts that helped me to, to figure out myself as a Vietnamese. I think it could be similar to you guys. Because I- my, my country have a sentence like this like people have their ancestry. Just like river have head water and the tree have the roots. So, if you want to have the connections with with where you're living. Firstly, you need to understand and have connections with where you come from and based on my experience when I, when I understand about Chinese and Cambodia, about how I live here in Vietnam, why I live here in Vietnam, why my family's here. So, that's when that's the time when I, I really understand. And I really see my connections between me and Vietnam. And I think there are two words that I could say to you, or to me on to anyone. If you guys want to have any connections between the land that you're living. Firstly, gratitude. And secondly, is understanding.

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Yeah, I really like that because I've recently realized I've been having conversations with my parents on their life before they came to Canada,

like their life back in Korea, why they immigrated to Canada, and just kind of getting understanding further than "oh we came here because it's good for education". Like I wanted to know more about their history and connecting their history with my life, and the decisions that they made felt made me feel a lot more grounded too, like, it helped my sense of identity. So I think what you said definitely has truth to it. Well said.

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Yeah, this is like a stream. Like if you-if you know where's the head water. So, you will know where to stream to.

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Oh yeah, I like that yeah that's that's a very good imagery. That was a Vietnamese saying, though? Yeah. Yes. How does it go? Can you tell it to me in Vietnamese? [Vietnamese]. True. Sounds very poetic, I like it.

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it's not only a sentence, is also us. Like, It took us, like, how to understand ourselves if we want to understand our self, try to learn something about our ancestors.

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It sounds so obvious when somebody says it out loud. It's so it's so funny that I guess a lot of people don't try to do that like even for me I only recently started asking my mom about or my parents about their history.

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I mean I also think like, especially for you, you're someone that has to come to the realization that that's something you want for yourself, right. You can't just tell someone "this is something you need to do" and you can't just show it and have others expect to pick up on it, like, you have to, there needs to be some sort of catalyst, something to get you to think about the thing. Like this course, ACAM, was like a big catalyst for me to start thinking about my Chinese culture.

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Myself as well. Yeah like I never thought, you know I never cared so much at all. I remember like there was this one lecture we had, where everyone was talking about their Teochew, those type of people. And I was like holy crap like I'm one of those people and like all these people in the class are talking about like "I'm part of it" and "I know a bit about it but not really" and I'm like "whoa there's other people like me." So, it got me just thinking so much more about it and then, and then I met Vinh shortly after that. I was like, I'm going to go to China, I'm going to go to Vietnam like I want to do all these things and yeah I, it takes a catalyst and before you even before something like that, that I guess proverb, maybe makes sense.

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Yeah. I'm going to take a, take the conversation to a different path is, this course is a lot about Asian diaspora. And now that you are in Asian diaspora, you're in Canada. I want to talk more about like the differences you have felt between Vietnam, and in here. What you felt

that you thought you knew sure of but when you came to Canada you're like, "oh wow this is much more different than I thought it was." Like expectations, yeah expectations versus reality.

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Hmm. You know what, I expect a lot of things just about a Vietnamese community here in Canada, because I don't know much about Canadians. So just expect my community. And that's the only thing that made me disappointed, because in my opinion before I think that Vietnamese should help Vietnamese. And as I think in my head that whenever I'm in the Vietnamese, I'll try my best to help them. But not every Vietnamese have the same opinion like me, or maybe they have some problem with their mental health, so they don't think about that, and they treat their, the people from Vietnam are very bad that I don't think they are Vietnamese. So that's the only thing that makes me disappointed. And it because I didn't expect too much about Canadians, or about Canada. So, when I come here, I learned something and experience something, and I just feel more gratitude. Because, because there's so many things, even it's different with my countries, but it's better, better than my country.

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What were some of the things that made you realize, or like make you feel disappointed, specifically about the Vietnamese community do you have some sort of story or experienced that you went through.

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Yeah, um not. For example, before when I come here, to, to Toronto for example, I work in some Vietnamese restaurants. And, in my opinion, I always think Vietnamese should help Vietnamese, but they don't treat us very well, especially we are international students so they try to get benefits from us to pay very low salary. And they pay cash, of course, so there's no minimum wage for them. They're just the lowest as they can pay. And they always try to get information about us, why we come to Canada, or do we have much more money than them. And like they try to have some information to compare between me and them. So I don't think they, they're nice, but, except for the Vietnamese community like that, I can say that not every Vietnamese is like that but some of them are like that. And, Yeah, except for that everything is so nice.

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Do you feel like, that has to do with like the Vietnam War, because like a lot of Vietnamese people who have been in Canada for a while, are likely to be Vietnamese boat people or refugees from right after the war. So I'm wondering, I'm just making assumptions here but maybe they're seeing you as like the other side you know what I mean. Like not the southern Vietnamese, like the true southern Vietnamese but you are raised in like a different education system and a different regime and you have different ideology. So, this is their way of like probing to understand like which side are you on and what are you trying to obtain, like that kind of stuff.

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Yeah, that's what that's what I think too, Tommy. Before when I was in those situations, I was very, very sad. And I felt angry. But time by

time. I tried to understand more about that. And I learned something about their mental health. Like, there was refugees. Many of them are refugees before, and they survive during the most difficult time in my country. So, they have some problems with, with the country, and with anyone come coming from that country. And that's how they treat us when they they met us.

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I kind of feel like I felt the same way. I took a lot of pride in being Vietnamese and like, Oh, if I meet another Vietnamese person, I'll try my best to speak Vietnamese and connect to them. But I always felt like there was some sort of resistance or hesitancy when someone's trying to talk to me, or when I tried to talk to someone. Like, I felt like it didn't matter if I was Vietnamese or not like I'll meet someone who's Vietnamese like be like "[Hello in Vietnamese]" and like, try to talk to them, it would be very dismissive and there's no like connection. I felt like being Vietnamese didn't give me extra like you know brownie points or credits just, just to get on someone's good side I felt like I was just another person, like I could have been Vietnamese from, you know, anywhere and it just didn't matter. So I'm surprised that, you know yeah I mean, I think your Vietnamese skill is much better and you're a very very nice guy, you're very polite. I don't think it's just you right like I went through the same thing and still to this day like it's always been that and actually furthermore, like, even with Vietnamese my age, There was a big disconnect. And I think one of the most- I don't know if you get this, Vinh, but one of the most popular question I get is, are you north or are you South. Ay Korea too.

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Oh really yeah but I don't see, I haven't seen any North Koreans here in Canada. There's a couple but like my friend she's half cana- half American half Korean, but her Korean half is North Korean. Oh that surprised me because I don't think that not any of North Korean can immigrate to other country. Yeah, because they usually escape to China, and then make their way to Korea, or they've escaped a long time ago so they had more time to immigrate other places. Oh yeah I have so much compassion for them. Yeah, it's very tough. Yes.

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Well, the things that Tommy mentioned about the north and the south. Before I care about that. But until I came here to Canada, I, I don't think it's matter, because where I worked before in Vietnamese restaurants they all come from the south part of Vietnam and I'm a South Vietnamese too. The way they treat me just like I'm a, I'm someone coming from China or Cambodia, not Vietnamese, not a Vietnamese. So, it doesn't matter, it just about something I want to say here that the story, I mean the history of Vietnam during the 20th century is really, really tough. Like, everyone's coming from those time, they all have the mental problems, but they may- they may not know that.

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And I think like children, they carry a lot of that from their parents to like, and the reason I mentioned that earlier like people my generation,

my age would ask me like are you north or south, because they'll hear stories from their parents, and they would, you know.

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Yeah, that's what makes me surprised because when it came to Vancouver. This is my, my, my first time that I heard so many questions about the north and the south, even when I was in Toronto. It wasn't like that. And when I was in Vietnam, so we didn't ask anyone because we can, we can know from the accent, right. But here, whenever I met a 2nd Vietnamese second generations so they always like, oh you're from the south, or oh you're from the north. I don't really understand how it is. But I think, yeah, there should be a mental problem of the first generation so that's making the second generations, always have to question the North, or the South.

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Yeah, I always felt like, I guess, like I mentioned to you before, is that I like I grew up kind of resenting Vietnam and like especially like the north Vietnamese regime and everything just because the stories I would hear from my family and I would also feel that hesitancy like meeting another Vietnamese person I'm like, "Oh, I'm not gonna relate to them if they're like, you know, not the same as me." I did have another Vietnamese like friend, growing up, but like, it was just so just so difficult for me to just accepted their background was just so different, like, like, you know, like they'll ask me like, oh how to, how to you know, do your parents come to Canada and it will be like completely different story because I'll ask them how to your your parents kind of in Canada, just tell me like, "oh you know they booked a flight and they just decided to move." Like, it wasn't like that, you know for my family you don't just book a flight, you just go, it was very different. And I was like, while we speak the same language and we have similar like background but the way we achieved it was more just, you know, the way we achieve our lifestyle and that was so different. But on top of that Vinh, like many people. You know I don't know what it was but in Vancouver I found that many South Vietnamese people my generation, and they have like taking part in a lot of like gangs or violent activities, in my neighborhood. Like I don't know being Vietnamese was like, like a little bit scary sometimes like, like I was a pretty good kid, I think, but being Vietnamese was like, "oh yeah you're, you better watch out because other people can take you the wrong way" since there are so many other Southern Vietnamese like gangs or Southern Vietnamese like, you know, violent people in in East Vancouver. So I don't know if that adds to it.

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Come on, Tommy. Not only Vietnamese are gangs.

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Yeah, for sure. I mean there's much more to it but, yeah. You know you speak a lot about mental health so I want to talk a little bit about that. Okay. What's your experience with mental health in Vietnam was like and how do you feel that it compares to here.

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Oh, yeah. So since the day I came to Canada, I have some more understandings about mental health that I didn't really care before when I was in my home country. Um, four years ago, I had depression. And during my three years, the first three years in Canada, I was so, like, it was a big problem for me. I can't really, really feel anything. I can't really have a good connections with anyones around me. And sometimes I ask myself, what's the reason for this mental health, mental problem. And I just. The first question could be, I could just answer is that could be because of the weather, because the weather is so different with my from my country. It's colder and there's the less sunlight and a lot blah blah blah. So the weather could be the first reason, and secondly could be the culture, I mean the language. But when I went to learn some more about it. I figure out that my, my symptoms, has been has appeared like maybe from when I was in Vietnam, already, but I didn't to know that. And that's what be so important, because I found out that when I was in my country, we, I mean Vietnamese, we don't really care about mental health. We just think like sometime when we, we have some negative feelings or some stuck inside our mental, our mind, for example, so we just think that it's, it just like that is the nature. There's no problem about it. And we try to live with that. And we don't think that should be treated or should be talked out. Then, when I came to Canada. I mean, the first year, I study in Centennial College. And basically, at that time, I have some negative feelings in my own ready. And I didn't that it's depression until I took the class that psychology class. And when I read some symptoms about depression, I just know Well, okay. I'm depressed. I'm in depression, at a time. So, my, in my experience, maybe Vietnamese don't really care about a mental health, but the Canadians. They do.

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I kind of feel like even with that, like, I don't know what the Canadians do per se like just as a solid statement. I think mental health is a very a new conversation with people, especially given like the pandemic and people being indoors and that becoming a larger concern, but I think mental health is still very new. And as much as I'm learning about it, like being able to talk about is still like difficult is only it was only until like a couple of weeks ago where I was able to talk about mental health more with my friends. But for a longest time, it was just something that, like, I guess maybe like we've recognized that thing but we just don't talk about it because it's like difficult to talk about or that you don't think people care. But, at the very least, you know, having like access to that kind of education like psychology or something and learning about it allows you to recognize it. That's, I think that's like first step right because I don't know if you would have had the chance if you had like continue to live in Vietnam that you would you would have felt like there was this feeling that you didn't understand why and and just, what would that have been like, do you think like if you had stayed in Vietnam and continue to have depression, and how do you feel like it would have been different if you hadn't come to Canada.

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I think he just went it was in Vietnam, they are some symptoms already. But I didn't recognize it. And when it came here. The weather changed, the culture changed and also at that time and leave with some of cousins, coming from Vietnam, like me, and we have many problems with each other.



So, so many, so many things happen at the same time. So that's when my, that's when my mental health gets worse like before it, it could have like a few symptoms. But after being in Canada for a few months, it totally terrible. So yeah.

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Yeah, I guess like the impact of immigrating was like a, I guess almost like a catalyst to like a down downhill spiral.

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Yeah, we could say that's a catalyst to my, to my mental health. And, yeah, and I know, I know, I feels like before, all the things I got like, about a depression. That's nothing because I never heard about depression before when I was in my home country. And when I understand something about the symptoms in psychology class. And then I chose to go to the crusade is the small climate right, is the small climate, in, in the college, and I bought some meetings with a psychologist, I don't know what are these a psychologist, or a just a mentor, a health mentors or something. And then he talked with me. He got me some comments, some suggestions, and it's mostly about, about the problems I had with my cousins, like, I need us to move out or something like that. But at that time, I have no no choice. I had to stay there, I had to live there. So, yeah, so then I quit. I quit, I quit. I didn't go to the client anymore. And I, I, I treat myself, I try to save myself, to help myself. But the good part is, I realized that I had the depression

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Thank you for sharing. I feel like it's, it's a very vulnerable, you're making yourself very vulnerable to be able to share this with us and I think there's a lot we can learn from it, and so thank you for that. Do you feel like you're able to have this kind of conversation in Vietnam.

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Um, I don't think so. That's why, that's why I told you that people don't really care about mental health. For example, after my first and second years in Canada, I realized that I had depression. And when I have a long summer vacation in Vietnam. I talk about it with my uncle's, the one who I really love, and the one who's care me a lot, and I talk with my grandmother and talk with my, my mother. And if I have, I have no thing that I expect before because I just feels like they don't understand that even not understand what's depression means. They just think that I was, I was sad and I was in a negative feeling. And all I need to do is go through it and be strong. And that's it.

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Yeah, that's something I hear a lot too. Just be strong, there's this whole thing with men like you're, you're a man. I got that like as a kid like you're a man, man up. Don't cry. It's wrong. It'll pass or something like that. But it's interesting you say that I think recently I've also, I think my, my mom is has also been experiencing some, like, mental health issues and I've been trying to talk to her more and help her understand those kind of thing especially being a Vietnamese boat person, you know the refugee, she's definitely been doing a lot like going through all the strenuous she had to do just to go from country to

country, and even going to jail for a period of time like I think that adds up and I remember like when she was telling me her story I was just like how do not feel anything now. Because that's the impression I get like I feel like, wow, like she's fine, like there's no, there's no negative, like consequences, how do you how do you do that and then she was telling me you know I think recently like, especially with pandemic and everything being at home a lot. She's feels interest and just alone and worried a lot now and I think that was, that was the first time I ever heard her say anything like that and it, it just, it almost feels like it's like, it's not like mental health isn't something people don't care about it, or anything, it's just that they don't, they don't know how to care about it, they don't know how to talk about it they don't know how to express these feelings and realize it. And I think everyone, I don't know I think many people who have had, especially refugees. There are things that they wish they can talk more about or01:00:36.000 address but this idea of like just keep it to yourself is very dangerous.

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I think the first step to, to go for depression is you like someone need to accept it. Like someone needs to accept that they have depression. That should be the first step. I talk with some people they have some symptoms of depression. But the big problem is they don't think they have the problem.

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Yeah. It makes sense because you can't really recognize what you have if you don't know about the existence of that thing, right. We talked a lot about different our different experience in Vietnam and even in Canada, today, and I felt I feel like we've had a very meaningful discussion, through many different aspects of, of our course actually ACAM320B. I want to wrap this up by asking you a question here. Since, like I've only really lived in in Canada like a bit in the States but I guess just probably in the West here. And same with YoungJi. But, you grew up in Vietnam and you're here in Canada. How long has it been, four years right. Yeah, four years. More than four years. And also you're here much older, where you're able to kind of like learn and and learn about the culture like better. I'm curious if there are some things that that you have experienced in Canada, that you will like to take back to your country. What are some of that, that you want to bring back?

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That's a really interesting question. Um, yeah so many things that I want to bring back to my country, maybe the most simple things are the word, thank you and sorry. It just important because in my country, not everyone really care about thank you and sorry to someone, when you, when you have your gratitude with them or when you, when you hurt them. And by that way, I think if we get used to say thank you and sorry, we may we may help others like feel better in some situations. And it also a good culture, in my opinion, and there is something that I always think about is the way of living the lifestyle here. Because Canadians seems to live like slower than other country like comparing to their neighbors, Americans, Americans seem to be so fast in everything like technologies, business, lots of things. But after my depression experience, I don't think it's a, it's a good lifestyle. And growing up in Vietnam we,

because we are we are developing country so everything seemed to be faster than the past. So, the mental health, would be a big problem in the future and maybe now it's was a problem already. And when I live in Canada, I feel like people live, slow, and they enjoy enjoy your life. And they really take care of themselves. I can say like most of them. And that's another thing I want to take it back to my country. And all I know right now, there are some Vietnamese young people, they try to to inspire other Vietnamese about those, that lifestyle. And that's a good news for me.

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Well, I've never heard anyone say that, especially the first part which is being able to say thank you and sorry, like, I, I want I wonder if that's affected me like through my, my bring up from my parents because I swear I've only heard thank you and sorry from my parents like a handful of times like I can count on my hands. It's a very very, those are two very very rare words like we're, you know I was taught to say thank you to to other people, but I never, I was never taught to say sorry it was always like, accept fault. You know, I mean like it like then you understand this word is like [vietnamese] like to know fault. But, But there was no like. It was very rare for me to be like sorry it's just like it was your fault accept as your fault.

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Oh, no, you know, is a, is a miracle works because I apply it when I was in depressed, depression. So, at that time, every- because I got used with thank you and sorry in Vietnam already and when I come here to Canada. I feel like Canadians use thank you and sorry more than that. So, I learned something about thank you and sorry from among that every morning I woke up, I say thank you I just sit for a few minutes in silent. And I think about some gratitude that I have with, with some people with something, and then I just repeat that I say thank you to each of them And also I say sorry, I say so sorry to myself, because I didn't treat myself very well. So, I make me, I make myself. Like, I, I make myself in a bad situation, because I didn't treat it well. And I also try to practice say, by saying sorry to someone that I hurt before, but even they don't hear it, but I tried to practice this. So thank you and sorry I can say it's a miracle thing that we can use not only to others, but to ourselves as well.

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That was very beautiful. That's a good point because growing up in Canada. In the Canadian school system, we're always taught to say thank you and sorry, like it's so pushed I remember in elementary school like it's second nature to me because I because of how much they pushed it in school, but I never thought about saying the same stuff towards myself because it was always focused on treat others the way you would want to be treated. Which is funny because we treat others better than we treat ourselves. Yes. So, thank you and sorry to ourselves that was really profound.

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And there's one more thing I just want to mention is like when, when we say thank you and sorry, we, we should say it like deeply from our mind.

We shouldn't say something that we just like it's just a habit, we shouldn't say like that and why we should learn something about that. Because I know some people, especially here in Canada, they say, they always say thank you and sorry but it wasn't coming from their deep mind. It's just like a habit and it wouldn't help them a lot. But that's why when I practice this thank you and sorry. I spend a few minutes in silence, because I want to connect with myself I want to, to, to think about the gratitude, I want to think about the real things. So that's when they can apply it, like, more, more use like better.

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Well, thank you for your time today, Vinh. I felt like we were able to have a lot of very meaningful discussions about just being Asian, our own culture, our experience in Canada, your experience in Vietnam, but not only did we learn about you. You had a lot of opportunity to even teach us about, you know, like just ourselves, like, that last one of that a lot last point you made about, you know, thanking ourselves and it's like a big self care initiative that I felt like I've always thought about but just hearing it from you, it made so much sense. It was such a beautiful imagery that you painted for me like I can just imagine like the benefit of just sitting on my bed in the morning, in a dark room and just, you know, meditating and having all these identifying like all my gratitude and this is Yeah.

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Yeah. It should be the most important thing you have to do every day because or like every two or every few days. Because, you know, if you want to connect to others or to other things around you. Firstly, you have to connect to yourself first.

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True. Well, I just finished my Viet coffee. I made it right at the start of this conversation so I felt like this gone a long way. So, thank you, Ben. Thank you for your time. Anything you want to add, YoungJi?

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I wanted to thank you for your time as well for me what really stood out was what you said about connecting back with our ancestors. The Vietnamese sentence about the stream, and the river head. The roots of the tree yeah that was really great. So, thank you for sharing.

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You're welcome. I'm also very glad to talk with you guys about this topic. Because, like, yeah, this topic, it's not only important thing in Canada. This is also important in my country and I believe that every, every people should be be mindful of their mental health, and the roots of their story and their family as well.

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Well said. Well, that is it for us. Thank you for joining us. I'm your co-host Tommy, I'm signing off with my co-host, YoungJi. That was our special guest, Vinh. I hope you enjoy it, alright. Have a nice day. Bye, Vinh. Bye.