Kelsey Sullivan: My name is Kelsey Sullivan. Today is October 6, 2025, and I am interviewing Daniel Chi through Zoom for the Colby College Korean Oral History Project. Daniel, do you agree to grant Colby College permission to archive and publish this interview for educational purposes?

Daniel Chi: Yes.

KS: Okay, awesome. Start by telling me a little bit about yourself, just simply where you grew up and where you're born.

DC: Yeah, so my name is Daniel. My Korean name is Buhyun. I was born and raised in Flushing, Queens, where there is a huge Korean population. And I lived there until about [age] eight or nine, and then I moved to New Jersey. And then I went to college in Maine at Bowdoin College. Both of my parents are Korean immigrants. It's a bit of a weirder history, though. My mom immigrated directly from Korea, whereas my dad, he was actually born in Brazil. After the Korean War, most of my family on my dad's side moved down to São Paulo. There's a huge community over there. And he moved up to the US at some point, I think in the ‘90s.

KS: Going back to yourself, you graduated from Bowdoin in 2024. Tell me what you've been up to post-grad. And I know you just got settled in Austria and everything, which is very exciting.

DC: Yes, since graduating, I've been working through Fulbright Austria as an English Language Assistant. So, I work in a high school setting, and I go to classes, and I share US culture,

language, and just practice English with a bunch of high schoolers. Anywhere between I think fourteen, to I think now twenty-years-old, which is kind of a huge range, but it's super fun to do that. I'm doing it this year, and I've done it last year as well.

KS: What made you want to take German at Bowdoin?

DC: I had the wonderful pleasure of graduating high school during the beginning of COVID. And during that March of 2020, I kind of started getting bored because we're just waiting to go into college, but there's not really much else to do. I decided, “maybe I'll just start learning German for fun.” It just kind of continued and at Bowdoin, I just continued that path. And it was super fun to continue it. And I really loved the department over there. It was just a blast to learn a language that I had no connection to and a culture I had no connection to.

KS: But then you also speak Korean as well. And you were taught this growing up. Can you tell me more about that experience?

DC: Yes, I think that – especially learning, I guess now, a third language – it really puts a bit of perspective in my head what it's like being a language learner because the way that I process both Korean and English in my head is very different from the way that I think about German. To circle back, my Korean also isn't the best. I only speak it at home with my parents, and sometimes with some friends. Whereas my German, I feel like I think a lot more about the grammatical structures that I'm using, and even the word choice. And it's always a little battle in

my head of how to properly put out phrases. Whereas with Korean or English, it just flows out and allows me to just keep going and going.

KS: Was it just your parents that taught you Korean, or did you ever have any formal classes or lessons like that when you're younger?

DC: Yes, I think… I think the stereotype that I have in my head is that most Korean American kids, they end up going to Hangul hakgyo, which is like Korean language school. Every Saturday for a while, I would go to a language school, usually in a church or something like that. And there I learned how to read and write in Korean, which I think was a really valuable skill to have. Also just some vocab and things like that. But I did at such a young age that I don't really remember my experience besides learning how to read and write. And that's just something that I know how to do.

KS: If Korean was offered at Bowdoin, do you think you would have taken it?

DC: I think I probably… I was thinking about this for a long time, but I think if Korean was offered at Bowdoin, I probably wouldn't have taken German. I always think it's so interesting when schools offer both Chinese and Japanese, but they don't have Korean as well. It just feels like there's levels to the culture, I guess. And that's kind of how I always viewed it in my head. I think now in the last five or so years, that's kind of changed a lot, especially with the emergence of K-culture in the mainstream. For instance, this summer, something like *KPop Demon Hunters* was such a rage to the point where, at a summer camp I was working at in Boston, small kids

who weren't Asian or had any Asian heritage were coming up and singing songs from this movie. And for me, that was something that I couldn't really fathom maybe even five, six years ago. And reaching that kind of in the mainstream that some other Asian cultures do have… I do think that it would be really nice if Bowdoin did offer Korean. I do think that it's kind of a missed opportunity because it is its own unique culture and it has its own unique stories, just like any other culture.

KS: Then I guess your Korean experience at Bowdoin you found in the Korean Student Association. Can you tell me a little bit more about that experience?

DC: Yes, my first year of college also was impacted a lot by COVID. I'm not really sure what the protocols at Colby were like, but at least at Bowdoin our freshman year in the fall semester only the freshmen and international students or students who needed emergency housing were allowed to stay on campus during that time. So, finding community was something that was really hard, because when you are in a college setting, I do feel like a lot of that impetus does come from upperclassmen to build that community and welcome freshmen into the things like the traditions, the cultures, the clubs that do exist on campus. And that was really a difficult thing to navigate on your own as a freshman. We were very lucky that we had a bunch of Korean seniors, juniors, and sophomores who were on campus during that time. And they did a really big effort in order to reach out to the Korean freshmen that were on campus, like myself and a bunch of my friends. We kind of snuck around and cooked food and things like that, which is really fun. That's kind of how I got started in the KSA (Korean Student Association). And that experience really helped me feel at home, even though Bowdoin really felt like a very different place to

anywhere else that I've ever been. And additionally, after that, my sophomore year, I decided I really wanted to be a part of the board and be a part of that community building aspect, especially now that everyone was back on campus my second year. And we did a bunch of things like hosting events. We did *gimbap* (rice roll) making things. I think we did a bunch of dinners every week. That was a super fun experience for me. And ever since then, I've been on the board. I was on the board my entire time at Bowdoin between my sophomore, junior and senior year. And ever since, I think the club has really just kept growing and growing every year, which was super exciting to see, and a really rewarding experience, I would say.

KS: Was it mostly Korean students, like Korean Americans that were a part of that society? Or were there other people that ended up joining? As you said, it's starting to grow larger.

DC: Yes, I think that the general perception is that the Asian population at Bowdoin has generally increased over the past few years. I think that really helped us in terms of growing. I think a vast majority of the kids who were actively within the KSA were of Korean descent, either Korean American or a part of that larger Korean diaspora population. We did have some people who were also from Korea as well. That also didn't mean that people from other cultures or other backgrounds didn't take part in KSA events. Whenever we would have a big food event, I think a lot of people would bring their friends and everything. And honestly, I think that was a really rewarding experience where people were able to come and enjoy food they've never had before. People would bring their friends and being like, “you should try this because this is my favorite thing in the world.” I think in terms of growth, I think more people are just more open

and willing to try something, especially if they have someone who can pull them in as well. That was a super fun thing for us, too.

KS: You said you kind of – through that program you kind of find your own community at Bowdoin. How would that compare to the community you had at home?

DC: At home, I think also it was a little bit more tricky as well. Flushing was a wonderful place for me to grow up. I think up until nine, I had a huge group of Korean friends and things growing up. But when you're nine, especially at my old age, most nobody really had a smartphone back then. Social media wasn't really prevalent. It wasn't a thing when I moved away. We weren't able to really keep in touch. And when we moved to New Jersey, I moved into a place where there wasn't a lot of Asian diversity. I was the only me – my brother and my cousin were the only three Korean people in my entire school of I think 2000 kids or so. That in itself was pretty difficult. I think that also has set me up to being very willing to share my own cultural experiences and whatnot with people. At least my own community in New Jersey, I felt like mostly came from me going to places like Palisades Park or Fort Lee where there are huge Korean American populations and just interacting with people there.

KS: At home, besides your parents and your brother, do you have any family that was close or even that you visited a lot within the US?

DC: Yes, my dad's brother also lives around there. We would hang out a lot, and we also had family visiting all the time. We have family up in L.A., so we would always see family every

now and then, and a bunch of family friends. I think in terms of general community, I also did have Korean friends who lived in a town over. We would always hang out and things like that. I would always hang out in Palisades Park, which is super fun.

KS: Shifting topic a little bit, can you talk more about your parents? Let's start with your mom. As you mentioned, she was born in Korea. Can you tell me a little bit about her history, her story and how she got here?

DC: Yes, she doesn't really talk about how she got here. I just do know that I think some point in the ‘90s, her entire family kind of moved over to the New York City area. She went to college here at Queens College, which is right in Queens in New York. Then she's just been around, I guess. She doesn't really talk much about her story. It's really difficult for me to really give anything, fortunately.

KS: That's fine. Your dad also has a pretty interesting story. Another extra step before the U.S., one might say. Can you tell me a little bit about his story?

DC: Yes, he's the middle child of three. His sister was born in Korea. But like I said, most of my family, they moved to Brazil during that time, and he was born in Brazil along with his younger brother. Whenever he talks about growing up in Brazil, it does seem like a lot of it is rooted in racism that he would face and bullying and whatnot. I think mostly because one, the Asian population there wasn't very big, specifically the Korean population. I sometimes find ways of relating to his own experiences where I think when I moved to New Jersey, questions I would

hear a lot are like, “Are you Chinese?” or things like that. Whereas for him, it was like, “Are you Japanese?” because of the populations that are moving over there. At some point him and his family, his mom, his dad and his brother, they all moved over to Los Angeles. They lived there for a very long time. During the ‘90s, during the L.A. riots, he decided that he needed to move and moved over to the East Coast to New York, which is where he met my mom, and I was born. Sometimes he talks about things like the L.A . riots and how difficult it was for him, because most of his friends lost their entire businesses, their entire lives from that whole thing.

KS: Did his parents have a business there in L.A.?

DC: I think so. My understanding is that they had a cleaning business of some kind. They would go into office buildings and they would go in and clean the entire building. They would do contracts with bigger companies and whatnot. But I don't think that itself was affected by the riots. It was more where he was living and also what his entire network of friends and community was going through at the time.

KS: I know this might be a stretch, but do you recall anything your dad or grandparents may have said about –more your grandparents' side – of why they moved from Korea and those motivations, especially after the Korean War? Or any bits of information you can share from that?

DC: Yes, I think in terms of moving to Brazil – it was I mean – the situation in Korea was not very good after the war. I think I remember hearing that our (Korea’s) GDP was one of the

lowest in the world at that point in time, which sits in such stark contrast to what we see today and what South Korea is. I think that because of that, our family just really wanted to find new opportunity. Brazil was a place where they perceived to be a lot of opportunity for their family to grow. So, they got on a boat and they hopped over across the Pacific. I think that's kind of the motivation as well. I think that it was also quite difficult for my grandpa – my dad's side as well – mostly because he was born in the North prior to the division of the country (Korea). I do hear about it a lot, but as my grandpa, as my grandparents' dementia continues to affect them, parts of stories begin changing and it becomes a really weird mixing of history. But he did talk a lot about how there is family on the other side that he doesn't know if they're still alive.We don't know if there is any family on the other side. That in itself, I think, makes it a bit hard for me to completely understand the motivations of moving as well. Besides finding opportunity and getting out.

KS: Do you recall why specifically Brazil? Was it just that [Brazil] was an area they knew that there's an opportunity? Or was there any other motivations behind that rather than the U.S. or other parts, since there is a very large Korean diaspora across the entire world?

DC: Yes, I think it's mostly just for opportunity. I do think that it's a question that my parents probably never asked their parents. I think that I remember reading or hearing analysis about how generations talk about things, and how the first generation, my grandparents, they have all the stories. And then the second generation, my parents, were never taught to ask. Then we're the ones always asking questions. I do think it's a question that they've never asked, because it's not a thing that we've ever really heard a clear, distinct answer for.

KS: Can you tell me a little bit about how your parents met, and especially about – they had two very different migration experiences and histories that helped shape their identities and kind of how that shaped their relationship together.

DC: The way that they always tell me the story is always that they were at a restaurant or something with mutual friends and then their friends kind of matched them up together, and it kind of just went from there. They don't really tell us much about the time before us. Maybe it was happier, we can say. They met at a bar or at a restaurant with a bunch of mutual friends. I think growing up with kind of a little bit of that diverse background was super interesting as well. I think it opened me up to being really adaptable with a bunch of different cultures really quickly. I think even just growing up in New York does that to you anyways. But even at home, we would have *feijoada* (black bean stew) some nights or *kimchi-jjigae* (kimchi stew) other nights. We'd have that mix of food that I feel it's really hard to get unless you're ordering food every night or you're in a college dining hall that does it really well like Bowdoin. I think another thing is that my dad – he talks a lot about how growing up, he didn't really speak Korean all that much. Once I was born, because I'm the oldest one, he really, really wanted to change that. He wanted to make sure that his kids were able to speak Korean and were able to communicate in Korean and also really connect with the culture. He made a really, really huge effort to start learning the language himself, so that he sets an example for us that we should be better about learning about our own history and our own heritage and also even our language. I think for me and my brother, that wasn't really something that we lost out on. I know that I said my Korean

isn't very good, but I also know other Korean Americans who don't speak Korean. So, I do think that it does push me to learn every day.

KS: Growing up, what memories or traditions can you recall that to you were distinctly Korean? Or even any sort of traditions around holidays that you may have partaken in?

DC: Yes, I mean, I think a big one is during Lunar New Year. We would always receive money from both our grandparents and also my parents. I think that was a big thing. I think having *mandu-guk* (dumpling soup) is something that I always look forward to on New Year's as well – to a point where I started helping my mom make it, which is really fun. Another really big thing, I think most of the things that are times where I started really connecting more with the culture come from college. Is that okay if I talk about that? I think at Bowdoin, it became really apparent to me that if I wanted to feel connected back to home – if that makes any sense – those are experiences that I would have to create for myself. One thing I started learning how to do is learning how to cook a lot of Korean dishes that traditionally I just can't get up in Maine. Watching Maangchi[1] recipes, I started learning how to make things – what's it called? *Miyeok-guk* (seaweed soup) for my birthday. My sophomore year of college, once I finally had access to a legitimate kitchen, I started making my own *Miyeok-guk* for my birthday. I've been doing that every year so far, because my birthday falls at a point where I will almost never be home. Every year it comes out perfect in my eyes and it tastes and it reminds me of home. Even then we also do *Chuseok* (harvest festival) at Bowdoin as well. That was a huge thing that I

[1] Maangchi is a website featuring Korean recipes by Emily Kim (Kim Kwang-sook), who is a Korean American YouTuber and author specializing in Korean recipes.

really wanted to push forward my sophomore year, and that was a huge success. Every year we did it. I think that those kinds of cultural connections to me always brought me back home.

KS: That sounds awesome. I'd love to try some of those dishes. Would you say that a lot of the dishes overlap with things you had at home and at college? Also at college, did you find a lot of other people part of the association (KSA) also shared the same meals growing up as you?

DC: Yes, so I think - could you re-ask the question? I'm so sorry.

KS: Yes, did you find it, at Bowdoin, that a lot of the people in the association (KSA) also grew up with the same meals you cooked at home? Or did you learn anything new at your time at Bowdoin?

DC: Yes, I think most of us grew up with the same-ish sorts of things, especially if your parents really enjoy cooking. I think that helps a lot. Also growing up in a place like Queens and then moving to somewhere close to Palisades Park, it means that we always have a plethora of options in terms of Korean food. To the point where I think that restaurants are super specialized in even one or two dishes, which I feel for almost any culture is pretty rare, unless you have a really large community. I think for people who grew up in places similar, in L.A., for instance, or in Atlanta or Chicago, those places also have really huge Korean populations where they have very similar experiences. Things like *myeok-guk* are very similar. My favorite dish is *Gamja-tang*, which is a pork bone and potato spicy soup kind of stew thing. I think a lot of people really relate to me liking that because they also really like that dish. I think the one thing that I did notice is we did a

kimchi making thing one time at Bowdoin, and the person who was leading it made *kimchi* in a way that tasted very different than the way that I'm really used to tasting. Besides that, I feel like it tends to be very similar. I do feel like people really feel the most nostalgia, especially when it comes to food, especially when you're super far from home, because it's the one thing that you might think of, right? Everyone needs to eat, and food is a way of bringing yourself back – those flavors, those memories that you associate with those things.

KS: A lot of the food that you eat at home came from your grandparents, those recipes passed down?

DC: Yes, I think my mom ended up just cooking a lot. When I was growing up, my grandma, who's no longer with us on my mom's side, she would also do a lot of cooking. She took care of us most of the time, but I think my mom just knew how to cook most of the things. That's just how I've always seen it. My dad has always liked taking time to learn how to cook new things. But he cooks more of the Western dishes at home. Even things like Brazilian food or if we want pasta or something, he'll always cook that instead. But I always perceive the things that my mom makes as things that she inherently already knew. When I'm home now, I always try to learn something new. But even if I can't do that, I think the internet has become such a good resource in terms of learning how to cook Korean food. If I ever do miss anything, especially now that I live in Austria, I just go to Maangchi's website and I just use that in order to learn how to cook new things.

KS: Would you say that, as you mentioned, that your dad and your parents have really tried to bring a lot of Korean cultural aspects into your house and making sure you know Korean? Would you say that their effort to bring those sort of aspects into your household continued? Or they started when you're younger and continued into your older age into high school? Was that same effort put in throughout the whole time?

DC: I think that it ended up becoming more focused on my academics at some point. I think getting into college and going to a good college was a bit more of the top focus. I do think that it got to a point where the amount of work that we put into bringing culture – it didn't really feel like a work. It just felt like living in a way. It was the way that things are. It's not like we're cooking Korean dishes just to feel closer to home, but it's like these are just the things that we eat at home. I don't think we tried any less harder besides maybe not going to Korean school anymore.

[break in interview]

KS: We were just talking about the traditions you grew up with at home. I was also going to follow up with that question on – were there any cultural aspects that your dad picked up when he was in Brazil for a little bit – more from his grandparents – that is incorporated into your life?

DC: What do you mean? Do you mean aspects of Brazilian culture that they've picked up?

KS: Yes.

DC: I think that… that's a question I've never really thought about. I do think the way that I hear him speaking Portuguese – when I hear him speaking Portuguese, especially with family that comes from Brazil or even his brother and his sister, it feels very different than when he's speaking to me in English. It doesn't mean he's not very – his English is very fluent, but the way that they joke around in Portuguese and things like that, I think is super nice to hear. I don't fully understand everything, but I think in terms of Brazilian culture, I don't really know how much of it that I can really pinpoint exactly to his experiences, besides, once again, the food that he has taught me to even crave. Even now, there's a weird thing where I feel like I only really feel at home if I've had both Korean and Brazilian food. This summer I was in Boston, which is still a bit far away from home. Whenever I felt homesick, I could either go for Brazilian food or Korean food. Things for me, *coxinha* (thigh-shaped croquette), *pastel* (deep-fried hand pie) and even *feijoada* (black bean stew) and things like that. Those are the very basic dishes I know, but those to me also feel very much like home, just because I associate them with memories of going to a Brazilian market to get ingredients and things like that for dinner and things. It feels like a very weird, semi-smaller, similar niche to Korean food in my nostalgia brain, if that makes any sense.

KS: Do you speak any Portuguese?

DC: There was a point in middle school where one time I just got fed up with my dad, because we were with Brazilian family in a car for an hour. They were speaking Portuguese and I couldn't understand anything. I was like, just gotta learn, I guess. So, I picked it up on Duolingo and I

finished the entire track in a month or something. There was a solid time in there where I understood a lot of Portuguese - things that my dad was talking about with his brother or that I would hear over the phone with family in Brazil. But then eventually I think my dad caught on and just stopped for a few months, and then it all just disappeared during that few months. So, I lost it, but I can still kind of understand certain things here and there. That's my silly story with the Portuguese language.

KS: Do you think you'd pick it back up?

DC: I think so – it's very similar to Spanish. I did take Spanish in high school – albeit it is a high school Spanish, so I don't know how much I actually know. But in terms of the words and whatnot, I think that I can usually piece together what certain words are. I think putting them together and forming my own thoughts in that language is very different. But if I can read it, I feel like I can understand some of it or pick up the context clues on what I'm looking at.

KS: Have you been able to use any of your Portuguese, as little as it may be, with your dad's side of the family?

DC: I haven't – but there've been times where, especially if you go to really Brazilian neighborhoods, especially in New Jersey or in Boston. In Boston there's a huge one, I think in Somerville, and there are just huge ones in New Jersey as well. In Newark, I know Newark gets a bad rep, but I think they have some of the best food. If you walk in by yourself, as a lone Korean boy, most times people are a little confused on what's going on. I'll just order something,

a *coxinha* (thigh-shaped croquette) or a *pastel de queijo* (cheese pastry) or something like that. They're always like, “Do you speak Portuguese?” I'm like, “Absolutely not, no.” And they're just really baffled by the whole thing. I think that's the extent of my interaction with the Brazilian culture – at least, it's not something that I was really taught, I wasn't given much Brazilian holidays or anything growing up. It just mostly was the food. I think the food and the language are things that I hear or feel a lot.

KS: Does your dad's side of the family visit often and have you ever gone to Brazil yourself?

DC: I haven't been to Brazil. It is something that I wanna do. I've also never been to Korea as well. Those are two places I really wanna go. But even then, some of my Brazilian family has moved to the U.S. – into Florida, for instance – mostly because of security things. I think my aunt, she got robbed at gunpoint once. For one of the small - is it nuclear families? Is that the word I'm thinking of? They ended up moving to Florida I think kind of because of that incident. I think it is a place that I wanna visit. Growing up, they would visit a lot more, especially because the kids were younger. They had a lot more, or a lot less expectations, I feel like. Travel is kind of more on the table. Whereas now all the kids are my age – they'll have their own lives and they're in college and things like that. It's hard to move the schedules together so that people can come and visit at the same time.

KS: What about your mom's side of the family? Where are they scattered everywhere? Any in the U.S. or still mostly back in Korea? And is she still in touch with a lot of them?

DC: Yes, most of my family that I have met on my mom's side, they actually do live in the U.S. We're pretty scattered across the country though. And the feeling that – or the understanding that I have is most of them immigrated kind of very separate from each other. Whereas my dad's side of the family, I feel like most of them moved to São Paulo together. A lot of my dad's cousins and my dad's side of the family, they all grew up together. Whereas a lot of my mom's side of the family, they've kind of had their own families in different parts of the U.S. I have an uncle who came here, I think first. He worked for IBM and everything, back in – I don't know when IBM was popular – and had my aunt and my uncle and they just grew up in the U.S. as Korean Americans. I also have family out in L.A. on my mom's side as well, [and] Virginia. My mom, her brother, and my aunt – who's her sister as well – they all live in the New York City area. Those are the different clusters that at least I know about. I do know we have some family back in Korea, but I haven't really met any of them.

KS: Did your mom and all of your family that's over here, they all moved around the same time, within a few years of each other or was it more spread out?

DC: I think it was more spread out. My aunt and uncle who were born in the U.S., I think they're about the same age as my mom is, so they came way before everyone else. Even my Virginia family, I do think that they came here before my mom and her sister and her brother and my grandmother all moved over here too.

KS: Having been born in the U.S. – and so you're a Korean American – how do you perceive your identity as a Korean American, not only just an Asian American in the US, but specifically

a Korean American? How do you navigate those two different worlds of identifying as Korean, but also American?

DC: I do think that there are many levels to really any hyphenated American or just any hyphenated identity. Because especially being Asian American or even Korean American, I do feel like there is a level of where home actually is for you. In the U.S., I think the thing that highlighted that for me the most was, especially during COVID, suddenly it was are Asian people really – or are Asian Americans actually American, right? How can you call yourself at home if very quickly you're seen as an enemy by a lot of people? That was a really big moment for me as well. I think that was always super hazy after that. Then even if I were to go back to Korea, right? I grew up in America, I have a lot of Americanisms, right? Things the way I interact with - if I'm working at a company structure, I do think that – my understanding is that there's a lot more talking, praising up the higher ups, and I just don't have that within me to do that, right? If I do think something, I will say it. And I do think that in itself is very interesting because there is a perceived fear that I have that I won't be accepted back in that culture because of the cultural changes that I just have on my own, right? I think over time though, it does become easier to know that there are a lot of other people who kind of are in that same boat, where being Korean American doesn't mean that you're alone in that, right? There are other people who are Korean American as well. Some might not think about it all that heavy. It's not the top thing in their mind. For me sometimes, I think about it a lot, especially now being abroad. I do think about that from time to time. Sometimes it's a weird thing to grapple back and forth I feel.

KS: How do you think your identity of being Korean American has changed while being abroad?

DC: I think while being abroad, especially with the job that I have, it's very easy for me to just say that I'm American because that is my job, right? My entire job is sharing whatever they perceive as American culture. I do think that I do take a lot of liberty in that, because to me America has always been framed to me – and I do believe very wholeheartedly that America is a melting pot of different places, of different cultures, right? There is no unique – there's no monoculture in the US that exists, I feel like. And because of that, whenever I do talk about things like holidays and things like that, I always talk about what my family does as well, right? For Thanksgiving, it might not be traditional, but we have turkey of course, but we'll have *galbi* (beef short-ribs) and other Korean food as well, because those are the things that my family most relates to and things that they wanna have on their table. I do think that another thing that I have noticed is that I think the conversations that we have, especially even at college campuses about microaggressions, and realistically just racism, they don't really happen outside of the U.S. to the certain extent that we have them. Even when I am introducing myself and I'm like, “Yeah, my parents are of Korean descent.” Sometimes kids will say things that I know that aren't meant out of harm, but I do have to recognize that they're not conversations that they're having about microaggressions here that we are in the U.S. in the same way. Which sometimes makes me grateful about how diverse the U.S. is and how many conversations we are having about our own diversity. The questions I'm talking about are, let me think, people are like, “Can you also speak Japanese?” “Are you from the North or the South?” Things like that. I know today, if I was in the U.S., most people won't ask me those same questions because we do understand why that might be a problematic thing. But in Europe, they don't have those same conversations I feel.

KS: Before going abroad and having those experiences, do you feel like your identity as a Korean American has shifted throughout your childhood, especially going into college at Bowdoin? Especially as you mentioned before, in the past few years K-pop culture being more accepted and a lot of Korean culture being more widely recognized in the U.S.

DC: I mean… at least in my own personal experience, I think it has always been a shifting thing for me. Growing up in Flushing, I guess Koreanness is not something I've really thought about at all, right? Because one, I'm eight or nine years old, so it's not something that I'm actively thinking about. And two, I came from a community where most people look like me and spoke the same languages as me and ate the same food as me. Moving to New Jersey, I went to school that was predominantly Latino and Black. That was a huge culture shock for me – especially being one of the only Koreans – in a way that the same things I was talking about microaggressions before, kids were also being, racist a little bit to me. I don't think – now that I'm older I know it's not out of a place of hate, but I feel like it's a place out of just not really understanding. It's like when I'd play soccer with kids, they'd call me "Chino" all the time. I understand that for most people is problematic. For me, it was fine. I didn't care and things like that. It really did make me think more about, what does it mean to actually be Korean? Because I wasn't surrounded by people that look like me anymore. Furthermore, even at Bowdoin, I think that changed. I think over that entire time, Korean culture has steadily been on the rise. When I moved, it was 2012, so Gangnam Style first came out. I think that was people's first real introduction to Korean culture. Ever since then, it's been BTS in 2016, [20]17 had their huge breakout year. Even within huge Spanish communities, I feel like Korean dramas have always

been pretty big, but now it's entering a mainstream in a way that I haven't really seen it. Even my students in Austria are asking me if I've seen some K-dramas and I'm like, that's crazy. I've been talking about things like Squid Games, but real K-dramas. That's something that's always been super fun [and] funny to see. I think in a way it does really make me wonder what it would be like to grow up now, as a Korean American versus what we had to go through, right? Because, we didn't really have that many Korean American role models growing up. I think the most that I had were YouTubers, right? Even then most of them were Asian Americans. Ryan Higa was a really famous, popular YouTuber back in the day. There are places like Wong Fu Productions and Freddie Wong, all these people making just YouTube content. Those are the only Asian faces I would really see in a media that weren't portrayed as being nerdy and whatnot. But now we have such great representation of every kind, I feel like in all forms of media and to a way that it permeates the mainstream. That makes me really happy for this generation of Korean Americans that are growing up. I think it's fun seeing the rise of culture.

KS: You were obviously - you said you were born in the United States and you've never been to Korea. How has that shaped your own relationship that you have with Korea?

DC: I think in a way it makes me sometimes feel like an outsider, mostly because I haven't been to the motherland (Korea) at all. It's something that I've always wanted to do but for always a myriad of different reasons – most recently, the COVID pandemic was the big one. I haven't been able to go, but I do think that I really enjoy catching up with whatever's going on in the country, politically even beyond the culture stuff. I do think that the political stuff is also very interesting, at least within the last few years, especially with the presidencies and whatnot. I do

think “outsider” is the first word that comes to mind when I think of how I feel about my Koreanness when I think of Korea. I do think that in a way, it makes me feel a lot closer to that identity of being Korean American or less, just because those are the experiences that I have. Those are the stories that I know. Especially now with so much more media, films, things like *Minari*[2], even *Everything Everywhere All At Once*. I know that's just a broadly Asian American movie. Those films make me feel way more seen, I think than anything I've seen before.

KS: Do you also – you've touched on this earlier – but do you also feel like an outsider within the U.S., being an American as well?

DC: I think it depends on which situations I'm in. I think during COVID, I think that was probably the time I felt that the most. I think that you only really start feeling - in the U.S., I think only when there is active hate, I do feel the most like an outsider. Sometimes, especially now with the current presidency, I feel like there is a push to kind of feel like you need to assimilate in order to not be hurt by this administration if that makes any sense. You need to find a way to blend in. But, I feel like that's a losing battle and one that I frankly don't care about. I mean even now, I think that with the recent news about the Hyundai and LG plant that just got raided by ICE – I do think that a lot of Koreans, especially Korean immigrants – Korean Americans who thought that they were invisible to this administration, they do think a lot about what does it actually mean to be Korean American, right? Do these people only see us as immigrants, or are we also American as well? I do think that's a question that is slowly starting to be asked more, mostly because there is this perceived whiteness. I think within most Asian

[2] *Minari* is a 2020 film written and directed by Lee Issac Chung, and produced by A24. The film follows a family of South Korean immigrants who move to Arkansas in the 1980s.

American communities that anything that happens to immigrants won't ever happen to us because we're the “good ones”. This model minority myth keeps being perpetuated.

KS: Would you say these feelings – obviously have happened within the presidency and then also this is the second term, so that's taken up a large chunk of both of our lives – would you say that you're optimistic for the identity of Korean Americans going forward that you've seen? Or anything you wanna touch upon and where you hope that more acceptance could be seen in the future in the U.S.?

DC: I do think that there is a lot of divisiveness that's being driven by this administration, but in a way that – like praise and ignorance, not even ignorant, not knowing because you just don't know instead of not knowing because you don't want to know. I do think that things like food, for instance, right, that's always been on the chopping block of how you can divide people, right? “Oh, that food smells stinky” or something like that. Honestly, I do feel like there is a lot of hope that one day people will realize that the diversity that we have is very special in the U.S. Or that everyone will realize that. Honestly, I see it all the time, right. So, I said the *KPop Demon Hunter's* movie for instance, it was crazy to me that even the whitest kids at my summer camp are coming and singing all the songs from the movie. I was like, “Have you seen this?” And they're like, “Yeah, it's my favorite movie.” I think the acceptance of that culture in the mainstream continues to make me think that it's just gonna be widely accepted. I do think that we're at a point where Korean culture is mainstream. It just makes me think about what is gonna continue to be the mainstream and what things are gonna be erased, right? Because I think that happens with any culture, right? Cultures end up becoming reduced down to a few things here

and there, so that becomes more palatable and more understandable to people. Japanese food, for instance, right? If you look at that, most people think of it only really as sushi, ramen, bento boxes. But, if you know anybody who's been to Japan, I haven't been, but if you know anybody who has, you understand the food culture there is way more than those three things. I guess I'm starting to see that with Korean food to a certain extent. I hope those are the things that aren't really erased once we make it into the mainstream. But I feel like it's an inevitable thing to a certain extent.

KS: Is there anything else you'd like to touch upon in this interview today? Anything you mentioned that you want to circle back around – that I may not have asked a follow-up question on?

DC: Yes, I think I'm good.

KS: I think I've gone through my questions and all my follow-up questions, but I wanted to thank you so much for taking the time to interview with me today and share all of your amazing stories. I know this will go forward to being a very productive project that I'm sure, as we talked about the educational aspect of it, that a lot of people can learn from. Thank you so much, Daniel.

DC: Yes, thank you.