

# 5 'Just Asian'? Inscribing East Asian 'Mixed Race' in Australia

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## Introduction

This chapter focuses on Asian migrant communities and diasporas, noting both their scripts of assimilation and the agentic preservation of their Asian roots. Within race and ethnicity studies, some research has focused on Asian-Australians, where a mixed race person has parents of Anglo-Saxon and Asian descent. In such cases, the mixed race person's phenotype is likely to signify their ethnic diversity. Current studies of mixed race in Australia have focused on those whose distinctive phenotype clearly marks their mixed heritage (such as Black/White/Asian Australians) (see Perkins 2007), and those whose phenotypic ambivalence is a concern for making claims of authenticity, belonging, and practice (such as Aboriginal/White Australians) (see Kissane 2010, and Kowal, this volume). The mixed race persons presented in this chapter, however, are blended East Asians (i.e., Chinese of all nationalities, Japanese, and Korean), where the phenotypic closeness of both racial groups does not typically mark them as mixed race. Within the Australian context, these mixed race East Asians are one 'type' of 'minority-minority' mixed race person (Hall & Turner 2001: 81), where both parents belong to a minority racial group in the country. The visual ambiguity of these individuals may crucially impact their racial membership because 'physical appearance is the primary cue for racial group membership . . . and remains the greatest factor in how mixed-race children are classified by others' (Rockquemore & Laszloffy 2005: 114). As such, and as will be demonstrated in this chapter, mixed race East Asians often face greater difficulty in expressing their heritage to others.

First it is important to define a number of terms. Although 'race' is a concept in flux, it generally refers to one's biological categorization, such as inherited genetic traits and phenotypic markers, especially skin colour, hair type, and eye shape (Song 2003). On the other hand, 'culture' is premised on a shared understanding of beliefs, values, and practices among peoples; it is not a fixed category but is continuously being learned and negotiated by people (cf. habitus in Bourdieu 1986) based on their living conditions (Webb et al. 2002), daily exchanges within their society (Maccoby 2007),

and socialization with others from different cultures (Gibson 2001: 19). 'Nationality' is the country in which a person holds citizenship; most often, it is the country in which a person was born, although it may also refer to another country to which a person has formally migrated. For matters of jurisdiction, 'nationality' is distinct from '(permanent) residents' in that only citizens hold passports and are entitled to national privileges that vary by country, such as voting rights and welfare benefits. Thus, if acculturated in a particular social setting for a prolonged time, both citizens and residence may identify with the same cultural identity in spite of their race, and may mobilize their nationality as a placeholder for cultural identity.

While not all of my informants identify as Australian citizens or residents, each person has spent a number of years in Australia, during which the country's multiracial and multicultural context was a precipitant for re-evaluating their mixed race identities. Those of Australian citizenship or residence felt that their 'Asian-looking' appearance occasionally delegitimized their 'Australianness', since a typical Australian is presumed to be White. Hence they found it even more difficult to negotiate their mixed race identities. In particular, almost all of these participants of mixed East Asian backgrounds reported being deemed as 'just Asian' by White Australians despite their multiracial (Chinese-Japanese, Japanese-Korean) heritage. While some preferred to be acknowledged by their Chinese, Japanese, or Korean heritage, they often found it laborious to resist the reductive label of being 'just Asian' as a generic racial category. This tension between what King-O'Riain terms 'identity differentiation' or 'what other people say they are' and 'identity declaration' or 'what people say they think they are' (2014: 267) is a recurring motif in this chapter.

This is also noted in the everyday Australian lexicon. Several informants recalled that persons from other parts of Asia—such as Indians and Pakistanis in South Asia, or Iranians and Iraqis from West Asia—seemed to escape the label of being 'Asian' but were instead perceived as 'just Indians' or 'Middle-Easterners'. Being 'just Asian' consequently appeared to be a label reserved for a specific phenotype of Asian person in Australia. Thus, the modifier 'East' that I use in reference to mixed 'East Asian' persons throughout the chapter marks a geographical and cultural entity that is most significantly distinguished by appearance—having 'fair' or 'light coloured' skin. In other words, skin was the primary signifier of one's race and perceived identity. As such, this chapter follows Fozdar and Perkins's proposition that 'the material realities of the experience of mixed-race people are better understood by acknowledging color/race as distinct from ethnicity' (2014: 121).

This chapter looks at the experiences of mixed race persons whose parents are of East Asian descent—namely, Chinese of all nationalities, Japanese, and Korean—in an Australian context. In these instances, a mixed race person's visual makeup is less likely to denote their racial hybridity, and instead they 'pass' as monoethnic/monoracial Asians. What has been under-documented is how these mixed East Asians self-identify and negotiate their

mixed race identity, despite their categorical assimilation into the simplistic perception of being 'just Asian' in multicultural Australia. In fact, an analysis of how my informants selectively enacted one race over the other in particular settings, what Choudhry calls 'Situational/Chameleon-like Identity' (2010: 115–116), reveals a loose hierarchy of East Asian affiliations (i.e., where Japaneseness is valued over Chineseness).

## Approach

Through in-depth interviews with seven fair-skinned, self-identifying mixed race East Asian men and women who have lived in Australia, this chapter adopts a biographical narrative approach in documenting mixed race strategies of marking ethnicity. It seeks to account for the strategic bodily inscriptions, cultural performances, and mental calibrations that these 'hybrid' or blended individuals engage in to mark their identities in public and private spaces. This research follows from my previous line of inquiry among Malay-Chinese women in Singapore and how they negotiate their mixed race ambivalence for agentic autonomy, despite being deemed 'illegitimate' persons within monoethnic contexts (Abidin 2014). However, while that research was premised on the praxis of mixed race persons 'enacting corporeal markers to enable homophilous interactions with homoethnic social groups' (Abidin 2014: 2), this chapter is focused on 'the big reveal' process in which mixed race East Asians refute, contest, or accept the 'just Asian' label assigned to them in different social groups and settings in Australia.

All informants consented to being acknowledged by their first names, although the majority also offered to be named in full and were proud to share their experiences and heritage as mixed race young people. Their background information is tabulated below (Table 5.1), detailing the self-identified 'race' of their first and last names, their self-identified 'race', paternal and maternal parentage, gender, age, citizenship and residency status, the number of years spent in Australia under specific circumstances, and their spoken languages.

This chapter is divided into four sections. It begins with 'Awareness of "Asianness" in Australia', presenting some emic perceptions of being 'Asian' in Australia developed from my informants' discussions of local Australians' cultural knowledge of 'Asia' and 'East Asia'. The second section, 'Perceiving ambivalent mixed race bodies', looks at how mixed race East Asians are perceived by people in Australia, with racial cues taken from their corporeal appearance and the assumed 'race' of their names. The third section, 'Selective posturing of mixed race identity', demonstrates how mixed race East Asians may strategically align themselves with particular racial identities (i.e., Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Asian, Singaporean, Australian). The chapter concludes with 'The big reveal', or how mixed race East Asians refute, contest, or accept the 'just Asian' label assigned to them in different social groups and settings in Australia.

Table 5.1 Background information of informants

| <i>Informant</i>            | <i>Akio</i>                      | <i>Arthur</i>                              | <i>Erina</i>                    | <i>Hiroki</i>   | <i>Junyu</i>                     | <i>Kakeru</i>               | <i>Sancia</i>             |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 'Race' of first name        | Japanese                         | European                                   | European                        | Japanese  | Japanese                         | Japanese                    | Latin                     |
| 'Race' of last name         | Japanese                         | Chinese                                    | Japanese                        | Japanese  | Japanese                         | Japanese                    | Japanese                  |
| Self-identified 'race'      | Japanese                         | Japanese-Chinese                           | Japanese-Korean                 | Asian or Japanese   | Australian-Singaporean           | Japanese-Singaporean        | Singaporean-Japanese      |
| Paternal parentage          | Chinese (CN)                     | Chinese (unknown)                          | Japanese                        | Chinese (CN)  | Chinese (SG)                     | Japanese                    | Japanese                  |
| Maternal parentage          | Japanese                         | Japanese                                   | Korean                          | Japanese  | Japanese                         | Chinese (SG)                | Chinese (SG)              |
| Gender                      | Male                             | Male                                       | Female                          | Male  | Male                             | Male                        | Female                    |
| Age                         | 21                               | 23   | 21                              | 18  | 23                               | 26                          | 21                        |
| Citizenship & Residency     | Japanese, Australian PR          | Australian, Hong Kong PR                   | Japanese                        | Japanese, Australian PR                                       | Australian                       | Singaporean                 | Singaporean               |
| Years in Australia & Status | 8 years, Perth, family migration | 15 years, Perth, family migration at age 8 | 1 year, Perth, exchange student | 7 years, Perth, family migration + 1 year, Melbourne, student | 23 years, Perth, Australian-born | 4 years, Melbourne, student | 2 years, Perth, student   |
| Spoken languages            | English Japanese                 | Cantonese English Japanese                 | English Japanese                | English Japanese  | English Japanese Mandarin        | English Japanese Mandarin   | English Japanese Mandarin |

### Awareness of 'Asianness' in Australia

The 2011 Census reported that 26% of Australia's population was born overseas, and 20% had at least one parent who was born overseas. Half of the 'Top 10 Countries of Birth for the Overseas-born Population' listed were Asian countries, including China, India, Vietnam, Philippines, and Malaysia. The 'Top 10 Countries of Birth for Recent Arrivals', or recent migrants, included seven Asian countries, India, China, Philippines, Malaysia, South Korea, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka. In addition, 12% of Australians report they are of Asian descent (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). Despite this diversity of Asian presence in the country, many of my informants felt that the Australians they encountered had a poor sense of multiracialism and multiculturalism, specifically a lack of awareness and knowledge of the vast range of cultures and peoples encapsulated by the term 'Asia'.

One significant trope is that dark-skinned Asians are not labelled 'Asian', but 'Indian', regardless of their actual nationalities. Having spent 23 years in Perth, Junyu felt that Australians usually categorize race as 'White people', 'Black people', 'Indians', and 'Asians'. He adds that his Australian friends generally perceive 'Asians' as being from China:

. . . that's seriously how they categorize it here in Australia (laughs), the four categories . . . well when my friends refer to "Asian", they refer to . . . China I guess? Like, you're a Chinese, regardless of whether you're from Singapore or yeah . . .

Sancia, who identifies as 'Singaporean-Japanese', feels that her Australian friends similarly perceive 'Asia' as 'China':

My Australian friends they just, they don't know. Like some of them, I think their range [of] "Asian countries" is restrictive to like, Chinese, Japanese . . . they don't really know . . . more of them . . . "just Asian" . . . they don't understand. They just think Chinese is "Chinese" . . . like "China" Chinese yeah.

Arthur, who has spent 15 years in Perth after his family migrated, echoes Junyu's perception that 'Asia' excludes darker-skinned nationalities:

So it's like a stereotypical person in Perth . . . whenever I think of "Asian" I think of like, those in the East side or whatever, like the Malaysians, Singaporeans . . . So not like the Indian Asians? I think we classify Indians as "Indians" . . . (laughs)

Having migrated at the age of eight, Arthur was more conscious in making distinctions between East Asians. He said his peer groups generally perceive only 'two types of Asians', the 'very Asian' who came to Perth to

'study', versus the Australian-born Asians or those who migrated at a very young age with their families and are thus 'more local'. Fozdar and Perkins report that an 'undercurrent of Eurocentrism' in Australian multiculturalism discourse means 'migrant groups were treated in monolithic essentialist terms, ignoring their internal diversity' (2014:123). Hence, despite identifying as a 'Japanese-Chinese person', Arthur received more attention regarding his status as a 'migrant Asian' in Australia rather than his mixed Asian heritage.

Sancia and Kakeru came to Australia to pursue their undergraduate studies. They identify as 'Singaporean-Japanese' and 'Japanese-Singaporean', respectively, but only Kakeru felt that local Australians were more likely to read his 'Japaneseness'. Both of them suggested that it was their names that signposted their racial identity; Kakeru had a Japanese first and last name, whereas Sancia's racially ambivalent first name did not immediately mark her race until she revealed her Japanese-sounding surname. However, both felt that 'pure Japaneseness' was misattributed due to a lack of cultural understanding from their 'White Australian' friends.

Kakeru admitted that he would not have passed for a Japanese person if his local friends 'knew some Japanese people' and had a benchmark to match him against, or if they were familiar with Japanese-accented English and 'figured out' that he did not 'sound like a Japanese'. Sancia laments being told that she 'doesn't look Japanese' by 'White Australian' friends. She believes their perceptions of Japanese appearance was limited to 'reading manga and anime', which gave the impression that in order for her to 'feel Japanese' to her friends she had to be cute or have a 'cute way of talking'. Sancia also implies that her local friends' lack of access to and knowledge of other Japanese people led to a stereotypical imaginary of how Japanese women ought to 'look'.

Brothers Hiroki and Akio, who were interviewed separately, both felt that mentioning their 'Japanese-Chinese' parentage only encouraged their peers to see them as being 'just Asian' and hindered discussions about their varied racial experiences. Hiroki says:

Yeah I used to say I was "Japanese and Chinese"? Which made me "*way Asian*" apparently? (laughs) I don't know, my friends used to say like, "you're the most Asian person we know", something like that.

Hiroki now refers to himself as either 'Asian' or 'Japanese', and no longer brings up the 'Chinese side' of his mixed race unless necessary. Similarly, Akio says that his friends would 'jokingly' say his Japanese-Chinese mixed race made him '*super Asian*'. He has considered presenting himself more explicitly as 'Japanese-Shanghai', since his father was born and raised in Shanghai, but feels that many Australians who have not travelled to China would not understand that there are distinctive cultural differences between people from Shanghai and other parts of China. Hence, reducing

his 'Shanghainese' ethnicity into the simplified 'Chinese' race became a convenient communicative marker.

Despite a collective lament over their Australian friends' lack of cultural knowledge, exchange student Erina felt the country's multicultural environment more saliently in comparison to her country of residence, Japan, which she feels is 'monocultural' or a 'monosociety'. Erina had previously only perceived herself as 'Japanese' until she spent one year in a university in Perth. As a result, she now identifies as 'Japanese-Korean'. It was in Australia that she first met people of all races and ethnicities, and the experience made her more aware of her mixed race identity:

Japanese society is very . . . different from Australia . . . I went to Australia I met many people from Africa, or Europe, or Singapore, or Malaysia, or many different countries, so that is why maybe I felt like it's a little bit important to *confirm* my nationality or my ethnicity as well. . . . now actually I'm sort of looking for something . . . a hint.

In this sense, Erina understood herself better as a 'racial being' through 'encounters with other groups who have different racial heritages than [her] own' (Hall & Turner 2001: 83). This transformation in her racial identity is particularly significant because Erina says she has never been to Korea, cannot speak the language, and had previously never felt any 'connection', 'relationship', and 'feeling' for her Korean 'half'. Erina said that her newly found motivation to claim her mixed race heritage is 'surprising' to her, given that she had spent all her life in Japan and grew up in what she felt was essentially 'Japanese culture'. Erina's experience thus echoes Hall's (1980) and Mass (1992) propositions that the strength of a person's identification with a group may not always correspond with their actual cultural knowledge.

### Perceiving Ambivalent Mixed Race Bodies

As mentioned earlier, the East Asian mixed race participants in this research rarely find their mixed heritage acknowledged due to the phenotypical closeness between both their racial sides. None of them felt that their manner of dress or behaviour would indicate their mixed race in any way. In the rare few instances where their mixed race identity was recognized, however, these individuals reported facial features as subtle cues.

Japanese-Korean Erina, who came to Perth for a year-long exchange programme, reported that the fellow 'Japanese' students on the exchange programme thought she looked more 'Korean' than Japanese, given the shape of her face:

the shape of my face is very round (giggles) but usually Japanese people don't have such a round face line, so [they said] this is very Korean (laughs).

Erina adds that this was a revelation to her because she felt she 'did everything as how other Japanese [would] do things' and strongly believed 'no one could tell' her mixed race heritage. That the shape of her face would be a subtle cue for a racial code surprised her.

For Sancia, her 'big eyes', 'deep set eyes', and 'double eyelids' were usual conversation starters leading to the few discussions with her White Australian friends about her mixed race background. She admits that 'Asians have, like, small eyes . . . you know, straight lines . . . extremely small', but adds that she has 'unusually big eyes for an Asian'. This indicator seemed to signal her mixed heritage, although most people could not tell exactly 'what mix' Sancia was until she explained her parentage to them. Thus, although not explicitly signposting her mixed race, Sancia's unusual features garnered interest in her background on a few occasions.

This was not the case for most of the other participants—phenotypic cues were not particularly helpful in marking their mixed race identities. Rather, if anything, many felt that their full name was the clue to either 'reveal', indicate, or obscure their mixed race identity. In the first instance, where their White Australian friends correctly identified them as mixed, it was due to first and last names which, when put together, obviously signal a racial blend, although it is not immediately clear what that 'blend' is. Both Sancia and Erina report having 'ambiguous-sounding', European first names that are not distinctly tied to any East Asian culture. Sancia says that while her first name is Latin, her Japanese middle name and last name show that 'it's really obvious' she is part Japanese. On the other hand, Erina, who has a distinctively Japanese last name, felt that it was her European-sounding first name that suggested her mixed heritage even though she 'looks and sounds completely Japanese':

Some people told me Russians also have this name . . . I know many people ask me if it is Japanese name or maybe English name . . . maybe for different people from different countries, sometimes my name shows [my mixed race] because usually Japanese name is like, "Hanako", or like, those kinds of [typical Japanese] names.

In the second instance, conversations about mixed race arose when informants felt an incongruity between their phenotype and their full names. Akio, for example, has a distinctively Japanese first and last name. However, he often meets people, especially 'older people with an Asian heritage', who perceive him as being 'a Chinese'. Akio suspects that the assumption that most Asians are of Chinese origin is likely because 'there are more people with a Chinese heritage living in Australia' than any other East Asian race (cf. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). It is only when he offers his full name to new acquaintances that the opportunity arises to talk about his Japanese-Chinese background.



In the third instance, where some informants felt that the race expressed by their full names and phenotype appeared congruent, these factors appeared only to contribute to the further obscurement of their mixed race. For example, Kakeru thinks he gives 'an impression that [he is] *just* pure Japanese instead of being mixed with Chinese' because he appears phenotypically Japanese and has a Japanese first and last name. Similarly, Arthur has a Chinese middle and last name with 'no hint of Japanese in it', which when taken together with his 'Chinese looking' facial features, obscures his Japanese half altogether. For this reason, both of them have had to initiate conversations about their heritage in contexts in which they wish to demonstrate their mixed race, such as when they were befriending international students from Japan, or when inviting peers into their family home for the first time. On the other hand, Hiroki, whose father is Chinese and mother is Japanese, identifies more as 'a Japanese', owing to his upbringing. He feels no desire to claim or explore his Chinese heritage, as he has never experienced it firsthand, and does not view it as necessary or as having an impact on his everyday life. Thus, it was not an issue to him that his distinctively Japanese first and last name and 'Japanese-looking' appearance completely obscured his Chinese heritage.

### Selective Posturing of Mixed Race Identity

Discussions of how some informants tended to highlight one 'half' of their race over the other also revealed a perceived 'hierarchy' of East Asian identity, based on presenting oneself to solicit favour or homophily among different social groups. Arthur, Sancia, and Hiroki point out that there are more Chinese than Japanese in Perth, thus making their Japanese 'halves' a more valuable feature. Arthur says:

I have noticed that when I tell people I'm "half-half", people are more interested in the Japanese side because there are more Chinese in Perth I think? So it's more of a rarity I guess (laughs).

Reiterating Arthur's sentiments, Sancia compares the Chinese in Perth to the Filipinos in Singapore, who have immigrated in vast numbers while seeking professional and blue-collar jobs. She explains that Filipinos may feel a stigma in Singapore and believes the same happens to the Chinese nationals in Australia. Sancia feels that highlighting her 'Japanese half' over her 'Chinese half' would place her more favourably among Australians:

In Australia I think it's . . . better if I say I'm Japanese, cos I think some, like, locals, they get kind of, like . . . not "annoyed", but it's the same as like Singaporeans who see Filipinos everywhere, but here it's like Chinese, so if you say Japanese they feel like you're different, like oh, at least like, not another Chinese, or like not another Filipino . . .

Hiroki similarly explicitly states that emphasizing his 'Japanese' identity over his 'Chinese' identity probably helped him 'gain favour' when he was speaking to a non-Japanese audience. He thought that this intentional posturing would make him appear more exotic and solicit more interest and curiosity from his audience, especially since the majority of East Asians in Perth were 'just Chinese', as was the case in his high school in Australia. Being the only Japanese person made him feel more 'unique'. In both this and the previous cases, participants found that strategically posturing one racial identity over another 'brings with it privileges or deprivations that affect [their] relationships with others and [their] relation to the world' (Mohanty 1995: 109). For this reason, many of them preferred to selectively highlight one half of their mixed race heritage over another if they felt it brought them more favour in a particular social setting.

For many of these mixed race young people who have spent some years at school in Australia, the racial makeup of their social groups affected how salient their own mixed race heritage was. Junyu and Arthur both spent most of their lives in Perth as Australian citizens and experienced their high school years predominantly with White Australians. It was not until later at university that they found themselves mixing more with Asian-born Australians.

Arthur, who identifies as 'Japanese-Chinese', reports that whereas his high school friends were mostly White Australians who saw him as the 'token Asian' in school, most of his current friends at university are Australian-born Asians or migrants from Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong, among whom his Asian identity was a non-issue. At university, he joined an 'Asian social club' and muses 'everything just became "Asian"' in that he began spending less time with White Australian friends. He also started attending a local church that was predominantly attended by Australian-born Asians or Asian migrants. In these settings, Arthur's Asian friends tended to identify strongly with their (and their parents') countries of origin. However, having moved to Perth at a young age and owing to his being surrounded by White Australians in the formative years of high school, Arthur says he still 'feels Australian' and rarely identifies with his parents' prior countries of residence (Hong Kong and Japan). He asserts that 'Perth is home' more than any part of the world, and perceives his *cultural* identity as an 'Australian' as his master status over his *racial* identity as 'Japanese-Chinese'.

Similarly, Junyu reports that his White Australian high school peers generally perceived him as being 'Asian', which he felt was 'sad', since it erased the mixed heritage in which he took pride. However, he is now 'not too fussed' and would not generally specify his mixed race heritage unless people mistake him as being of a different nationality altogether:

If they make a mistake and say that I am, for example, half Indonesia or Thai or Viet, then I would say no, I am *this*. But if they say I'm "Asian" then it's okay, it's not *wrong* (laughs).

But inside, it appears that Junyu does care about the difference. If given the opportunity, he self-identifies as 'Australian-Singaporean'. He has since lost contact with his White Australian high school friends and is no longer branded the token 'Asian' in the group. Although he currently has a racially diverse group of friends at university, Junyu prefers to spend time with his newfound group of Asian friends and attributes this preference to a mutual understanding of small everyday practices:

I think culturally speaking I feel more comfortable around [my Australian-born Asian friends], because I guess it's the mindset. It's just a little bit different in situations. It's the small things that makes a difference . . . like greetings when someone comes over to your house, calling your [friends'] parents "auntie" or "uncle" . . . it's just a "Japanese" culture . . . "Chinese" culture . . . mannerism.

In a sense, while resisting simplistic brandings of mixed race East Asians as mere 'Asians' during his high school years, Junyu himself presently mobilizes 'Asian' as a valuable catchall category. 'Asian' then becomes shorthand and segregation for groups of people who may share similar cultural practices and beliefs, among whom Junyu experiences homophily and comfort.

Like Junyu and Arthur, Hiroki also found himself to be the only person of Asian descent among his peer group of predominantly White Australians. While he used to specify his race as 'Japanese' or 'Japanese-Chinese', he found this exchange to be cumbersome because his friends seemed to perceive all the Asians in his school as a single collective, and being labelled 'just Asian' was a convenient shorthand for all of them. Hiroki explains:

I used to [clarify] but I don't really care anymore because like . . . when [I] first went to high school, a lot of people called me "Asian" as a nickname, so I just like accepted that. I don't really say I'm "Japanese", you know, I don't think it mattered to *them*, so I just rolled with it I guess (laughs) . . .

Similarly, Sancia spends much of her time around non-Asians as well—her basketball team apparently comprises only 'White Australians', apart from herself. Although she primarily self-identifies as 'Singaporean-Japanese', Sancia finds it 'much easier' to 'just say' she is 'Singaporean' because introducing her mixed race heritage would be cumbersome, and her local friends might not have a nuanced understanding of 'different types' of 'Asian' races.

Sancia's experience reflects earlier research on mixed race. In their study of Asian-White and Asian-minority mixed race persons in the United States, Hall and Turner highlight that mixed race persons may 'feel more comfortable' identifying with either half of their race when there is a 'critical mass' of either monoethnic racial group in their community (2001: 88). Junyu, Hiroki, and Sancia, however, have had experiences in predominantly White

Australian contexts in which neither of their Japanese or Chinese halves could elicit homophily. Hence, while they may have attempted to construct their identities through peer interactions (Wilson in Choudhry 2010: 112) by self-identifying more precisely as 'Australian-Singaporean', 'Japanese', and 'Singaporean-Japanese', respectively, these mixed race East Asians still found themselves being perceived as 'just Asian' as a convenient racial marker among their peers. Evidently, among the social groups of mixed race East Asians, corporeal markers still take precedence over other presentations of the self when identity is being 'assigned' or 'audienced', as the lived realities of my informants have shown.

### **'The Big Reveal'**

Mixed race East Asians in my study engaged in refuting, contesting, or accepting the 'just Asian' label assigned to them among different social groups and in different settings in Australia. This process of 'the big reveal', in which they publicize their complex heritage, is carried out to varying degrees depending on their audience, interest, and motivations. Some would only venture into discussions of their heritage if their relationship with the acquaintance required it. For instance, both Kakeru and Junyu do not mind being perceived as 'Asian' by strangers, acquaintances, or friends they do not feel close to. Junyu feels that his mixed race identity is not as 'important' to him as that the people he meets are not prejudiced against him:

I guess it's not that important, they classify me as Asian . . . I guess if it's close friends I would tell them, but if it's just a, sort of, an acquaintance? I wouldn't really mind if they notice me as Asian . . . I mean, as long as they're not racist, then that's fine. I don't think that that is a problem. . . . Unless they start to attack you personally for . . . the race you are.

Kakeru, on the other hand, is less passive and feels that the perception of his mixed race is a dialogue that requires mutual effort. Thus, he would only divulge his heritage if his conversation partner showed an interest to learn or was genuinely curious about his background:

If I actually see the person for the first time, [someone] I probably would never see again, then I would just leave it as it is. Well . . . why explain to someone whom I don't have to meet any more? If they think I'm "Asian", then [I'm] "Asian", [if] they don't bother to ask further if I'm "Chinese" or "Japanese" or "Korean" or whatever, then it probably wouldn't bug me. I don't care.

Like Kakeru, Akio would also not volunteer information about his mixed race or 'talk about [his] heritage in depth' unless people 'really want to get

to know' him. In a similar vein, and as mentioned earlier, Junyu would also only discuss his mixed race if someone incorrectly read him as 'half Indonesia or Thai or Viet'. He adds that he would be inclined to reveal more about his upbringing and heritage if explicitly asked about his racial ambiguity:

if someone were to say, um . . . *what* Asian are you? (laughs) yeah I feel more inclined to say "Japanese" because that's kind of the household that I've kind of grown up in, so at home we speak Japanese, even though my dad's Singaporean, he speaks Japanese as well . . . I've just been . . . in the culture, and just more comfortable with it.

Earlier on, we discussed Akio, who is often perceived as 'Chinese' based on appearance, but signposted his 'Japanese' identity with his full name. He self-identifies as being a 'Japanese' and signals this in conversations by mentioning that he speaks the Japanese language but not any Chinese languages. Akio also tended to emphasize that it was his father who was born and raised in China, while he has only lived in Singapore (where his Japanese mother was working) and Perth (where the family migrated). He feels this framing would help people 'understand' that he 'sees [himself] as being more "Japanese"'. However, when the context changes and he is speaking with a person whom he knows is Chinese, Akio would reveal the 'Chinese'—and more explicitly, 'Shanghainese'—half of his mixed race to solicit homophily. He explains:

I say this to get them to know me more, and explain that my father is good at Chinese cooking because . . . he was born and raised in Shanghai. To Chinese people, I usually say that I am "Japanese-Shanghainese" as a conversation starter. But often they will then start speaking Chinese and I usually have to say that I only understand Chinese a little, with "a little" said in Shanghainese.

Both Kakeru and Hiroki speak the Japanese language but feel that they are not as fluent as they would like to be. For them, bringing up their mixed race is a strategy to excuse themselves from any cultural faux pas or misunderstandings that may arise. Kakeru specifically refers to this disclosure as a 'safety net':

I would just tell them from the beginning, that, you know, I'm not a "pure Japanese", so probably, you know, it's like a safety net for me? In case my Japanese goes really wrong (laughs) they will realize, they will know beforehand that I am actually not "pure" . . . Yeah.

When Hiroki meets Japanese people, they often read him—based on his phenotype—as being a 'pure Japanese' person and speak to him in the Japanese language. However, he says he usually responds in English because he

is 'self-conscious' about his Japanese language ability, and to 'avoid' being 'judged' if he 'speaks kind of weird'. As the biographical narratives have demonstrated, racial identity is 'influenced by historical, cultural, and contextual factors' (Rockquemore & Laszloffy 2005: 121). Mixed race identity is thus more contextual than static, more fluid than categorically stringent, and continually develops throughout a person's lifetime.

### East Asian Mixed Race in Australia

Mixed race persons around the world experience different degrees of ambiguity in the ways their heritage is marked, conveyed, perceived, and negotiated by others. Current studies of mixed race identity have focused on those whose distinctive phenotype clearly marks their mixed heritage (such as Black-White Americans), and those whose phenotypic ambivalence is a concern for making claims of authenticity, belonging, and practice (such as Aboriginal-White Australians). The participants in the current research, however, are mixed race East Asians whose phenotypic closeness does not typically mark them as mixed race individuals. Furthermore, racial diversity in Australia has largely been framed in terms of nationalities and citizenships, in which non-White Australians residing in the country are subjected to an etic categorizing by their country of origin, rather than by an emic understanding of their self-identified race and culture. Partly because the complexities of race are not yet engaged with in Australia in a sophisticated way (Fozdar & Perkins 2014), visually ambiguous mixed race East Asians in Australia often find their full heritage being unacknowledged and obscured in the country's cultural diversity and growing migrant pool.

The experiences of these seven mixed race East Asians generally suggest that despite being immersed in a country that is statistically multicultural, the White Australians they have encountered still appear to lack an awareness of the diverse types of 'Asians' around the world. Instead, mixed race persons from East Asia are often stereotyped by their similar phenotypes and reduced to being 'just Asian'. In the absence of phenotypic features as racial cues, one's full name appears to be one of the more convenient shorthands for referencing mixed race. However, this is not always effective. For this reason, mixed race East Asians selectively portray their mixed race identity to varying degrees depending on the context or favour it may gain them. Lastly, mixed race East Asians negotiate revelations and discussions of their identities strategically, contingent upon their audience, interest, and motivations.

In our conversations, my informants were often self-reflexive about their mixed race, whether this identity was salient or obscured in Australia. They referenced their heritage in a number of ways: in celebration as 'special', 'unique', and a 'rarity'; in humour as a 'weird mix' and 'fun fact'; in pathology as 'not pure' and 'not normal'; and in dialectics as being 'complex' and 'complicated'. They also conceptualized their mixed race not only in

terms of actual 'race', but by nationality, country of residence, language, and cultural upbringing (see also Reddock 2014, Ualiyeva & Edgar 2014). Although they had varying attachments to their identity, being a mixed race East Asian person in Australia impacted informants' notions of race and identity. While some were encouraged to explore more strategic renderings of their mixed race, others realized they preferred to be acknowledged by other identity markers. These were largely guided by their experiences with White Australians during their early school years, or out of personal preference regarding the extent of the effort they were willing to expend engaging with transient conversation partners. Some informants took their visibility constraints as motivation to further explore their mixed heritage and to educate their White Australian friends to combat everyday casual racism. Other informants felt their visibility constraints enabled them to identify with one particular aspect of their multiracial identity, which they took to be their master status. In general, however, these East Asian mixed race persons agreed that living in Australia had enriched their own consciousness of being a visually 'unmarked' person in a multicultural society that ironically branded them by colour.

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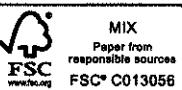
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