UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

"Wanna Get Boba?":

The Bond Between Boba and Asian American Youth in San José, California

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

in Asian American Studies

by

Talitha Angelica Acaylar Trazo

2020

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

"Wanna Get Boba?":

The Bond Between Boba and Asian American Youth

in San José, California

by

Talitha Angelica Acaylar Trazo

Master of Arts in Asian American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles 2020

Professor Victor Bascara, Chair

The tenth largest city in the United States with a population of over 1 million, San José, California resides on the southernmost edge of the Silicon Valley. Though high-tech narratives often subsume this region, a closer examination of San José's (sub)urban landscape reveals the presence of over 100 boba shops and their multiethnic community of local patrons. Boba, a milk tea beverage which originated in Taiwan in the 1980s, made its U.S. debut in the late 1990s when Taiwanese American entrepreneurs aimed to emulate Taiwan's unique boba shop experience in their American hometowns. Over the past 20 years, boba within the United States has morphed into a distinctly Asian American cultural phenomenon, which I argue makes boba a unique lens by which to examine Asian American youth culture. For this ethnographic study, I conducted and analyzed 17 interviews and 156 survey responses from Bay Area-based young adults (between the ages of 18 and 40) with varying degrees of familiarity with San José boba

shops: from the occasional boba drinker to what some may call the "boba addict." I opened the survey to all racial groups but focused my data analysis on those who self-identified as Asian American. I found that boba shops serve as nodes of connectivity that spatially unite Asian American young adults within the sprawling city and its neighboring localities. In addition, veering away from original Taiwanese boba culture, U.S. boba culture resembles and caters to the pan-ethnic Asian American and diverse multiracial community of San José. Overall, the interactions and conversations within and about boba shops illuminate the enduring salience of race and place in shaping how contemporary Asian American young adults negotiate their self-identity, community belonging, and cultural imaginaries.

The thesis of Talitha Angelica Acaylar Trazo is approved.

Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns

Valerie Matsumoto

Victor Bascara, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In December 2018, while studying with my sister, Chantal, at Pop Up Tea in San José, California, I chose my thesis topic. Thank you, Chantal, for patiently watching as I frantically contemplated whether or not to spend the next year-and-a-half studying boba. Thank you to my parents who continuously inspire me to chase my dreams. Thank you to my family across the world and up above. *Maraming salamat. Mahal kita/Gihigugma ko ikaw.*

Thank you to the Asian American Studies Department and Asian American Studies Center for accepting a former Biology and Studio Art major into their worlds. An immense debt of gratitude goes to my thesis committee: Dr. Victor Bascara — for his encouragement as my interim advisor and thesis advisor, guidance throughout our independent study, and boba/foodie show recommendations; Dr. Valerie Matsumoto — for serving as my faculty advisor throughout the IRB process, helping me obtain the Institute of American Cultures (IAC) grant which funded this study, and allowing me to take her course, "Asian American History Through Food"; and Dr. Lucy MSP Burns — for her cultural studies expertise, kind-hearted check-in emails, and the space to present my initial boba findings in her "Pilipino American Experience" course. Thank you to the Asian American Studies professors whose courses I had the pleasure of taking: Dr. Lily Yumi Welty Tamai, Dr. Kelly Fong, Dr. Shu-mei Shih, Dr. Renee Tajima-Peña and Janet Chen, Dr. Tritia Toyota, Dr. Jinqui Ling, Dr. Min Zhou, Dr. King-kok Cheung, Dr. Kyeyoung Park, and Dr. Keith Camacho. Thank you to Wendy Fujinami, Kylin Sakamoto, Gregory Pancho, and Kristine Jan Espinoza for making Rolfe feel like home. Thank you to the Asian American Studies Center, namely Dr. Karen Umemoto, Melany De La Cruz-Viesca, Meg Thornton, and Barbra Ramos, for supporting my creative projects.

A huge thank you to the fellow graduate students at UCLA who supported me throughout this journey. Huge thank you to Lauren Higa and Bing Wang for attending my thesis defense (the first of the cohort/on Zoom/with non-committee attendees) with “GO” and “ANGEL” signs. Thank you to Elyse Izumi, Jessea Young, Alex Nguyen, Ed Nadurata, Christian Gella, and Paul Mendoza. Thank you to Reuben B. Deleon (PhD, Higher Ed) who showed me importance of building community and uplifting others. Thank you to Bernard James Remollino (PhD, History) for nerdy chats about food and culture. Thank you to Stefanie Matabang (PhD, Comparative Literature) for hosting afternoon tea parties and sharing a love of hoarding library books. Thank you to Christine Liboon (PhD, Education) for late-night boba and omni-matcha runs to Junbi, formerly Sip Matcha. Thank you to my neighbor, Oraison Larmon (PhD, Library and Information Sciences) and their dog Fancy/Francis, for their friendship. Thank you to Yee Vang (M. Ed, Student Affairs), Magali Campos (PhD, Ed), and my peers from Dr. Daniel Solórzano’s “Critical Race Theory in Education” course who helped me feel seen, heard, and supported. Thank you to Michelle Rolon and Landy Joseph (M. Urban Planning) for shared lunches in Luskin after Dr. Michael Lens’ “Housing and Community Development” class. Thank you to Nathan Tong and Lucy Ma, two Asian American Studies undergraduate foodie friends from our “Asian American History Through Food” class. Shout-out to my wonderful students who put up with boba-centric icebreaker questions (i.e. If you were a boba, what flavor would you be?).

Thank you to the graduate students from other institutions, namely Wayne Jopanda and Katherine Nasol (Cultural Studies, UC Davis) for helping me feel like part of a Filipinx community. Thank you to Katie Quan (Asian American Studies, SFSU almunus) whose academic and artistic journey inspired my own. Thank you to Shirley Shi (CSUN alumna) for

fun times at Bon Bon Tea House in Northridge. Thank you to Chester Chae (KGI alumna) for reminding to love living in L.A.

Thank you to all the friends in the following cryptic group names who are the pearls to my bubble tea: *Fearsome Five, Phamily Phriends, Slaysianz, Lesbros, Gudetama Poops, Bees?, Love is an Open Door,* and *Four Eggplants*. A huge thank you to Woohee Kim, who hosted me in her dorm at the University of Oxford for two weeks during the summer of 2019. Not only did she bring me through a real-life Harry Potter experience (New College!) but she traveled with me on many U.K. boba runs. Thank you to Amanda Liberman and On Tim Tang (with whom I had a 1257-day streak on Snapchat) for our Spring Break 2019 reunion and to Gian Sepulveda for boba and pie in Boston in March 2020. Y'all remind me how far we all have come since college graduation. Thank you to Leslie Huynh for her love and boba adventures. Thank you to my partner, Luis Hernandez and his familia for all the love, support, and of course, boba.

An amazing debt of gratitude is owed to my interviewees and friends, whose willingness to share their stories made conducting research a gratifying experience. Thank you to the Los Angeles community of boba lovers who hosted events from the Asian Creative Network's "Beyond Boba: Digging into the Roots of Boba Entrepreneurs" to the "626 Night Market" to Tea Pop's "Tea 101" class. Thank you to the boba shops and workers who fostered spaces for study and connection, especially my main sites: Bon Bon Tea House, Tea Lyfe, Teaspoon, and Pekoe. A special thanks to my very first interviewee, V from Northridge, whose enthusiasm to "help a sister out" motivated me to continue this project when my doubts had the best of me. Of course, thank you to everyone, from the local boba shop workers and patrons, to growers of cassava and tea leaves across the diaspora, without whom this project would not have been possible.

Angel Trazo (she/her)
Los Angeles, 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s, when boba took the form of tea, ice, milk, and tapioca balls clumped at the bottom of nondescript Styrofoam cups, few would have predicted the massive role boba would play in the cultural imaginaries of Asian youth. Today, 1.7 million Instagram posts contain "#boba" as social media feeds flood with photos of aesthetic crème brûlée masterpieces, glowing and glittering reusable cups and straws, or Asian Baby Girls (ABGs) simultaneously flaunting acrylic manicures and $6 beverages. Boba memes, each with thousands of likes and comments, saturate "Subtle Asian Traits," a private Facebook group which garnered over 1.7 million transnational members since its founding by Asian Australian college students in 2018 (Kwai 2018; Zhang 2019). Asians spoke up and Apple listened, with Chinese Creative Director, Yiying Lu, advocating for and designing the "boba emoji" (Harris 2020). Products such as boba-shaped nightlights and huggable plushies by Smoko, bubble tea-printed sneakers by Toms, and other boba paraphernalia go viral via social media advertisements. Students program apps to track boba consumption while engineers calculate the perfect cup shape for optimal tea to pearl consumption (Wilson 2017; Samson 2019; Wongsuphasawat 2018). From the Fung Bros' music video "Bobalife" (2013) to Jason Chen's acoustic love song "Boba" (2019) or Mark O'Dea's "I'm a Boba Girl" (2019), Asian American YouTubers profess a generation's love for the "carby" commodity (Chen 2019; Wei 2017). The "boba generation" encompasses Millennials (born between 1985 and 1997) and Generation Z (born after 1997) whose adolescent years coincided with the proliferation of boba shops across the United States between 1997 and today.

Boba originated in Taiwan in the 1980s, though debate ensues regarding whether Chun Shui Tang Teahouse in Central Taiwan (whose owner was inspired by seeing coffee served cold

in Japan) or Hanlin Tea Room in Southern Taiwan, among others, deserves credit for its invention (Tang 2014; Zhang 2019). "Boba," also known as "Pearl Milk Tea," "Bubble Tea," "Tapioca Tea," "zhenzhu naicha (珍珠奶茶)," and "sago" among its multilingual nicknames, is a beverage consisting of the following five core ingredients: tea (with or without milk, and/or a non-dairy milk substitute), ice, sweetener, a topping (often tapioca pearls), and flavoring (natural ingredients, syrups, or powders) (Nguyen-Okwu 2019; Boba Made 2019; Chau and Chen 2019; Chau and Chen 2020) (**Figure 1)**. Boba are round, squishy black balls made from cassava, a tropical tree starch (Chau and Chen 2019). These balls or "pearls" possess the "QQ" texture or unique "bouncy chewiness" prevalent in many Asian desserts (Nguyen-Okwu 2019; Zhang 2019). In Taiwanese, "boba" is a derogatory term for "a woman with large breasts" but has since been repurposed by Asian American youth to refer to tapioca pearls or the tea beverage in its entirety (Wei 2017; Harris 2020).

Figure 1. Anatomy of a Boba Drawn by author. *Boba* (n.) 1) Tea drink, 2) Tapioca pearls. Yes, it can be confusing. In my thesis, I use the term "boba" to refer to the drink in its entirety (tea + topping).

Since its inception in the 1980s, boba has travelled from Taiwan's cafes and night markets to restaurants and storefronts in America. In the 1990s to 2000s, boba chains such as Sharetea, Gong Cha, and CoCo Fresh Tea & Juice gained popularity in Taiwan (Trieu 2014). Simultaneously, the first boba shops opened overseas in the United States, initiated by young Taiwanese American entrepreneurs longing to satisfy their cravings for the foods and beverages they experienced in cafes or night markets abroad (Trieu 2014). In 1997, Fantasia Coffee & Tea, Northern California's first milk tea shop, opened in Cupertino "with the vision of bringing the popular Taiwanese delicacy of pearl milk tea to the United States" (Fantasia Coffee Tea 2020). In Southern California, Tapioca Express opened in 1999, Lollicup opened in 2000, and Quickly opened in 2002 (Zheng 2018; Zeng 2017; Quickly USA 2017; Lin 2017; Trieu 2014).

One long-standing Asian American chain responsible for the spread of boba across California is Lollicup Coffee & Tea or "Lollicup." Lollicup co-founder and UCLA alumnus, Alan Yu, traveled to Taiwan in 1999, a journey that inspired him to build an Asian-inspired boba spot in America. Yu believed boba would "take off" and "spent the year learning the ins and outs of the business" (Lin 2017). "I figured, hey, we don't have that kind of tea shop in LA, and it should be pretty fun to bring one over. That's when I saw the opportunity" (Lin 2017). What started as a dessert item on restaurant menus in Taiwan and then an Asian American business venture catalyzed by the likes of Yu and fellow Taiwanese Americans, has reverberated into an international phenomenon with an estimated $2 billion industry that is only projected to grow (Wen 2019). In effect, the emergence of California boba shops in the early 2000s meant a divergence from Taiwan's boba culture. The result: a uniquely Asian American boba scene.

***

On March 6, 2020, after presenting on a roundtable titled "Pedagogies and Challenges: Teaching Asian American Graphic Novels" at the Northeastern Modern Language Association (NeMLA) Conference in Boston, Massachusetts, I searched for "boba" on Google Maps. Multiple locations near the conference venue proliferated on my iPhone screen, the nearest a Kung Fu Tea roughly a quarter-mile away. Despite the insufficiency of my very California-winter outfit in shielding my body from the frigid Boston climate, I eagerly hobbled — in open-toed heels over cobblestones — the distance required to satisfy my boba craving. As I write this paragraph in Kung Fu Tea, I marvel at the diverse influx of middle school, high school, and college-aged youth surrounding me, many of whom present as Asian American. In pairs and large groups, just out of school and donning hefty backpacks, they emerge through the shop's glass door, fill large tables, and lounge against counters as they await their boba orders. Bursts of laughter pierce the steady stream of noise typically heard in a busy boba shop: overlapping conversations (in English and a mix of other languages), the maraca-like sound of a the boba shaker (a device used to mix flavored syrup and tea), the harsh blending of smoothie ingredients, and chill hip-hop or EDM hits playing over the store's speakers. Over the course of this two-year study, I witnessed similar scenes of youth gathered in various, disparate localities: boba shops in Washington D.C.; Arlington, Virginia; Honolulu, Hawai'i; the suburbs of Los Angeles, namely Northridge and the San Gabriel Valley; and of course, my hometown, San José, California. Even while visiting a friend in Oxford, our adventures to the multiple "bubble tea" locations such as the mom-and-pop shop, Formosan, or London chain, Bubbleology, allowed us to witness a U.K. version of boba culture where members of the Asian diaspora and local young adults converged in spaces serving organic sesame milk tea or alcoholic boba. No matter where I go, in boba

shops, I feel a sense of home. Wondering if other Asian Americans felt a bond of belonging in boba shops, this study began.

My study investigates the Asian American boba scene in San José, California between 1997 and 2020. 1997 marks the opening of the first boba shop in the Bay Area, Fantasia, located in Cupertino, one of the cities neighboring San José to the west. While outlining the history of boba shops in San José within the context of suburban development, I simultaneously illustrate the complex transnational and local interactions that resulted among Asian American youth and how this population continues to be shaped and to shape their community landscape. The scenes that I illustrate through the contemporary boba phenomenon speak volumes to the history of Asian Americans in San José, a history which parallels that of other ethnoburbs across the globe.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Boba Studies 101

Previous scholarship on boba centered on chain shops in Southern California and the interactions between diverse youth and young adults at these sites. My boba study largely builds on the work of Asian American historian Jean Paul de Guzman's "'Living La Vida Boba': Social Space and Translation, Hybrid, Asian American Youth Culture" (2006) and Chicano Studies PhD candidate Natalie Santizo's graduate thesis, "'Te de Boba': Food, Identity, and Race in a Multiracial Suburb" (2015). Both de Guzman (2006) and Santizo (2015) studied local chain establishments in Southern California, Lollicup in Northridge and Boba Time in Baldwin Park respectively. They depicted how boba shops function as youth spaces and shape the ethnic and transnational cultural consciousness of youth in multicultural suburbs. While boba continues to expand its physical presence in both cities and suburbs nationwide, California suburbs remain integral sites for studying American boba culture due to their disproportionately high number of boba shops and large Asian American population. Additionally, while both scholars took site-specific approaches, interviewing people they recruited at a particular boba shop locality, I recruited my interviewees through an online survey. My survey called for Bay Area young adults (18-40) with familiarity with any San José boba shop. In doing so, I provide a different approach for investigating multiethnic, multi-racial youth across a greater geographic scope, a move necessary for my goal of illustrating a comprehensive portrait of Asian American youth culture across San José's 180.5-mile^2 area of colonized space on ancestral Muwekma Ohlone Lands.

My study also draws from journalistic, artistic, and popular culture accounts of California boba culture. Taiwanese American journalist Clarissa Wei emphasized the centrality of boba

culture for Asian American youth in the San Gabriel Valley or "SGV," also known by its area code "626," a predominantly-Asian Los Angeles suburb (Wei 2017). Her assertion that boba trends originate from Southern California reoccurs in popular culture, such as the early-2010s viral YouTube music video, "Boba Life" (2013) by the Fung Brothers, which they filmed in the infamous SGV boba spot, Factory Tea Bar. In her *Eater* article, Jenny G. Zhang (2019) similarly identifies Southern California-based shops as the main catalysts for U.S.-based boba trends. Her piece also used a critical food studies lens to argue that an "East Asian hegemony" dominates Asian American boba culture (Zhang 2019). Notably, my study shifts focus to Northern California boba culture and fills a gap in the research on boba culture outside of Los Angeles County. In addition, my study centers the voices of a pan-ethnic, multi-racial youth culture that counters this East Asian hegemony. My study largely focuses on the voices of Southeast Asian American youth, as the majority of my survey respondents identified as Vietnamese American or Filipino American. This sample mirrors the large Vietnamese American and Filipino American and migrant populations in San José, California. While focusing my analysis on the interviews I conducted, I also used San José news sources and digital newspaper archives, namely *Content Magazine* and *The San José Mercury News,* for narratives about Bay Area boba shops.

I also draw inspiration from the creative UCLA Asian American Studies Master's thesis by Stephen Cong titled "'Fill My Cup Half Full': Boba Stories" (2016), a series of short stories that demonstrated the deep, affective relationships between Asian Americans and the boba beverage across various localities within the United States, namely San Francisco.

Taken together, these studies and stories speak to the relationship between boba, the Asian diaspora, and Asian American youth culture today. Boba studies exists within the rise of food studies scholarship (particularly Asian American foodie culture) over the past decade, a

conversation centering on community and culture, places and spaces, and of course, the changing tastes of American consumers (Ku, Manalansan, and Mannur 2013). Overall, my study builds on previous academic scholarship, creative narratives, and popular culture articles which connect the boba phenomenon with Asian transnational youth culture, while presenting the first ethnographic study centered on the Northern California boba scene. Using the interdisciplinary lens of Asian American studies, anthropology, sociology, and urban studies, I examine boba shops in relation to San José's suburban development, demonstrate how Bay Area youth scenes and interethnic relations emerge within boba shops, and analyze how boba shops serve as nodes of spatial (dis)connectivity for contemporary Asian American young adults.

(Sub)urban Studies

To situate the boba phenomenon within San José's geographic space and history of urban development, I draw from the theoretical conceptualization of suburban space proposed by urban geographer and Asian Americanist, Wei Li. In her pivotal ethnographic work, *Ethnoburb* (2008), Li examines the historical and spatial relationship between post-1965 Asian migration, namely the large wave of Chinese and Taiwanese migration to Los Angeles suburbs, and suburban development policies in the San Gabriel Valley community of Monterey Park. In light of Asian migrants' suburban settlement trends, Wei Li (2008) asserts that in such areas, "ethnoburbs" became "a more important Chinese residential area than Chinatown" (75). Li proposes the term *ethnoburb* to describe such spaces. Ethnoburbs are:

> Multiracial/multiethnic, multicultural, multilingual, and often multinational communities, in which one ethnic minority group has a significant concentration but does not necessarily comprise the majority. Ethnoburbs are likely created through some form of deliberate efforts of that group. (29)

The term ethnoburb fits San José, a city with a population diverse both in terms of race and socioeconomic status. Today, San José holds a population that is 26.5% White, 32.3%

Hispanic/Latino, 34.8% Asian, 0.4% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 3% Black, and 5.1% multiracial (US Census 2010; Silicon Valley One World 2015). By framing San José as an ethnoburb, my project expands on previous work centered on Asian American suburban communities. Thus, I emphasize the role of Asian American youth in shaping suburban development and community culture.

In addition, previous scholarship on ethnoburbs argues that studying ethnic food spaces aids in understanding how migrants shape suburban environments. Asian migrants face the continued challenge of negotiating for their piece of colonized space. Their place-making has led to the emergence of physical markers of an Asian presence in the ethnoburbs of Northern California via food-oriented spaces such as Asian shopping centers, restaurants, and grocery stores. In *Trespassers?: Asian Americans and the Battle for Suburbia* (2017), urban planner, Willow Lung-Amam, stresses the role of "Asian Mall" retail spaces in showcasing a distinctly Asian ethnic presence within the suburban Silicon Valley landscape. Asian malls exist as spaces "in which people of many different backgrounds have come together to define what it is to be Asian American" and include boba shops (Lung-Amam 2017, 99-100). For example, when analyzing an example of the "Asian Mall," Fremont's Mission Square Shopping Center nick-named "Little Taipei," Lung-Amam (2017) observes: "By 3:00 many parents and elders have left, while students from the nearby Mission San José high gather at *boba* milk tea and frozen yogurt shops" (emphasis added, 98). Lung-Amam admits to feeling like an "outsider" to her study, as she did not grow up in the Bay Area. Thus, my study adds a complementary "insider" approach to the study of Bay Area suburban space, as I was born and raised in San José.

Similar to the notion of the "Asian Mall," Purnima Mankekar (2002) argues that grocery stores such as "Indian groceries" in the Bay Area "mark the urban landscape with specific

signifiers of ethnicity and 'Indian' culture, and hence, enable Indian communities to represent themselves both to themselves, and to the dominant community" (82). Similarly, Hien Duc Do (1999) writes that in places like San José, ethnic shopping centers and markets function as "a social space where Vietnamese Americans who live throughout the local areas, and in some cases, from far away, can spend the time to visit with families and friends and get a 'taste of home'" (109-110). Overall, these claims to space via ethnic culinary centers emphasize the strong relationship between culture and food and speak to how such spaces make visible Asian suburban communities and physically bring Asian Americans together.

Subsumed by neoliberal "Silicon Valley" tech narratives, San José youth culture remains relatively understudied (Montoya 2019; Liou 2019). Like Lung-Amam (2017), Mankekar (2002), and Do (1999), I demonstrate how post-1965 Asian (im)migration impacted community development, and in doing so, assert that boba shops function as sites for viewing and partaking in Asian American youth culture. Following these scholars' demonstrations of how Asian Americans and Asian migrants in suburbia subvert notions of assimilation into the archetypal homogenous, white, middle-class suburb, I ask, "What does it mean for Asian Americans to crave ethnic and racialized spaces apart from 'mainstream' spaces, or spaces that cater to a Anglo American/Western clientele and reflect a white cultural hegemony?" As described by my Asian American interviewees, 'mainstream' spaces, at the intersection of socializing and sipping, include 'American' (meaning, predominantly-white) food chains, coffee shops, or bars and clubs. Notably, the boba shops I center my research on harbor an Asian American, arguably Bay Area Asian American culture, a culture that differs so greatly from Taiwanese tea shops that ethnic "authenticity" feels too restrictive a benchmark for understanding San José boba shops' underlying cultural sensibilities.

In tandem with a food studies and urban studies perspective, I center not only the implications of ethnicity and race in suburban development but also that of class privilege. In positing that Asian Americans claim suburban space, I cannot do so without acknowledging the role members of the Asian American community play in the widespread phenomenon of Bay Area gentrification. The intertwined timelines of suburban development, migration histories, and technology booms converge in the construction of high-priced boba shops in increasingly-Asian and/or affluent shopping plazas. I often fear that boba shops are becoming "the New Whole Foods" or "Starbucks," meaning that the arrival of a popular boba shop chain or glass-walled boba storefront is a symbol of gentrification, or the pushing-out of lower-income community members already living in a neighborhood. However, family-owned Asian food shops also perform the work of maintaining a sense of local culture and fostering an ethnic economy. While cognizant of the economic impact the expansion of boba shops may cause across San José, my study focuses heavily on local, family-owned boba shops unique to the city and centers the perspectives of youth and young adults partaking in the boba phenomenon.

Asian American Youth Culture

Asian American Youth Culture (2004) by Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou provides the first comprehensive collection of ethnographic essays aimed at filling a void within American youth studies: Asian American youth. They situate their work within the study of youth and youth culture in the United States, which developed at the turn of the twentieth century. This branch of study stems from the leading schools of Western sociology (The Chicago School) and cultural studies (The Birmingham School). As the United States transitioned into a post-industrial nation, sociologists identified a cultural shift in the prolonged time between childhood and adulthood and called this phase "adolescence" or "young adulthood"; in 1942, Talcott Parsons coined the

phrase “youth culture” (Lee and Zhou 2004, 2 and 313). While the Chicago School fixated on studying youth’s deviancy and delinquency, behaviors they believed resulted from increased urbanization, the Birmingham School argued that youth did not passively react to culture or urban life but themselves served as agents of cultural production. As Lee and Zhou (2004) summarize:

> Influenced by the Marxist conception of cultural production, Birmingham School researchers redefined youth as cultural producers and consumers rather than delinquents. Moreover, they regarded youth cultures as the distinct ways and patterns in life with socially identifiable youth groups come to process the raw material of their life experiences and give expressive forms, or ‘maps of meaning’ to their social and material existence. (5)

Drawing from these traditions which shape the study of youth culture today, Lee and Zhou argue for “Asian American” as a meaningful social category for analyzing American youth and youth culture. The term “Asian American” originated as a politically charged group identity coined by Yuji Ichioka during the Civil Rights and Third World Liberation movements of the 1960s (Lee and Zhou 2004, 11). It emerged as a categorization that those of Asian origin could self-identify with as, in the past, mainstream white American society used racialized terms such as “Orientals” or “unassimilable aliens” to label people of Asian ancestry (Lee 2015). Based on the U.S. Census, today’s “Asian” racial category encompasses twenty-four ethnicities, the largest being Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, Indians, Koreans, and Vietnamese Americans (United States Census Bureau “The Asian Population” 2010). “Native Hawai’ian or Other Pacific Islander” constitutes its own racial group. Lee and Zhou (2004) argue that research on Asian American youth and youth culture “should be located foremost within the dual processes of international migration and American racialization” (15). My study observes these definitions of Asian Americans and similarly emphasizes the roles of (im)migration and American racialization in shaping Asian American youth culture.

Literature on Asian American youth within the past ten years largely focuses on youth within the context of education. For example, works examine the impact of stereotypes of Asian Americans, namely the "Model Minority" stereotype (*Unraveling the Model Minority Myth,* 2nd ed. (2015) by Stacy Lee; *The Asian American Achievement Paradox* (2015) by Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou) or the Asian American gangster stereotype (*Youth Gangs, Racism, and Schooling: Vietnamese American Youth in a Postcolonial Context* (2015) by Lam). Others examine the role of race in shaping the higher education experience (*Asian Americans on Campus: Racialized Space and White Power* (2015) by Kristen Lee and Rosalind S. Chou and *Academic Profiling: Latinos, Asian Americans, and the Achievement Gap* (2013) by Gilda L. Ochoa).

Of the literature on Asian American youth culture, works within the last decade largely discuss Asian Americans in the Hip Hop scene (*Hip Hop Desis* (2010), *Filipinos Represent: DJs, Racial Authenticity, and the Hip Hop Nation* (2013) by Antonio T. Tiongson Jr. *Empire of Funk: Hip Hop and Representation in Filipina/o America* (2014) by Mark R. Villegas, DJ Kuttin' Kandi, and Roderick N. Labrador, and *Legions of Boom: Filipino American Mobile DJ Crews in San Francisco* (2015) by Oliver Wang). Other studies examine Asian American youth participation in organized sports teams (*Desi Hoop Dreams: Pickup Basketball and the Making of Asian American Masculinity* (2015) and *Asian American Sporting Cultures* (2016) by Stanley I. Thangaraj) and religious groups (*Identity, Youth, and Gender in the Korean American Church* (2015) by Christine J. Hong). Works on Asian American youth also examine their racialization in regard to political subjecthood (*9/11 Generation* (2016) by Sunaina Maira, *Rethinking the Asian American Movement* (2012) by Daryl Joji Maeda, and *Desi Divas: Political Activism in South Asian American Cultural Performances* (2013) by Christine L. Garlough).

Meanwhile, my study falls into the realm of works focused on the intersection between Asian American identity, (sub)urban space, and consumer culture. “Forming Identity and Girlhood Through Consumer Culture” (2018) by Tomoko Tokunaga examines how Asian American girls adopt Japanese popular culture through cute or *kawaii* commodities imported from Asia and define their ethnicity and femininity within retail spaces. For Tokunaga, retail spaces such as the mall are both “special and mundane,” mundane in their everyday existence but special in the opportunity they provide via the sale of cultural products that Asian American girls consume to define themselves; she also adds that the girls enjoy “bubble tea” when they go to the mall in search of treats and trinkets from Asia (89). Like Tokunaga, I argue that spaces of cultural consumption, such as boba shops, allow youth to assert “their right of presence,” claiming such spaces as their own worlds in which they can explore markers of identity, from imported Japanese plushies to Taiwanese-inspired snacks (90). However, while Tokunaga explains how mall products function such that youth “attach racial ethnic and cultural meanings to these Asian products and explored their ‘Asianness’ and ‘Americanness’ in search for the meaning of being Asian in America,” in my study, boba functions as a distinctly Asian American commodity in line with what Lee and Zhou term an “emergent culture of hybridity” (Tokunaga, 2018, 94; Lee and Zhou 2004, 22). An “emergent culture of hybridity” means that Asian American youth “feel that they are both a part of yet apart from mainstream America,” with “mainstream” referring to the white, hegemonic culture of the United States (Lee and Zhou 2004, 22). They explain, “The unique dual status of Asian American youth combined with their immigrant backgrounds prompt them to actively craft a culture of their own that is distinctive from both their ethnic communities and from other American institutions and youth” (22).

Undefinable by essentialist definitions of "Asian" or "American," I assert that boba, in the context of this study, is an "Asian American" product and cultural symbol, a physical embodiment of the cultural hybridity also emphasized in Lisa Lowe's "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences" (1991). In her work, Lowe reconceptualizes "Asian American culture" from a categorization previously seen as homogenous and essentialized, to one that is dynamic and multifaceted. She theorizes the differences within Asian America by using the terms heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity.

> As with other diasporas in the United States, the Asian immigrant collectivity is unstable and changeable, with its cohesion complicated by intergenerationality, by various degrees of identification and relation to a 'homeland,' and by different extents of assimilation to and distinction from 'majority culture' in the United States. (27)

Lowe (1991) also suggests heterogeneity by disrupting the notion that "original" culture can only be transmitted through a "vertical" generational model, in which legitimate Asian culture is passed between Asian elders and American children. Lowe breaks from this definition by suggesting the mode of "horizontal" transmission, one which occurs when internalized understandings of ethnic culture are shared between members of the same generation (26). She illustrates her model of horizontal cultural transmission through the relationship between two Chinese American peers in Diana Chang's "The Oriental Contingent" (26). Each woman believes that she is not "Chinese enough" in relation to the other, yet it is "in one another that they find a common frame of reference" (27). Thus, ethnicity is not fixed, but rather an "active cultural construction" facilitated by their interactions (27). My boba study exemplifies this mode of horizontal cultural exchange, as Asian American youth culture emerges as youth observe each other rather than their parents and/or older members of the Asian immigrant generation. I focus on youth culture in this study for the reasons outlined by Maira and Soep (2005):

> Youth is, after all, often the ideological battleground in contests of immigration and citizenship as well as the prime consumer target for the leisure industry. Even when young people are not themselves traveling across national borders, or leaving their own bedrooms, they can find themselves implicated within transnational networks… often doing the service work to sell it, for salaries well below a living wage, while at the same influencing, subverting, and otherwise transforming the products in circulation. Youth, then, are at the center of globalization. (xix)

In addition, I consider boba shops a thirdspace for youth or "youthscape." Urban theorist, Edward Soja (1996), coined thirdspace to mean a communal space where those in the space experience human life (29). Youth culture scholars, Sunaina Maira and Elizabeth Soep (2005) define "youthscape" as "literal and imagined spaces" and that provide a means of "analyzing the intersections between popular culture practices, national ideologies, and global markets" and "a conceptual lens and methodological approach to youth culture, which brings together questions about popular culture and relations of power in local, national, and globalized concepts" (xv-xviii). They draw from the "scape" framework of Arjun Appadurai (1996), in that the idea of the "scape" "accounts for the deeply perspectival and uneven character of the forces behind globalization" (Maira and Soep 2005, xvi). Notably, as emphasized in the work of Lee and Zhou (2004), thinking of youth within the frameworks of globalization or transnationalism allows for a greater understanding of Asian American youth beyond the physical bounds of the nation-state.

While studies on youth traditionally focus on participants between the ages of 12 and 24, my study draws from an older demographic. I study the Millennial generation (born 1980-1995, ages 24-40 as of 2020) and the oldest of the Generation Z cohort (born 1996-2002, ages 18-23 as of 2020). Drawing from an older population provides retrospective perspective to help better trace the otherwise unwritten, over twenty-year boba history in San José. To date, no academic studies have examined San José's boba development, and as many interviewees touched on the difference between their childhood or teen boba experience compared to their adult boba

experience, I decided to piece together this history using their memories as my guide. This lack of history calls for a retrospective telling of boba experiences in the early-2000's, a background that adds depth to my study as shifts in attitudes toward boba and boba culture reflect larger changes within Asian American youth culture. After all, as this literature review aimed to convey, Asian American youth culture is not static but everchanging.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Funded by the UCLA Institute of American Cultures and Asian American Studies Center, and following IRB-approved methods for recruitment, data collection, and storage, I conducted research for one year and three months between February 2019 and May 2020. My data derives from in-depth interviews with Asian American young adults based in the Bay Area, field notes from participant observation in boba shops, and both qualitative and quantitative survey data. For survey distribution, I utilized a snowball sampling method and received 166 responses, 156 of which fit the Bay Area geographic scope of my project. Most participants are based San José (n=124) and neighboring cities including Cupertino (n=9), Milpitas (n=5), Santa Clara (n=3), Sunnyvale (n=3), Saratoga (n=1), and Campbell (n=1). While interviewees identified as Asian American, I invited young adults of all racial backgrounds to complete the survey **(Figure 2).**

Self-Identified Ethnicity					
Asian Indian	3	Filipino/a/x, Japanese	1	Taiwanese	9
Asian Indian, Indonesian	1	Filipino/a/x, Mexican	1	Thai, Vietnamese	1
Cambodian, Vietnamese	1	Filipino/a/x, Samoan, Mexican	1	Vietnamese	52
Chinese[a]	12	Filipina/o/x, White	1	Vietnamese, White	1
Chinese, Indonesian, White	1	Japanese	1	**Total Asians**	**142**
Chinese, Japanese, Native Hawai'ian, White	1	Japanese, White	3	Mexican	7
Chinese, Native Hawai'ian, White	1	Korean	4	Mexican, Salvadorian	1
Chinese, Taiwanese	1	Palestinian[b]	1	White[c]	6
Chinese, Vietnamese	16	Pakistani	2	**Total Non-Asians**	**14**
Chinese, White	4	Pakistani, White	1	**Total Participants**	**156**
Filipino/a/x	22				

Figure 2. Ethnic and Racial Breakdown of 156 Survey Respondents In the survey, participants could self-identify their race and ethnicity. Racial categories were based on U.S. Census and included: White, Black, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Native American. Multiple boxes could be checked for both race and ethnicity questions, and informants could specify ethnicity in a text box. Chinese[a] does not include Taiwanese. Palestinian[b] participant identified "Palestine" under the racial category "Other Asian ethnicity." White[c] included the following self-identified ethnicities: "European," "Jewish," "Russian American," "white mixture," and "Just everything white in Europe."

In the survey, about half of the respondents indicated their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview, and 17 committed to a recorded Zoom video interview. I conducted 17 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with young adults between the ages of 18 and 37 who self-identified as Asian and had familiarity with boba shops in/around San José (including the neighboring suburbs of Campbell, Cupertino, Milpitas, Santa Clara, and Saratoga). Interviews ranged from a half-hour to one hour and forty minutes. Questions were based on their experiences with boba in relation to growing up in suburbia. Pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality. Interviews were transcribed and coded for themes using colored highlighters.

In addition to conducting interviews, I recorded observations at various boba shops for at least one hour during each field note session, for a total of 30 sessions. I conducted the first ten sessions through a pilot study while in Los Angeles at Bon Bon Tea House in Northridge, a shop in a suburban space comparable demographically to that of San José. The remaining 20 sessions took place in San José at Tea Lyfe and Pekoe. Both family-owned shops specific to San José, yet each with a unique menu, origin story, and largely young adult, Asian American clientele, I chose Tea Lyfe and Pekoe as my main observation sites. I regularly (roughly once a month) visited San José while a UCLA student across the time frame of a year. In addition, to supplement my understanding of boba culture while based in Los Angeles, I also attended several local LA events: Asian Creative Network's "Beyond Boba: Digging into the Roots of Boba Entrepreneurs," the "626 Night Market," and Tea Pop's "Tea 101" class.

Researcher Positionality

Growing up in the South side of San José, California, I first noticed the boba phenomenon as a high schooler in the 2010s. My friends and then-partner and I would stop by Q-Cup at Oakridge mall for a sweet treat paired with popcorn chicken. I shared "bubble tea"

drawings on Facebook and tagged my friends as their favorite colorful confection **(Figure 3).** While on the Pioneer High School badminton team, teammates would drive to Tapioca Express to pick up boba before games. When my younger sister joined the badminton team, she and our friend sold homemade boba drinks and Asian snacks like Hi-Chew candies on the sidelines to fundraise during badminton matches. Then, while an undergraduate in the boba-devoid land of Upstate New York between 2013 and 2017, I felt intense cravings for the beverage that reminded me of home: boba. I drove the hour-and-a-half to the closest boba shop, Kung Fu Tea in Syracuse, or awaited the days when my friend, a Vietnamese international student, sold boba from his dorm.

Figure 3. Bubble Tea <3 Colored pencil on paper. A photograph of an illustration created by author in 9th grade and posted on Facebook on April 10, 2009.

While a graduate student based in Los Angeles, I only had to walk a block to get boba. Westwood alone offers Junbi, Ichi Tea & Sushi, Boba Time, Sharetea, and a Lollicup on UCLA's campus. Notably, since starting school at UCLA in 2018, I witnessed the closing (and replacement) of several boba shops: the Lollicup in town (where I bought the lunch bowl and large tea special every week my first year), Koala T Cafe (a boba-truck-turned-restaurant run by UCLA alumni), and CoCo Tea, where Ichi now resides (Temblador 2013). As the popularity of boba continues to peak, brick-and-mortar boba shops shift the city's physical landscape. Since UCLA transitioned to remote learning in March 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, I have

finished the remainder of this thesis at my home in the Bay Area. As of May 8, 2020, I continue drinking boba from Teaspoon which I order through the non-contact, online means.

Prior to "shelter-in-place" and California lockdown, I would frequent boba shops 3-4 times a week with friends, family, my partner, or individually. I also run an Instagram account (@bobastudies101) where I post boba reviews. As a queer-identifying (albeit straight-passing and cis-gendered) Filipina American woman in my early-twenties from San José, my interviewees appeared comfortable sharing their stories candidly, often interjecting slang, profanity, and personal anecdotes while sharing their boba shop experiences. Notably, several study participants expressed trepidation, for they felt like they "lacked the knowledge on boba culture" to participate in this study. My only requirement was that they had been to a boba shop in San José within their time residing in/around the city. I reassured them that while I had a hypothesis that a bond existed between boba and Asian American youth culture, engaging with multiple perspectives on the topic would help my research project, not hinder it.

Chapter 4

SETTING THE STAGE FOR BOBA CULTURE: ASIAN AMERICANS AND SAN JOSE'S SUBURBAN SPRAWL

By the time boba came to the United States in 1997, California suburbs hosted the largest Chinese and Taiwanese populations outside of China and Taiwan (Li 2008). At the same time, San José alone held the largest number of Vietnamese residents in any one city outside of Vietnam (Nguyen 2016; Do 1999). Despite the recent influx of Asian Americans into California since the 1960s, San José's Asian history stretches as far back as the 19th century.

The archived history of San José traces back to when Ohlone lands were colonized by Spain and San José became California's first pueblo in 1777 (Henderson 1996). San José boasted flourishing orchards that stretched for miles across the "The Valley of Heart's Desire" (Yu 1991, 15; Tsu 2013). The first Chinese settlers arrived in the mid-1800s to early-1900s to work in quicksilver mines, farms, or on the San José Railroad and Santa Cruz-Monterey line for the South Pacific Coast Railroad (Yu 1991, 8). One miner, Lum Hing (1830-1889) was the most famous of the Chinese quicksilver miners at New Almaden (Boulland and Bouderault 2006, 117). Most Chinese, however, settled in San José's Chinatown, originally built near present-day downtown on Vine Street (Yu 1991, 22). Due to the multiple racially-targeted burnings of Chinatown, the lasting impact of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act's "Yellow Peril" sentiments, and forceful city planners who desired to develop the land on which Chinatown stood, the Chinese population was pushed out of the heart of San José (Yu 1991, 28-29). The newest and final Chinatown was built with the help of the Heinlein Family in the blocks bounded by Fifth, Seventh, Jackson, and Taylor Streets (Yu 1991, 35-36).

By the early 1900s, the Chinese in San José slowly migrated out, as the younger generation of American-born Chinese lacked interest in taking over family farms; only ten or

fifteen Chinese families were left in San José by 1940 (Fukuda and Pearce 2014, 80; Yu 1991, 107). Meanwhile, beginning in the 1920s, an influx of Filipino migrant men, or *manongs*, and Japanese migrants, many coming from plantations in Hawai'i, arrived to work on San José's orchards and farms (Fukuda and Pearce 2014, 62). They settled near the last iteration of San José's Chinatown, now present-day San José Japantown (Fukuda and Pearce 2014, 62). When Japanese Americans were unjustly incarcerated during World War II, they assembled at San José State University before leaving for incarceration camps; a lucky few were able to keep possessions in the safekeeping of non-Japanese neighbors (Henderson 1996, 173; Burrill 2004, 98-99)**.** At the end of the war, many Japanese Americans returned to San José and their population nearly doubled. Despite threats from San José residents who harbored anti-Japanese sentiments, many Japanese found work in San José as prune farmers (Henderson 1996, 174). While San José held a diverse Asian population throughout its early years, the largest influx of Asians into the region took place after the passage of the1965 Immigration and Nationality Act.

Abolishing national quotas which once hindered Asian migration and implementing a family reunification clause and "skilled-worker" preference, the 1965 Immigration Act facilitated the largest wave of pan-ethnic Asian migration into the then predominantly-white and Hispanic, as well as black and Native American, locality of San José, California (Lee 2015). Filipino nurses, joining in the global "Empire of Care" phenomenon, could more easily petition family members to reunite with them in the United States (Choy 2003). Simultaneously, H1-B visas facilitated an influx of "high-skilled" workers from India, China, Taiwan, and other Asian countries into the United States (Wong 2006). Asian immigrants largely settled in California to work in healthcare centers such as Kaiser Permanente or the booming Bay Area technology sector, dubbed by labor activists as the "Military-Industrial-University Complex" (Pellow and

Park 2002, 59). Asian migrants, working in both piece manufacturing and engineering, fueled tech companies in San José and Cupertino (Jiménez 2017, 27). After the Fall of Saigon in 1975, tens of thousands of Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian refugees fled as "boat people" to Asian refugee camps and finally, America. Though originally scattered across the country, Vietnamese migrants developed large ethnic settlements in cities such as San José, California (Henderson 1996, 212; Do 1999). By 1990, Eastside San José's population was 9% Vietnamese, and today, San José remains the city with the largest Vietnamese community outside of Vietnam (Jiménez 2017, 30; Nguyen 2016). The population of Koreans and South Asians in San José also increased in the 1980s (Henderson 1996, 212). As Henderson (1996) writes, "The new immigrants changed the face of San José, as Asian enterprises sprang up downtown and in neighborhood shopping centers, particularly in the eastern parts of the city, from Evergreen in the south to Berryessa in the north" (212).

Eastside San José, even before its incorporation into the city in the 1950s, held a long history as a segregated area (Jiménez 2017, 29). In the 1940s, locals nicknamed the area the "Sal si puedes" or "Get out if you can" (Henderson 1996, 174). This part of San José once housed the predominantly-Hispanic, largely-Mexican community, who migrated as farmers through the Bracero Program after World War II, and Blacks who migrated from Southern states in search of work in the North and West (Regua and Villareal 2009, 53; Henderson 1996, 174; Peyton 1989, 20). According to Henderson (1996), while San José managed to incorporate this land in the 1950's, several affluent localities resisted "being absorbed into an amorphous San José":

> Campbell incorporated in 1952, Milpitas in 1954, Cupertino in 1955, and Saratoga in 1956. Santa Clara and Sunnyvale had been incorporated for decades. Eastside residents voted against joining San José in 1952, but [former city manager] Dutch Hamann said he would 'nibble them…a few blocks at a time.' (185)

Even after annexation, this Mexican American barrio remained neglected by the city, lacking paved streets until 1956 (Henderson 1996, 196). Nevertheless, this part of the city became the home of famous activists such as labor organizer Cesar Chavez of the United Farm Workers union (1962), and Dr. Ernesto Galarza who advocated for Chicanos receiving a fair education, represented Chicano history through scholarship and children's books, and "spoke up in defense of lowriders in the Eastside" (Regua and Villareal 2009, 56). This area, diverse in socioeconomic class and with the largest proportion of minorities of color, got likened to a "ghetto" and a stigma remains to this day (Chung 2011, 12). Overall, despite the diversity and lack of legal segregation in San José, the social culture designated certain neighborhoods as hubs for migrants and minorities, such as Eastside San José.

The large post-1965 wave of pan-ethnic Asian migration coincided with a pivotal shift in U.S. residential settlement trends. In the 1970s, the suburbs transformed from havens for "white, middle-class conformity built on a base of racist and ethnic exclusion," to ethnic hubs for Asian American communities (Nicolaides 2015, 6). Nationwide, the proportion of Americans living in suburbs increased from 37% to 51%, and "as America was becoming more suburban, suburbia was becoming more like multiracial, multiethnic America itself" (6). This trend of suburban settlement upon arrival contrasted with previous theories of segmented assimilation. Initially, newly-arrived migrants first settled into lower-income, majority-migrant ethnic enclaves (e.g. Chinatowns) due to discrimination from white society, racist housing policies, and language barriers; the children of immigrants (the second generation) would then "assimilate" and reach levels of educational and/or socioeconomic attainment equivalent to that of white Americans and move into predominantly-white, middle-class suburbs (Portes & Zhou 1993, 90; Zhou 2011, 82). However, many post-1965 Asian immigrants circumvented ethnic enclaves and settled directly in

suburbia. In San José, while the majority of Vietnamese, other Southeast Asian, and Filipino migrants settled in Eastside San José suburbs, other ethnic groups settled in neighborhoods across the city, with Chinese, Taiwanese, and South Asians moving into the predominantly-white South San José; Filipinos moving to North San José and its neighbor, Milpitas; and Chinese, Taiwanese, and South Asians settling in West San José or its neighbors Saratoga, Sunnyvale, and Cupertino. Meanwhile, second- and third-generation Japanese Americans, while still fostering a thriving Japantown in Northern San José through their businesses and community holiday celebrations such as the largest Obon in Northern California, spread amid the suburban sprawl.

The ability of Asians to "break the suburban color line" occurred due to the increased proportion of higher-income Asian (im)migrants admitted through the 1965 Immigration Act; legislation such as the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which denounced racially-discriminatory barriers to housing; pre-1965 community activist efforts; decreased racial hostility toward Asians in part due to the "Model minority myth"; and the increased availability of relatively-affordable suburban housing (Nicolaides 2015, 6; Cheng 2012, 16; Brooks, 2012; Peterson, 1966). Post-1965 San José, in particular, held immense tracts of cheap housing. Due to the 1960s land annexation and expansionist development policies carried out by former San José city manager, Dutch Hamann, by the 1980s "newly minted single-family homes sprawled away into infinity" (Henderson 1996, 212; Peyton 1989, 11). As Mitchell Chang (2015) notes of this period of development, "Instead of slowly integrating older communities, racially diverse communities in different parts of San José were literally being built from the ground up" (46).

My interviewees similarly recounted the multiethnic, minority and migrant-driven development of San José's suburbs. Daniel Huang, a 23-year-old Chinese-Vietnamese American, whose parents are both migrants who left Asia due to the Fall of Saigon, explained, "We moved

to San José because I think it was affordable and my mom ended up knowing the property manager who'd been there forever. It's your classic story of like, Chinese-Vietnamese aunties. They're everywhere [laughs]."[1] Daniel resided in the Eastside suburbs before moving closer to Santa Clara. Like many children of Southeast Asian refugees, Daniel grew up in close proximity to his relatives amid the suburban sprawl. While driving down the 101, one of my friends, a second-generation Vietnamese American from Eastside San José (ESSJ), joked, "I have cousins who live at every Freeway exit that goes to ESSJ." As for myself, my titos and titas on my father's side came to America from the Philippines through the 1965 family reunification clause and initially settled together in one house in South-Eastside San José. Once my relatives settled into jobs in the healthcare industry in the 1980s, they too purchased cheap homes across San José. My parents, longing for independence from my grandparents' multi-generational home, could not afford to buy a house, but decided to rent a small studio apartment in a predominantly-Latinx, lower-income neighborhood near downtown San José. While not in a conventional house and closer to downtown, I still grew up part of the suburban sprawl.

I apply Wei Li's (2008) term "ethnoburb" to the suburbs of San José and demonstrate the "deliberate efforts" of Asian American youth to sustain boba culture (Li 2008; Lung-Amam 2017; Cheng 2012). Notably, ethnoburbs are not only diverse in terms of racial, ethnic, and cultural components but also socioeconomic status (Li 2008, 29). This term pertains to San José, a city with a population diverse both in terms of race and socioeconomic status. Today, San José holds more Asian Pacific Islander residents than White residents with a population that is 26.5% White, 32.3% Hispanic/Latino, 34.8% Asian, 0.4% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 3% Black, and 5.1% multiracial (US Census 2010; Silicon Valley One World 2015). In addition, while

[1] Daniel Huang, Zoom video call with author, August 4, 2019.

certain parts of the city boast six-figure salary households, bolstered by those working in the technology or healthcare sectors Silicon Valley is known for, other neighborhoods such as East Central and Alum Rock in San José house mostly service-workers who labor as cashiers and retail salespersons, construction workers, or custodial staff (Data USA "San Jose City (East Central) & Alum Rock Puma, CA" 2017). Some areas, such as the Southeast/Evergreen area of San José exhibit the highest economic diversity. With a population that is 47.3% Asian and 32.1% Hispanic, Eastside San José houses both software developers and engineers (with an unusually high number, 16 times higher than expected, of residents working as computer hardware engineers; 10.3 times the expected number of electrical engineers; and 9.22 times the expected number of materials engineers) as well as maids, cashiers, and restaurant hosts and hostesses (Data USA "San Jose City (Southeast/Evergreen)" 2017).

Wei Li (2008) also argues that diversity in ethnoburbs leads to a shift in the hegemonic notion of American culture:

> [Ethnoburbs] provide opportunities for ethnic minority people to resist complete assimilation into the non-Hispanic white cultural and social "norms" of American society. More importantly, the ethnoburb model challenges the dominant view that assimilation is inevitable and remains the ideal solution for immigrants and other racial/ethnic minorities who live in the United States. (4)

These "norms" of assimilation and culture have been and will continue to be challenged as Asian migrants and Asian Americans build suburbia according to their transnational cultural imaginaries.

Today, San José holds over 100 boba shops **(Appendix E)**. San José shops set trends, from "split cups" that hold more than one boba drink to "boba hot pot" served at Milk Tea Lab (Wu 2020). As boba garners visibility, so does Asian American youth culture citywide. In 2018,

Figure 4. "Bye Bye Boba! How to properly dispose of your bubble tea" Short video Tweeted by the City of San Jose to demonstrate how to properly recycle boba cups.

San José hosted its first "Boba Festival," and the official City of San José Environmental Services tweeted a short, animated PSA titled, "Bye Bye Boba!" with the caption:

What's the tea? Follow these steps to properly dispose of your #bubbletea at home. For those @BobaFestival, this disposal is only when you take home the tea in San José. #boba #milktea #bobaislife #bobaislove #teatime." (*SJEnvironment* Twitter 2018) **(Figure 4)**

While California holds the largest population of Asians in the United States, Asians only comprise 14% of the state's population (World Population Review 2019). Even in San José, the tenth largest city in the United States, Asians and Pacific Islanders remain a minority group, comprising roughly one-third of San José's population (US Census 2010; Rodriguez 2011). If Asian American numbers remain small, how did boba shops garner so much attention in California and nationwide?

In 1999, Gerald Celente, director of the Trends Research Institute, told the San Francisco Chronicle, "Unless you're going to have some kind of mystical, ancient Chinese power from drinking it, [bubble tea] is not going to go anywhere" (SF Gate 2014). Over ten years later, SF Gate reported "how wrong he was" (SF Gate 2014). In 2016, boba presumably went mainstream when Hillary Clinton, then presidential candidate, pandered to Asian voters by professing her love for "chewy tea" on national television, or in 2017 when *New York Times* writer, Joanne Kaufman, finally realized (over a decade late) that, "Those blobs in your tea? They're supposed

to be there" (Chang 2016; Kaufman 2017). Its "newly discovered" appeal to white and non-Taiwanese consumers increased the visibility of the boba phenomenon. However, the true power of boba culture stems from the rallying of Asian American youth around the beverage and boba spaces as sites of pan-ethnic Asian belonging. In San José, boba functions as an Asian American cultural symbol and fosters a pan-ethnic Asian community. The strong presence of boba culture in California indicates the ongoing desire for Asian American youth to connect along ethnic and racial lines and illuminates how youth articulate belonging, as well as unbelonging, to such cultural communities.

Chapter 5

EARLY SAN JOSÉ BOBA CULTURE (c. 1997-2010)

On September 2, 2000, boba landed on the front page of the *San Jose Mercury News.* The article read, "Tapioca-Laced Teas Offer Café Crowd a Slippery Sip: 'Just When You Think You've Tried it all, Someone Will Concoct a New Flavor'" (Tomb 2000). In marvel of the beverage, the reporter provocatively wrote, "They slide, slither and slurp up through a double-wide straw… Excuse me, waiter, but are there frog eggs in my beverage. Or are those fish eyes?" Tomb 2000). The typical exotification of Asian cuisine upon its arrival in the United States did not escape boba. However, even as early as 2000, the owner of Fantasia Coffee & Tea, Mike Chang, believed in boba's potential for widespread popularity. Chang noted, "Originally it was an Asian drink, but now it's getting more and more popular" (Chang 2000). Undoubtedly, since the late-1990's and early-2000's, boba shops have remained staples of San José's landscape.

Fantasia Coffee & Tea, the first boba shop in Northern California, opened in 1997 in Cupertino, California, San José's neighbor to the west. Locals refer to Fantasia as the Bay Area's original milk tea chain. Other early 2000s boba shop staples included Tapioca Express, Quickly, Lollicup, and Q-Cup, four Asian American chains equally set on bringing the Taiwanese milk tea trend to the U.S. (Pacio 2002; Ulloa 2006). These chains, which boomed in the late-1900s and early 2000s, signified a cheap and popular boba and snack option for Asian American youth.

In the Bay Area and Southern California alike, when asked to recall their first boba experience, most Asian American Millennials describe a "first" occurring at these chains (Surasmith 2017). Musing over trips to "TapEx," Asian American youth recall frequenting Tapioca Express for its crispy popcorn chicken and affordable ($2.50 or less) boba drinks. "The Quickly's at VALLCO Mall [in Cupertino] was a thing for a little bit," Daniel Huang, a 23-year-old Chinese/Vietnamese American reminisced. James Cieres, a 30-year-old, second-generation

Filipino American remembered, "I started going to boba as a kid because of my mom. It was really expensive, so we'd only go as a treat if we did something good. We went to that Q-Cup that was by the Goldilocks, 99 Ranch, and a Chinese bank." While often in malls, early 2000s boba chain stores also proliferated within nascent or already-established "Asian plazas," outdoor plaza shopping centers which catered to the needs of Asian immigrants. Along with Q-Cup, James recalled Goldilocks, a Filipino restaurant and bakery franchise; 99 Ranch, a Chinese supermarket chain; and a bank which Chinese signage. That same Q-Cup caught the eye of *Mercury News* reporter Nerissa Pacio in 2002. She documented Q-Cup as one of the newest "social hubs for many of Cupertino's Asian teens and young adults" (Pacio 2002). This family-friendly shop encouraged a multigenerational social life. "Many times, because of the generation gap, Asian kids will even bring their parents to the café at first so that their parents know that that's where they'll be after school," explained a Q-Cup representative (Pacio 2002). Other times, older siblings would take their younger siblings to boba. Tyler Le, an 18-year-old, second-generation Vietnamese American from West San José, mused, "As a kid, I'd go to boba with my eldest sister. She liked taking [my siblings and I] out to experience what life was like outside. My parents couldn't really do that because they were working. We were around Cupertino Village a lot because there were bookstores and shops we could browse."[2] For older siblings attending to young ones while both parents worked, places they could safely explore were Asian plazas like Cupertino Village. Tyler recalls drinking boba at a Quickly in Cupertino Village and likening its taste to a Vietnamese sweet beverage or soup dessert:

> The first ever drink I had was Thai Tea because it's really sugary. We'd go to Quickly and I wouldn't get actual tea drinks; I'd get one of those smoothies or Oreo slushies with boba. I never really thought [boba] was weird. It matched everything I liked about

[2] Tyler Le, Zoom video call with author, March 6, 2019.

> desserts. In Vietnamese culture, you have traditional, cold desserts called *chè*. It's milky with beans and solids that you eat with a spoon and straw.

For many Asian American youth, boba did not appear peculiar as the chewy drink resembled ethnic desserts that they grew up eating as children of Asian immigrants and refugees.

In San José, the second most common location for first boba experiences took place at Vietnamese eateries. Asian American survey respondents remembered their first boba as such: "Honeydew Milk Tea at a hole-in-the-wall Banh Mi shop behind Independence High School." "A worn-down shop in the Grand Century Mall food court." "Avocado smoothies with pearls… there wasn't that many boba shops at that time, but Vietnamese dessert places would have smoothies with pearls." These Asian Americans noted the "gateway" drink to boba: "smoothies," or blended milky, fruit drinks, served at Asian restaurants, Asian grocery plazas, or, as one informant explained, "When my mom made me a smoothie and tossed in [tapioca] pearls." Interestingly, this phenomenon of Vietnamese shops selling "smoothies" (fruity slushies with tapioca pearls) occurred not only in the ethnoburbs of San José, but in ethnoburbs of Southern California. V, a 23-year-old Vietnamese American who grew up in Los Angeles, explained that her first boba-like drink was a "smoothie with boba" from a Vietnamese market "to-go" stand in Echo Park.[3] Like V, Thao Tran, a 31-year-old second-generation, Vietnamese American from Campbell, a small city bordered by San José, recalled:

> [In the mid-2000s], my sister and I started seeing people our age at the [Eastridge] mall drinking this drink with things in the bottom. Back then, they called it 'pearl tea' or 'bubble tea.' The place we got it was a Vietnamese fruit stand, so it was basically powder, water, and boba. We weren't impressed.[4]

For 22-year-old Kimmie Pham, her first "boba" experience took place at a Pho restaurant:

---

[3] V, Zoom video call with author, February 20, 2019.

[4] Thao Tran, Zoom video call with author, March 10, 2019.

> We got Pho after church and I'd typically never ask for smoothies, but one time I did. They asked if I wanted, well, they said, 'pearls.' And I said, 'Sure, why not. I'll try it.' As a kid, it kind of threw me off because it wasn't a super popular drink back then. And when you put boba in a smoothie, the pearls get kind of hard. And then when I went to high school and started trying it again, it was actually pretty good because I think I forgot how much I didn't like it as a kid [laughs].[5]

Similarly, Nicole Thompson, a 19-year-old who identifies as mixed Chinese/Native Hawai'ian/Irish/French Canadian recalled, "Ever since I was 2, maybe 3, I remember going to TungKee Noodles – it's like a fast food Vietnamese place – and getting the taro with pearls."[6]

Most of these restaurants are located in "Little Saigon," a predominantly-Vietnamese and Latinx neighborhood in Eastside San José. Little Saigon holds "Asian plazas" such as Lion Plaza, Grand Century Mall, and the recently-developed Vietnam Town Plaza, sprawling shopping plazas each filled with Asian restaurants, grocery shops, dessert and boba spots, and small businesses ranging from dentists and nail salons to eyelash parlors and religious paraphernalia shops ("San José" 2020). "Growing up, I've gone there since before it was Little Saigon," Daniel Huang, a 23-year-old, Chinese-Vietnamese American explained:

> There's that Pho restaurant that was by the old Hollywood Video store. And I don't even know the names of these places but knowing what restaurants to go to was common knowledge. Everyone's families did the same thing, and I think that goes to show how important food is to our [Vietnamese] community-building. For kids, it's like bonding over what boba shop you like best. My first drink was honey dew smoothies [at a pho restaurant]! I think that's where it started. Between there and Quickly.[7]

While boba drinks, "smoothies," Asian cuisine, and Asian faces were commonplace in what Lung-Amam (2017) describes as "Asian malls" or plazas, many Asian American youth remained the minority in spaces such as schools in predominantly-white or Latinx areas of San

[5] Kimmie Pham, Zoom video call with author, February 26, 2019.

[6] Nicole Thompson, Zoom video call with author, March 8, 2019.

[7] Daniel Huang, Zoom video call with author, August 4, 2019.

José. Thao Tran attended a predominantly-white high school in the early 2000's and rarely saw peers drinking boba. It was only after attending Vietnamese language school on Saturdays that she started drinking boba regularly. Thao recounted, "My Vietnamese friends, when we hung out, we would always get boba."[8] Her Vietnamese friends comprised of students from high schools across San José. Then, in 2008, when she started attending De Anza Community College in Cupertino, Thao continued socializing at boba shops. She and her friends would walk across the street from campus to the Quickly on Stevens Creek Boulevard. When I asked if her undergraduate friends also identified as Asian, she laughed and replied, "Yeah, I think the nickname for De Anza was 'De Asia,' so [they] were very Asian." For Thao, since her first experience drinking Vietnamese "bubble tea," gathering with Asian American friends at local boba shops remained a constant throughout her youth.

However, not all Asian American youth gravitated toward the then new boba phenomenon in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Trinh Lam, a second-generation Vietnamese American, now in her late 30s, from Eastside San José (ESSJ), witnessed boba emerge in 1999. She attended Piedmont Hills High School in ESSJ and explains, "It was just the [first generation] Asian students who went [to boba] … I didn't hang around a lot of first generation [Vietnamese]… I actually made fun of them."[9] According to Trinh, most first-generation Vietnamese classmates came to San José through family reunification sponsorships as relatives of immigrants and refugees who left Southeast Asia after the Fall of Saigon. Trinh explained that as a second-generation Vietnamese born in America, she refused to participate in boba culture. "I related boba to 'Asian-ness.' I did not want anything Asian American [because] that [was] so

[8] Thao Tran, Zoom video call with author, March 10, 2019.

[9] Trinh Lam, Zoom video call with author, February 26, 2019.

uncool. It [was] cool to be white-washed and all that bullsh*t like that." Currently aware of her previous desire to distance herself from an Asian identity and assimilate into a white, American culture, which she now terms "bullsh*t," Trinh admits that her youth was filled with a need to differentiate herself, an Asian American, from Asian migrants. A teen in the 1990s when Asian Americans saw less positive and diverse representations than they do today, Trinh harbored internalized racism toward her migrant, first-generation peers and stigmatized boba shops as sites of not belonging to the "cool," white American youth culture. Thao Tran, who attended high school in the mid-2000s, agrees with the notion that Asian Americans faced (and continue to face) the "perpetual foreigner" stereotype or idea that those who appear Asian cannot also be American-born. However, instead of distancing herself from other Asians like Trinh, Thao grouped herself among those who looked like her; "It was easier back then for people to make fun of you for being different, so you just hung out with people of the same ethnicity." Even within the Asian social circles, Thao explained, she felt herself not quite "fitting in" to any clique in particular and bounced between "artsy Asians" and "scholarly Asians." Overall, although Trinh denounced boba while Thao bonded with boba, their contradictory attitudes toward boba both stemmed from their perceived racialization as Asians in America during the early 2000s.

AZN American

Mac Nguyen, a 36-year-old second-generation Vietnamese American from Eastside San José (ESSJ), remembers when boba emerged at the border between San José and its northbound city of Milpitas in the early 2000s. His first boba experience occurred after high school, circa 2001, when his friends drove from ESSJ to a Milpitas plaza and said, "Let's get bubble tea." During his interview, Mac spoke nostalgically about his first boba experience:

> I wondered, '[Bubble tea], what the hell is that?' Little jelly balls, tea, sugar, milk in a cup. I saw a machine seal the cup, and I was like, 'What the hell is this magic?' The

> [worker] shook the cup, flipped it back and forth, and it [was] not spilling. I remember being really nervous because they gave me a straw, and I thought, if I hit [the lid], it's gonna explode. I tried hitting it, it bounced off, then boom! It was decent and I thought, okay, there's something special.[10]

His description of the tea mixing machine and plastic seal that prevented tea from spilling out of the plastic cup exhibits a sense of child-like wonder and awe, a vivid memory though it occurred nearly two decades ago. The novelty of early 2000s boba evidently drew teens like Mac to the boba tea scene.

Since this first boba encounter as a high school senior, Mac and his friends continued frequenting boba shops for their late-night hang outs. His friend circle comprised three or four Chinese Americans and six to ten Vietnamese Americans. "If you're a young Asian person and wanted some tea or a snack at like 8 or 9 p.m., Milpitas Square was the place [because] there was a Tapioca Express," Mac recalled. With WiFi, tea, and even snacks all for an affordable price, boba shops became a hub for Asian American youth to socialize and study. While a college student at San José State University, Mac continued frequenting boba shops to study. "At the libraries, you can't have food and you gotta be quiet. So, for a 'good' Asian [student] who wants social interaction and wants to do work, but is also flexible with their time, boba places were the places to go." In 2005, Aleta Watson similarly reported in *The Mercury News*, "While generations of collegians have floated through school on a sea of coffee, today's San José State University students are just as likely to rely on boba tea to get them through long hours buried in their books."

In addition to fostering a study space, Asian Americans came to boba shops to see Asian peers outside of school. While studying at TapEx, Mac spotted popular Filipino Americans

[10] Mac Nguyen, Zoom video call with author, March 5, 2019.

"dressing in clothes like P. Diddy, like really big baggy clothes… [Filipinos] were good-looking, singers, dancers. Those are the people [I] looked up to." Boba shops served as a hub for Asian American youth from different neighborhoods across the city. As James Cieres, a 30-year-old second-generation Filipino American remembered, part of the appeal of going to boba as an Asian American teen in the early 2000s was the sense of comfort it fostered. As he explained, "I usually feel really comfortable in boba shops because it feels like a space for people who look like me."[11]

In the podcast *Asian Americana* hosted by Quincy Surasmith, journalist and boba aficionado Clarissa Wei likened the boba shop to the "Central Perk" coffee shop in *Friends*, the ideal meet-up locality for Asian American friend circles (Surasmith 2017; Wei 2017). Beginning in the late 1990s and early 2000s, boba shops, nicknamed "the Starbucks of Asian culture," competed against "mainstream" coffee shops (Chung 2011, 68; Pacio 2002; Jiménez 2017, 28). Often compared to coffee shops, boba shops emerged as an alternative venue where Asian American youth could consume Asian-inspired beverages and snacks with those who shared similar tastes. In addition, free from their parents' watchful eyes or the pestering of younger siblings, Asian American youth made boba shops their hangout space. From the afternoon to late nights, after school or on the weekend, Asian Americans gathered for quick boba runs or a space to chat for hours on end. "You're just sipping and talking about new adventures, where we hope to travel or what we dream of… we jump topics from church leadership to sex and 'Who had a one-night stand?'" Mac Nguyen reminisced.[12]

[11] James Cieres, Zoom video call with author, August 22, 2019.

[12] Mac Nguyen, Zoom video call with author, March 5, 2019.

In the early 2000s, boba culture coincided with a time when young Asian Americans in San José, who identified largely as children of (im)migrant parents who arrived after the post-1965 migration wave, began asserting a hybridized Asian American ethnic identity or "AZN pride" (Oyen 2015, 45). Like Thao, Mac, and James, young adults who came of age during this early boba wave sought out spaces among the suburban sprawl where they could belong to an Asian American majority, making boba shops different from predominantly-white spaces like Starbucks coffee chains or late-night fast food places like McDonalds. For late night hangouts, study sessions, and social scenes this first wave of boba chains such as Quickly and Tapioca Express gave Asian American youth a space to be unapologetically AZN.

Chapter 6

"Wanna Get Boba?": BOBA CULTURE TODAY (c. 2010-2020)

Amy Tran, a 19-year-old Vietnamese American from East Side San José (ESSJ) recalled, "I grew up drinking Thai tea or Avocado smoothies with pearls."[13] Today, when asked to describe her favorite boba drinks, she replies, "Oh boi, I have a lot. It depends on the place, but here are my faves":

1. "Ice cream black tea with mini pearls, less ice, and 80% sweetness" (Sharetea)
2. "Matcha Thai with honey boba and less ice" (Tastea)
3. "Mango matcha" (Happy Lemon)
4. "Creamy milk tea with jasmine pudding, less ice, 75% sweetness" (Soyful)

Amy then sent me a spreadsheet with 18 boba shops ranked and scored (1-5) on criteria such as "creativity/variety," "quality," "price," "consistency," and "would go again." According to Amy's chart, Tapioca Express scored lowest with a mere 12 points while Soyful, Tastea, and Happy Lemon tied for first with 20.5 points. Amy was not the only one to send along boba rankings during an interview. Tyler Le, an 18-year-old, second-generation Vietnamese American from Westside San José created a "tiered list," much like that used to rank video game characters. However, his survey response for his "Top 5 Boba Shops" read:

1. Pekoe
2. Pekoe
3. Pekoe
4. Pekoe
5. Pekoe

Born and raised in the Bay, Tyler currently attends college in Southern California. Of the 23 boba spots he ranked, 2 exclusively SoCal chains (Snow Monster and OMOMO) appear on his chart; other chains listed now exist in both Northern and Southern California. Tyler also

[13] Amy Tran, Zoom video call with author, March 3, 2019.

listed 4 local chains: Pekoe, TeaLyfe, Sweet Corner, and Cafe Lattea. With the exception of Cafe Lattea, which is located in Cupertino, 3 shops are located in Eastside San José, a predominantly Southeast Asian and Latinx neighborhood. Evidently, today's San Jose young adults hold a variety of boba shop preferences, the most popular being Happy Lemon **(Figure 5).**

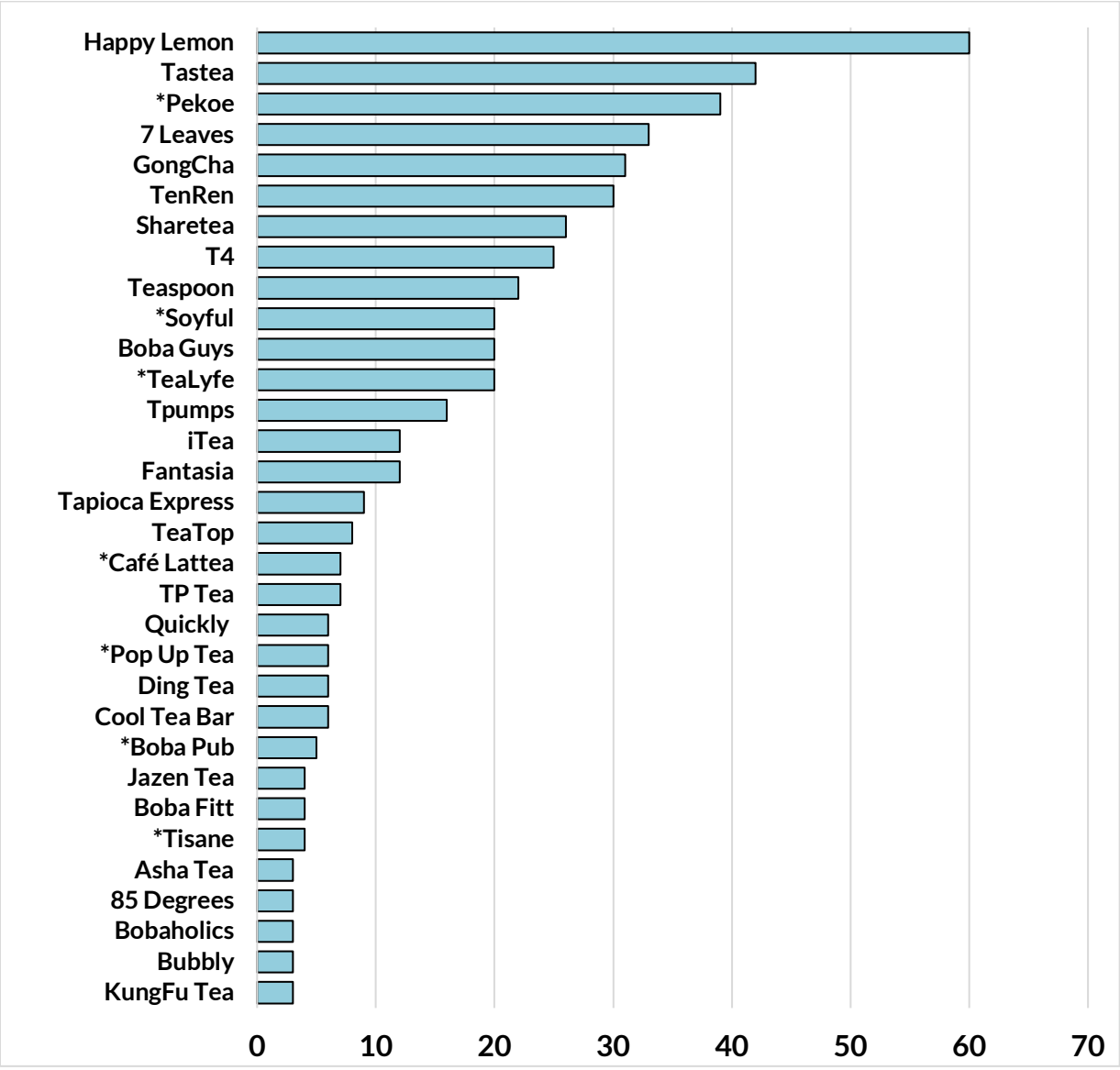

Figure 5. Boba Preference Chart Based on 156 respondents from the Bay Area and familiar with boba shops in/around San José, California (February 2019-December 2019). Survey respondents could list up to 5 of their favorite spots. (*) indicates a local shop/small chain only found in SJ. All shops listed can be found in SJ or surrounding cities, with the exception of Boba Guys (Palo Alto) and Asha Tea (SF/Berkeley). Happy Lemon's overwhelming success may stem from the fact that it has multiple locations spread across San José, serves a popular "salted cheese foam" tea drink, and offers consistently well-made and relatively affordable boba beverages.

Initially, starting up a boba shop held low upfront costs and a decent daily profit margin. However, as Kimmie Pham explains based on her 3 years of experience garnered from working at three different local boba shops:

> Now, there's so much more competition and variety that quality has become such a big indicator of whether or not they are successful. A lot of places no longer use powder. Now it's all about the recipe. How do you make your tea? Freshly brewed or in large batches? At what temperature? How long do you keep [a batch]? When it comes to the boba itself, what brand do you use? How long do you cook it? How long do you let it sit? Do you use honey? Brown sugar? Do you boil the boba in the brown sugar? [Is texture] a good in-between of chewy and soft? An example of bad boba is if its undercooked [from dehydrated packages], then the middle will feel hard. Or you could make it fresh, use tapioca starch and hot water, roll the [dough into] balls, and do that every day.[14]

Of course, nostalgic powdered boba drinks (made from a flavored-power mix) and fruit smoothies with boba pearls thrown in still exist in chain shops and on the dessert or drink section of family-owned Asian restaurants. However, today's boba culture, much like coffee or wine-tasting culture popular in middle to upper-class suburbs of California, carries its own following of self-proclaimed aficionados. Interviewees express a demand for novelty and quality. For many, the powdered tea drinks popularized by Quickly and Tapioca Express in the early 2000s get dismissed for the syrup-based and fruit-infused tea beverages of newer chains. Tyler Le expresses that certain chains that use sweet syrups are the "starter pack" for boba. "I'm not going to hate, but it's either black or green tea (as the base), with or without milk, and a whole bunch of syrup shots. As you get into [boba], you detect nuances. You start to go from really sugary drinks to appreciating the 'tea' more."[15] Go up in price point to nearly $7 a drink and quality may follow, with boba shops advertising their use of organic or locally-sourced ingredients, fresh fruits, teas brewed-to-order, or handmade tapioca pearls in various flavors. Shops offer a sweet,

[14] Kimmie Pham, Zoom video call with author, February 26, 2019.

[15] Tyler Le, Zoom video call with author, March 6, 2019.

sugary treat. Others replicate the authentic Taiwanese tea experience. For example, TenRen, Taiwan's largest tea company, which was founded 66 years ago, only uses tea from Asia in its U.S. boba shops, while TPT caters to a largely Taiwan migrant clientele (Boudreau 2009). You can order a rainbow assortment of pan-Asian-flavored beverages from Thai Tea to Taro or find interracial cultural fusions like Horchata with Vietnamese Coffee. A plethora of toppings in addition to classic honey boba pearls complement your drink: star-shaped mango jellies, heart-shaped strawberry jellies, rectangular clumps of grass jelly. Some drinks go as far as exhibiting performative qualities from sparkling color-changing tea drinks (infused with edible glitter) to fire-blazed crème brûlée layers atop a milk tea masterpiece. While the taste of the tea itself ranks high on the list of priorities of Asian American youth, hype also comes into play.

Hype: Influencers, Snap Stories, and Boba Memes

Compared to the Asian American young adults who came of age in the late 1990s-early 2000s, youth and young adults today have more options for boba and ways of exploring San José youthscapes through digital space. Early 2000s youth relied on AOL Instant Messenger (AIM), texting, or face-to-face interactions to learn about new boba shops. These methods were largely text-driven, as photo-sharing faced limitations due to the small memory capacities and low-quality photograph capabilities of early flip phones (remember the Motorola Razr?). Back in the day, high-quality photo sharing was less instantaneous – you often needed to upload your photos from a digital camera to your computer, and then upload them to share on your MySpace page or Flickr account. However, when Yelp, a business-rating and photo-driven website, started in 2004, youth now had a dedicated space for sharing reviews of the hottest new boba shops.

From the 2010s to today, youth face an unimaginable array of digital media platforms and social media networks. Simultaneously, boba shops in California have reached an all-time

high, with >100 boba shops in San José alone, not including neighboring localities or shops that sell boba as a side or dessert **(Appendix E).** Today's tech-savvy San José denizens learn about new shops on Yelp or foodie blogs featuring aesthetic boba drinks, with Instagram influencers tailoring their feed to a specific location such as the "Bay Area." Yelpers, aspiring to join the ranks of "Yelp Elites," compare local boba shops in their reviews, assuming most readers have similarly tried the most popular chains in the area. The DoorDash app even features a "bubble tea" search icon. Notably, in 2017, group of South Asian American high school students from Cupertino coded an iOS app for localized boba reviews within a tighter-knit community than they believed big-name platforms like Yelp could foster (Wilson 2017).

While constantly bombarded by boba on social media sites, young adults strongly influence each other on a local, intimate scale: friend circles. While previous studies investigated how media companies market consumer goods, such as McDonald's, to Asian Americans, my study fixates on the interpersonal relationships through which San José youth essentially market boba to each other (Shankar 2012). Through Instagram or SnapChat stories and foodie TikTok videos, peers post images of boba while tagging their location. They see posts created by local boba IG accounts, tag each other in the comments, and say, "We *have* to try this!"

Kimmie Pham, a 22-year-old second-generation Vietnamese American goes to boba with "a primary group completely composed of Vietnamese people, but another group I go with, one is white, two are Indian, one is Chinese, and one is Taiwanese American." As Kimmie's friend circle demonstrates, boba has become a pan-ethnic Asian American cultural phenomenon. Kimmie is a marketing major at SJSU and one whom I call a "boba enabler." "It kind of depends, but most of the time, when my friends get boba, they go with me." She explains:

> In Marketing, it's called 'word of mouth' when one person enables other people to go to a boba spot based on positive reviews. So, we [boba enablers] are definitely facilitating

> 'word of mouth' since when it comes to boba shops, they're not going to do a lot of marketing unless they have something novel. Like, when it comes to certain cups or [reusable] bottle designs. They put it on their social media. But they also need people like me and you to tag each other and go, 'Hey, there's this bottle. We should go there.'[16]

Mac Nguyen also believes in the combination of local hype and photo-driven marketing that gives certain boba shops clout. He explains, "I think it's the power of social media. On Yelp, you see the picture and the menu, then you go try it."[17]

Meanwhile, meme pages such as Subtle Asian Traits (SAT) on Facebook reify Asian youth's boba addictions around the world. Regarding SAT, its content, driven by Asian users across the diaspora, visualizes and archives an Asian taste that tends to differ from a mainstream, or Westernized hegemonic culture in which Asian foods still get categorized as foreign, exotic, or odd. "I feel like [boba] is not really talked about [online] except for on places like Subtle Asian Traits. [SAT] is like a big joke between Asians, right?" 19-year-old Amy Tran noted.[18] "And it doesn't really include mainstream American culture, where they're all talking about like… who knows? The Kardashians? Michael Jordan? Subtle Asian Trains is a space for like everyone to be one the same page" literally. Mac, Phoung, and Kimmie also discussed Subtle Asian Traits during their interviews and suggested that boba functions as a "conversation starter" or cultural symbol that fosters bonds between members of a pan-ethnic Asian community. As Tyler Le explained, "The presence of online groups, like SAT [Subtle Asian Traits] and SAD [Subtle Asian Dating, a largely heteronormative Tinder-esque slew of Facebook posts] unifies not only the growing population of Asian Americans but Asians around the world."[19]

---

[16] Kimmie Pham, Zoom video call with author, February 26, 2019.

[17] Mac Nguyen, Zoom video call with author, March 5, 2019.

[18] Amy Tran, Zoom video call with author, March 3, 2019.

[19] Tyler Le, Zoom video call with author, March 6, 2019.

It is important to note that while boba culture garnered extensive popularity in the United States in the recent decade, it remains a distinctly Asian food phenomenon. As many San José Asian Americans noted, boba may appear mainstream within the context of the Bay Area bubble but remains a beverage and phenomenon that gets "othered" by "mainstream" or white-dominated American culture. As Amy Tran explained:

> [For boba] in mainstream media, it's like, look at this 'cool, wild thing' Asians are doing…. We get highlighted like that, a delicacy to be put on display when this is just like every day for us. So that's why I don't think boba is part of mainstream culture. Like, I think Hillary Clinton said something about boba when she was running for president in order to appeal to Asians, but she called it 'chewy tea'![20]

While new boba shops bubble up across the Bay Area and the increasingly-technology-oriented landscape keeps young adults on their phones, one aspect of today's boba culture remains heavily intertwined with that of the early 2000s. Still stuck in the suburbs, Asian American youth continue seeking out what Judy Soojin Park (2015) calls a "cultural home."

"Wanna Get Boba?"

Among the feeds of boba posts and new shops emerging every year, certain shops get more "hype" than others. Yet, most shops survive the saturated landscape because they serve as a much-needed destination for suburban youth. Kimmie Pham, a 22-year-old, second-generation Vietnamese American from San José laments that aside from shopping or eating out at restaurants, there's nothing for Asian American youth to do in the suburbs. "So," Kimmie explains, "Half of the time, when someone's like, 'What should we do?' Someone says, 'Wanna get boba?'"[21]

[20] Amy Tran, Zoom video call with author, March 3, 2019.

[21] Kimmie Pham, Zoom video call with author, February 26, 2019.

Daniel Huang, a 23-year-old second-generation Chinese-Vietnamese American from Santa Clara explained, "Santa Clara is like, a suburb surrounded by San José. It's *Santa Clara.* There wasn't anything to do there [Looks at computer map]. Yeah, it's surrounded by San Jose, Saratoga, and Sunnyvale." Growing up with kids from Alviso, the northern part of SJ, and Milpitas, Daniel Huang explained:

> We'd go all the way to 7 Leaves in Berryessa. To Sunnyvale and Mountain View. Just because it's 11 a.m. and we don't want to get an alcoholic beverage yet. Especially way back when, when we first got to college, we're 19, we're babies. We're not going to get drunk at 11 a.m. So boba was just that intermediary. Boba did not change my *life* but it was a big part of what we *did.* We hang out, we go to the mall, we get boba. You just do things like that with your Asian American friends.[22]

While Daniel states that boba did not change his life, his descriptions of his everyday youth experience demonstrate otherwise. Phuong Huynh, a 22-year-old, second-generation Vietnamese American who attended Evergreen High School similarly recounted:

> TapEx was *the* boba place to be at in high school. It wasn't so special, but it was welcoming. They had spaces for us to sit, talk, eat, and drink boba. There are only two other places I came up with for kids to go. The mall and the library. I honestly hung out at the library a lot. I had my first kiss there [laughs]. For boba, we'd have to ask $10 from our parents or something. I'd just share with my younger sister. Or we'd share popcorn chicken.[23]

For today's Asian American youth in San José, boba shops, not coffee shops, remain the place to hang out. 18-year-old Vietnamese American Tyler Le who attended Prospect High School, explains:

> Boba shops are a little more casual than cafes, because people go to coffee shops to study, do work, drink coffee. But for high schoolers or kids, you didn't drink coffee. Even at Starbucks, we'd drink sugary drinks like Frappuccinos. [With boba], now there's this drink that a lot of young people can relate to because it's fun. You have sugary tea. Boba is fun to chew![24]

---

[22] Daniel Huang, Zoom video call with author, August 4, 2019.

[23] Phuong Huynh, Zoom video call, March 3, 2019.

[24] Tyler Le, Zoom video call with author, March 6, 2019

Meeting up at boba shops starts when Asian American youth become old enough to hang out in local shops without parental supervision. In middle school, parents dropped off groups of kids at the local mall or Asian plaza, many equipped with enough spare change for a drink and enough energy to carry on hours-long conversations or walk loops around a mall. For youth from working-class or middle-class families without adequate allowance to regularly drop $4-$6 on a sweet treat, friend circles or siblings would gather around a shared dessert. Others would work at local boba shops for the luxury of getting free drinks for themselves and their friends. Some youth thought little about their spending, such as Jaime Warner, a 20-year-old Chinese-White American who admitted:

> I don't even want to think about how much money I've spent on boba, but that's also a reflection of the fact that I don't have to count costs. I've literally had boba *four times* in one day. [Hold up four fingers]. That's a *minimum* of $20 a day. Those were meals... Unlike NYC [where Warner attends college] where there's so much to do, in suburbia, I automatically default to boba as an option.[25]

Boba shops also became a destination for before or after school hangouts. When the final school bell rings, hordes of students walk down the street to the nearest boba shop if they were lucky enough to attend school nearby Little Saigon or another Asian shopping plaza. There, they can study, wait in between school ending and their afternoon sports practices, or simply relax.

I attended Pioneer High School from 2009-2013. One of my close friend circles and I would go to the Starbucks three blocks from our campus every Thursday morning. This friend group comprised me, a Filipina American, Kathryn, a white American, Rachel, a Jewish white American, Alissa, a Korean-Chinese-Scottish American, and Hana, a Japanese-Dutch American. I relished buying a Caramel Macchiato or Green Tea Frappuccino, the coveted high-sugar beverage that I would drop my weekly $5 snack allowance on and slowly sip during my first

[25] Jamie Warner, Zoom video call with author, March 3, 2020.

three classes. I graduated 3 years before the boba spot, Bei Bay, now Gong Cha, opened up only two blocks from Pioneer. Like Starbucks, boba shops began proliferating near high schools and colleges in the Bay Area, competing for the growing clientele with limited funds who craved a sweet treat or caffeine boost before or after their school or work day.

In San José and its neighboring city, Cupertino, I now know where *not* to set up a study space on a school day. One such place is Café Lattea, where young tweens and teens will wildly flood into the small boba and dessert shop after 3 p.m. Lines out the door, aisleways cramped with chattering students, hefty 30-pound backpacks filled with Kumon assignments, SAT prep books, and textbooks the size of tomes swinging to-and-fro and endangering seated patrons. Another boba shop is Boba Pub across the street from Branham High School. One morning, while studying there, a police officer approached me because he thought I was a truant. "Do you go to the school across the street?" he condescendingly pried. I flashed my ID and explained, "I'm a college graduate. I'm here getting work done." *Curse my youthful genes.* Nevertheless, the choice to place boba shops so near schools proved the perfect marketing tactic.

Tyler Le, an 18-year-old Vietnamese American who attended Prospect High School in Westside San José, explained, "Middle school was a time that we'd walk to Starbucks and then come back, and everyone was like 'Oh my god, *that's* from off campus.'" "That" being a branded beverage, a status symbol for high school suburban kids. Like me, Tyler's friends enjoyed taking the off-campus journey to bring a treat back to school. Starbucks was the go-to until his senior year. "We had to go a little ways [several miles] for good boba until Gong Cha opened up in a nearby shopping plaza."[26]

"Westgate shopping plaza?" I asked.

[26] Tyler Le, Zoom video call with author, March 6, 2019.

"Yeah, Westgate! How'd you know?"

I replied, "I used to work retail there!" During my gap year in 2017-2018, before a nightshift that started at 3 p.m., I would often see groups of youth, many Asian American, walking down the street to the mall on my way to work. They would line up at Gong Cha in the Westgate food court, complaining about the rising cost of drinks, chatting about that day's school gossip, or debating what drink they wanted to try next. Turns out one of those kids was my now college-aged interviewee, Tyler. "Gong Cha opening – that was a *revelation.*" Tyler recalled:

> As high schoolers, we would *flock* to Gong Cha (and I lowkey have a bias against it because I've had it so often). It was our meeting place for every Friday after school. We'd go to Gong Cha and not all of us would even get it, but that was the meeting. I would constantly get the Wintermelon Tea with Milk Foam.

Seeing students lounging at tables in the open food court which housed Gong Cha, Starbucks, an ice cream spot, and a mix of fast-food cuisines was commonplace. Not everyone could purchase a drink, but the ample seating made it the perfect spot for social gatherings. Like Starbucks when I was in high school, Gong Cha became part of these kids' weekly routine.

Tyler grew up in San José near the "border surrounded by all these little cities" including Saratoga, Sunnyvale, and Cupertino and went to Prospect High School. As Tyler recalls, "Prospect doesn't have a strong population of any ethnicity but is like a 'mixing pot' of Latinos, whites, [East and Southeast] Asians, and Indians." Tyler typically distanced himself from those of the same Vietnamese ethnicity while at school, whether consciously or not. However, he told me about fond moments of connection with other Vietnamese Americans in high school.

> I think there was a decent Vietnamese population at Prospect, but a lot of times, they kind of branch off. You don't really talk to each other, but even if you weren't in the same friend group, you'd rejoice in being Vietnamese. Like, we'd have those conversations about Vietnamese things. For [Vietnamese] Lunar New Year, I'd ask, "Did you launch fireworks last weekend? Did you eat *xoi*, which is sticky rice? Did you go to Grand Century Mall in Little Saigon? Or how my friend would seek me out because I had Tiger Balm; it's like an oil that would help her with period cramps.

When it came to his Friday boba meetings, Tyler explained that he'd go with mostly Asian friends:

> That group was all Asian. It started off pretty big, but it boiled down to group of three or four core people. There was a Filipino, me a Vietnamese, there was a Taiwanese, and a Japanese American. Me and my friend are both second generation and the other friends were born in Asia. Yet, we all bonded over this concept of boba… I didn't realize how abnormal the idea was to other people outside of the Bay or Southern California.

Tyler, who now attends college in Southern California, realizes how growing up in a Bay Area bubble made boba such a large part of his life, a phenomenon less common in even other parts of California.

Phuong Huynh, a 22-year-old second-generation Vietnamese American from Eastside San José similarly remembered boba as "a growing trend in high school." Both on campus and off, Phuong explained, "Every time we had the opportunity to hang out, someone would throw in, 'Hey, anyone want to get some boba?'" Her high school, which she attended in the early 2010s, was predominantly-Asian and fostered a boba culture due to its location near many boba shops in Eastside San José.

> [At Evergreen high school], it was kind of a cool person thing to have a cup of boba while on campus because that meant you had a car or someone delivering the boba to you. In that way, it was kind of a status symbol. And I think we enjoyed boba more than coffee or anything in school because it was sugary, for one, and highly associated with the Asian demographic. My school had a really high Asian demographic. I remember having it on Senior Ditch Day. We'd all go to boba first and then come to campus so much later with our boba. [Boba also] came up a couple of times in Prom-posals. Like, someone would come with boba or a bouquet of chicken nuggets.[27]

After high school, Phuong attended UC Berkeley, a setting where boba culture remained a central part of Asian American and even the general college youth culture.

> Boba culture here is really big. Like, not even a block from campus, there are two or three boba shops. There's one on every street corner. When you'd say, 'Let's get boba,'

[27] Phuong Huynh, Zoom video call, March 3, 2019.

> people know because even if you don't drink boba, you know it's right there close to you. A lot of students do fundraisers through boba shops, like you'd go to [name of boba shop retracted] one day and 10-15% would go toward your organization.

Boba feels mainstream in places like San José or Berkeley, but Phuong, like Tyler, acknowledges that this boba phenomenon feels so relevant to her life because she has lived within the suburban "Bay Area bubble."

Amy Tran, a 19-year-old second-generation Vietnamese-American who grew up in Eastside San José and attended Silver Creek High School, told the story of when she brought her Pekoe boba drink to high school.

> There's so many boba shops around Silver Creek, and one time, I brought my boba to class. This guy saw my Pekoe drink, and he shouted from across the room, 'Is that PEKOE?' And you know how Pekoe has interesting [drink] names? I said, "Yeah, it's 'Let's Get High!'" And then everyone in the class looked up. Even the teacher looked at me. I had to explain, 'That's the name of the drink.'"[28]

Like Starbucks cups with their signature green logo, boba brands garner recognition for Asian American youth who bring their beverages to campus. They demonstrate knowledge of this unique boba culture, bonding over the provocative drink names of Pekoe to their classmates' delight and teacher's confusion.

For Ryan Legrand, an 18-year-old Chinese-White American from Cupertino who attended Cupertino High School, his go-to boba shop was Café Lattea.

> It's not the best boba, but it's so close. Also, because it was there before 'Main Street,' people who went there kind of got attached to it. And a lot of people know the employees. You can go there and study at any time, for however long as you want, even if you don't have a drink. I think that their policy I like, you can't [stay without a purchase], but the employees won't ask you to leave, so it's a very chill place to study. There's plenty of seats. And you see *everyone* from your high school there. If you go at 11 p.m. any day of the week, you'll probably see a crowd of high school or college aged students.[29]

---

[28] Amy Tran, Zoom video call with author, March 3, 2019.

[29] Ryan Legrand, Zoom video call with author, August 31, 2019.

The Main Street plaza in Cupertino developed in 2016. Along with a Target, Peet's, and Pressed Juicery, the plaza holds Asian eateries such as Tea Chansii and Meet Fresh where youth can congregate and drink boba. This plaza is situated right next to the Café Lattea and T4 boba shops. Café Lattea in particular attracted high school and college students, including myself, especially when one of my best friends from high school worked there and would throw in a drink on the house. Even after my friend changed employers, I continued frequenting Café Lattea with my sister, Tinder dates, or best friends because of its study-friendly ambiance and yummy "brick toast" desserts. It is located within a half-mile of Cupertino High School.

During lunch breaks or after school, Ryan would go to boba with "Chinese friends, Japanese friends, Koreans, and Indians… I just described the racial distribution of Cupertino High School," he joked. He also had a friend circle that was "100% hapa (an appropriation of the Hawai'ian word meaning part-Asian) and all of us were white-passing, total coincidence." He continued, "But I think that everyone at my school got boba. It's not exclusive to like, East Asian people." At Cupertino High School, Ryan recalls:

> I definitely remember myself or other people coming from lunch with boba. 99 percent of teachers didn't mind. I only had one teacher who said, 'You have to keep it in a box outside [during class] so it doesn't spill everywhere.' But, most of the time, teachers don't even care because it's such a ubiquitous part of high school life.

Bringing boba to school and going to boba shops afterschool or on the weekends made up a large part of Cupertino teens' lives. In Cupertino, recycling bins fill with more boba cups than Starbucks cups. Cupertino recycling bins in the Main Street even display boba cups on the bin's instructional labels. South Asian teens code apps to help find Bay Area boba because boba "is such a huge part of our culture" (Wilson 2017). Like San José, so embedded is boba culture in

Cupertino's youth scene that the Cupertino City Hall hosts events such as "Bobateeno" (a play on the words Boba and Cupertino) (**Figure 6).**

Figure 6. Posted on the City of Cupertino – City Hall Facebook Page with a caption reading "Teens! Do you enjoy free milk tea?! Silly question – of course you do. Who doesn't? Join the City of Cupertino, the Cupertino Teen Commission, and Cupertino's Youth Activity Board for Bobateeno ("City of Cupertino – City Hall" on *Facebook* 2020).

In Cupertino, Ryan explained, "It's typical if you're hanging out with someone. If you don't know what else to do, the typical thing is to get lunch, probably on 'Main Street' and then, afterwards, say, 'Oh yeah, do you want to go get boba?'" While San José participants often discussed exploring boba shops in Cupertino, Ryan explained that he never felt the need to leave Cupertino for boba. "Main Street is here, there's so many places, so for me, there's not much reason for us to go over there. If I make a trip, my friends and I will go to San Francisco."

As these stories of boba drinking in both San José and Cupertino illustrate, drinking boba is a social, visual, and cultural phenomenon for suburban youth. Young adults also take pleasure in visiting boba shops solo to study. Kimmie Pham, 22, explained:

> A lot of the friend groups I have, they all like to go get boba, but they're also not the type of people to go get it individually. So, it became a norm to go with at least one other person. The only times I ever go by myself is to study and need a good environment, like Pop Up Tea or Tea Lyfe. There's a lot of seating and music's not as obnoxious as other places. They have outlets. And I *need* caffeine, plus boba of course.[30]

Part social gathering space, part study spot, and part caffeine fix, boba shops remain a staple in Asian American youth culture that becomes more ubiquitous to San José's overall youth culture as the years go on.

Desire for a Youthscape

> *Throughout middle school and freshman year, Friday afternoon trips to Tea Top and QQQ were routine. Several awkward teens, celebrating the week-end, huddled around a phone and screamed about the latest memes or up-and-coming celebrities. For a moment, we forgot about homework and tests: it was just us, our drinks, and the stories we shared.*

This quote comes from an article written by Nicole Ong (2019), a seventeen-year-old Asian American, who published her piece in Lynbrook High School's student-run newspaper. In it, she explores how "Pearl Milk Tea" or "PMT" symbolizes connection for youth who grew up in Cupertino. Like the first wave of Bay Area boba lovers, today's youth continue to spend hours chatting and sipping boba at their local boba shop. Here, they proclaim the boredom of the suburbs, derive excitement from people-watching their peers, and share stories of the past and dreams of the future, all the while imbibing ever-evolving boba delicacies.

In San José or its neighbor, Cupertino, you can find traditional boba that resembles beverages in Taiwan or fusion boba shops serving Mexican horchata with Vietnamese coffee.

[30] Kimmie Pham, Zoom video call with author, February 26, 2019.

Some shops sell boba hot pot while others display glitter-infused, multi-colored teas on their social media feeds. All of them aim to attract the eyes of Asian American youth. Aside from the mall and the library, San José youth lack spaces to go for leisure. “I think that’s what made boba ‘welcoming,’” Phuong Huynh, a 22-year-old, second-generation Vietnamese American from Eastside San José explained. “They had space for us to sit, talk, eat, and drink boba. In the library, you have to be quiet, but in the boba shop, you don’t and you can sit there for a long ass time.” These boba shops, like Lollicup in deGuzman’s (2006) study, provides a space for Asian American youth to freely express themselves. This remains relevant in the suburbs where few opportunities to socialize freely remain available for Asian American young adults.

In addition, boba shops themselves aim to create a safe space for their young adult community. Many boba shops advertise board games and video games that patrons can enjoy in the boba space. Common noises heard in busy boba shops boba shops include the clunky crashing of Jenga blocks, plastic pieces shaking in a Connect4 set up, or the theme song of Warner Bros’ super smash blaring through a television screen. Other shops host themed events to attract youth and young adult guests. For example, Tea Lyfe hosts events for K-pop fans, where K-pop collectible “cup sleeves” get sold with drink purchases and a community of “K-pop stans” comes together to celebrate a K-pop group’s album release (Trazo 2020). Tea Lyfe also features young adults’ special moments on their Instagram, from catering Asian Americans’ weddings to showcasing local high schoolers in glamorous prom attire holding boba. Other shops, like Pekoe and Tisane, share their support of local school fundraisers on Instagram.

While boba shops foster a safe space for young adults, the realities of living in an a (sub)urban environment pierce through this veil of safety. In Spring of 2019, Tea Lyfe boba shop experienced multiple break-ins as burglars shattered the glass boba shop’ storefront. Tea Lyfe

owner and long-time Eastside San José resident, Candy, explained, "We've worked so hard to open a location in an area we grew up in." A Latina entrepreneur who runs Tea Lyfe with her Vietnamese American partner, Candy Gomez Bui and Caleb Bui both grew up in San José (Hickle 2018). While ESSJ has always been their ideal boba location, Candy remains vigilant in combatting the negative stereotypes associated with her community while continuing to fight for a safer neighborhood. Candy expressed on Tea Lyfe's Instagram (@TeaLyfeDrinks):

> I've grown up in east side and I've always been comfortable in our hood. I won't close my eyes to the crime and issues facing our neighborhood…I hate to see any break-ins and now that's it's happened to us I have more proof of what we face. We opened Tea Lyfe, our first business, here in ESSJ as our first choice for a reason. To provide great drinks and nice environment to our people to enjoy![31]

Nevertheless, in most cases, boba shops buffer young adults from the realities of urban life, and a perception of San José's Asian American youth as "sheltered" surfaced repeatedly throughout my interviews. As Chinese-White American Jamie Warner explained:

> I think for a lot of kids who grew up in suburbia who are immensely sheltered, I don't necessarily have the same concerns of safety. At least in San José, we're not profiled as threats. A group of Chinese-looking kids sitting in McDonald's, even at like 2 A.M., is not going to be constructed in the same way as black teens doing the same thing.[32]

Growing up in a sheltered suburban environment, boba shops function as an extension of the home or school, in the sense that Asian-presenting youth of color feel comfortable relaxing and expressing themselves freely in public spaces. Jamie's understanding of her racialization as East Asian differing vastly from the way Black youth get policed in public spaces speaks to the way Asian American youth navigate suburbia. They seek spaces of belonging and feel encouraged to stay in the places they find.

---

[31] Candy, Tea Lyfe Drinks (@TeaLyfeDrinks) Instagram post, April 22, 2019

[32] Jamie Warner, Zoom video call with author, March 3, 2020.

Intimately connected to local schools, social media feeds, and San José's landscape, boba culture continues to foster nodes of connectivity for Asian Americans across the suburban sprawl. While a more wide-spread phenomenon than in the early 2000s, boba culture remains a space for and by the Asian American community in cities like San José. As such, it serves as a lens to better understand the intricate racialization, community formation, and Asian American youth stereotypes within boba shops. A site largely discussed so far as one of inclusion, boba shops also illuminate feelings of unbelonging to Asian American youth culture and the complexities of how youth read themselves and others in racialized spaces.

Chapter 7

BOBA SHOP SCENES: PERFORMING BOBA CULTURE

Mixed

Jamie Warner, a 20-year-old from South San José, identifies as third-generation Taiwanese American. Her mother is second generation Taiwanese American and her father is "at least fourth generation… and literally as 'white boy American' as you want to get."[33] Jamie feels closer to her mother's Taiwanese/Chinese[34] American culture than her father's white American culture, particularly when it comes to her memories of food. The family frequently drives a half-hour from San José to Cupertino in order to frequent Chinese and Taiwanese restaurants and boba shops or celebrate Lunar New Year. The population of Cupertino is nearly 70% Asian, and of the 63% Cupertino citizens who speak a non-English language, a quarter speak Chinese (Data USA "Cupertino, CA" 2017). In Cupertino, boba shops fill with patrons heard speaking a mixture of English and Chinese dialects.

Despite her connection to Chinese culture, entering racialized spaces of consumption often causes Jamie to question her legitimacy in claiming a Chinese American identity. She feels she does not fit the "Chinese appearance" associated with monoracial Chinese Americans. As a mixed-race woman, Jamie explains, "I consider myself rather ethnically ambiguous in the sense of like people can identify... 'She's white, but she's something else as well'... [or] 'Oh, I can tell that you're something different.'" For mixed-race Asian Americans, "culture and phenotype are separate… someone could appear to be less phenotypically Asian but could be culturally Asian"

[33] Jamie Warner, Zoom video call with author, March 3, 2020.

[34] Jamie used the words "Chinese" and "Taiwanese" interchangeably throughout the interview. However, there remains a distinction between these different groups, as discussed in Wang 2020.

(Welty-Tamai, Nakashima, and Williams 2017, 183). Although strongly identifying with her Chinese culture, Jamie feels betrayed by how (she assumes) others read her ambiguous face.

Jamie felt profoundly self-consciousness about her mixed-race appearance when she and her sister went to "Taiwan Professional Tea," or "TPT," a boba shop in Cupertino. Walking into TPT, Jamie noticed, "Like everyone was visibly Chinese/Taiwanese, and my sister and I — we're also Asian, but we're *mixed* — so I was aware of how I am read in a space like this. Like do they see two random white girls? Or do they identify me as… as one of them?" Her worry about appearing to be a "random white girl" denotes a fear of exclusion based on the perception of the assumed majority-monoracial Asian clientele at TPT. Jamie remembered that trip to TPT specifically because of her experience while ordering her boba. Jamie recounted:

> I remember the number my sister and I got for our order. The number was "444" which is DEATH DEATH DEATH in Chinese! And my first thought was [the Chinese workers] are trying to curse me. They gave the only two white people in this entire f**king joint the most cursed number! Okay, that's just me being paranoid, but I think it does bring up feelings of insecurity.

Again, Jamie refers to herself and her sister, Kate, as "white people." Despite being both Chinese and White, the context of East Asian, monoracial-appearing guests at TPT makes the mixed-race sisters place their whiteness at the forefront, as it is whiteness that sets them apart.

Because Jamie feels her appearance is not Asian enough, she overcompensates through a "performance" of Chinese American culture. Jaime explains, "I think a lot of mixed people engage in performances... I want to prove that I was raised in this [culture], I *know* this. I feel what you feel, and I project that and make that visible to other people because when people look at me... they don't necessarily see 'Chinese.'" She views the simple act of ordering a drink at a boba shop as indicative of her Chinese cultural competency. In this performance, she

subconsciously demonstrates an essentialized understanding of what it means to exist as authentically Chinese.

> I don't think it's something I've ever admitted before [pause] how I police my orders. Growing up, I wouldn't want to order the things that my white friends were ordering. I'd be like, 'Oh, I know what's up. I know what's authentic' and order what other Chinese people are drinking, or I would 'adjust the sweetness' because, you know, my Chinese friends would do that. I would get a different type of tea I wouldn't necessarily order because I wanted to prove myself like, 'I know what's up. I'm an insider on this.'

Jamie's internalized notions of what it means to "appear" authentically-Chinese manifests through her tea orders and demonstrates the phenomenon of cultural understanding which Lisa Lowe (1991) terms "horizontal transmission" of culture. Horizontal transmission occurs between Asian Americans of the same generation, demonstrated in Jamie's case by how she models her performance of adjusting sweetness or her drink choice on the behaviors of her monoracial Chinese American friends. For Jamie, the monoracial Chinese body merits greater cultural authenticity while the mixed-race body signifies inauthenticity. As a body read as one, the other, or neither, Jamie attempts to control how others visually-consume her mixed-race body through a performance of ordering that mirrors that of "authentic" Chinese bodies.

Let's go to Pekoe!

Based on my interview data, Bay Area locals drive as far as 50 miles to drop by Pekoe Tea Bar. One such commuter is Sara Takashi. Sara is a 19-year-old multi-racial (Chinese/Japanese/Scottish/Native Hawaiian/Scottish), fourth-generation Asian American from Danville, CA, a rural, middle-class suburb in the East Bay region of the San Francisco Bay Area. About a year ago, Sara and her friends stopped by Pekoe after their San José day-trip to the city's escape rooms. Sara has since made the nearly *50-mile* drive from Danville to Pekoe on her own. Sara is not the only teen to occasionally journey to San José, as other respondents drive from as far north as San Francisco, CA, also 50 miles away, for the Pekoe experience **(Figure 7)**.

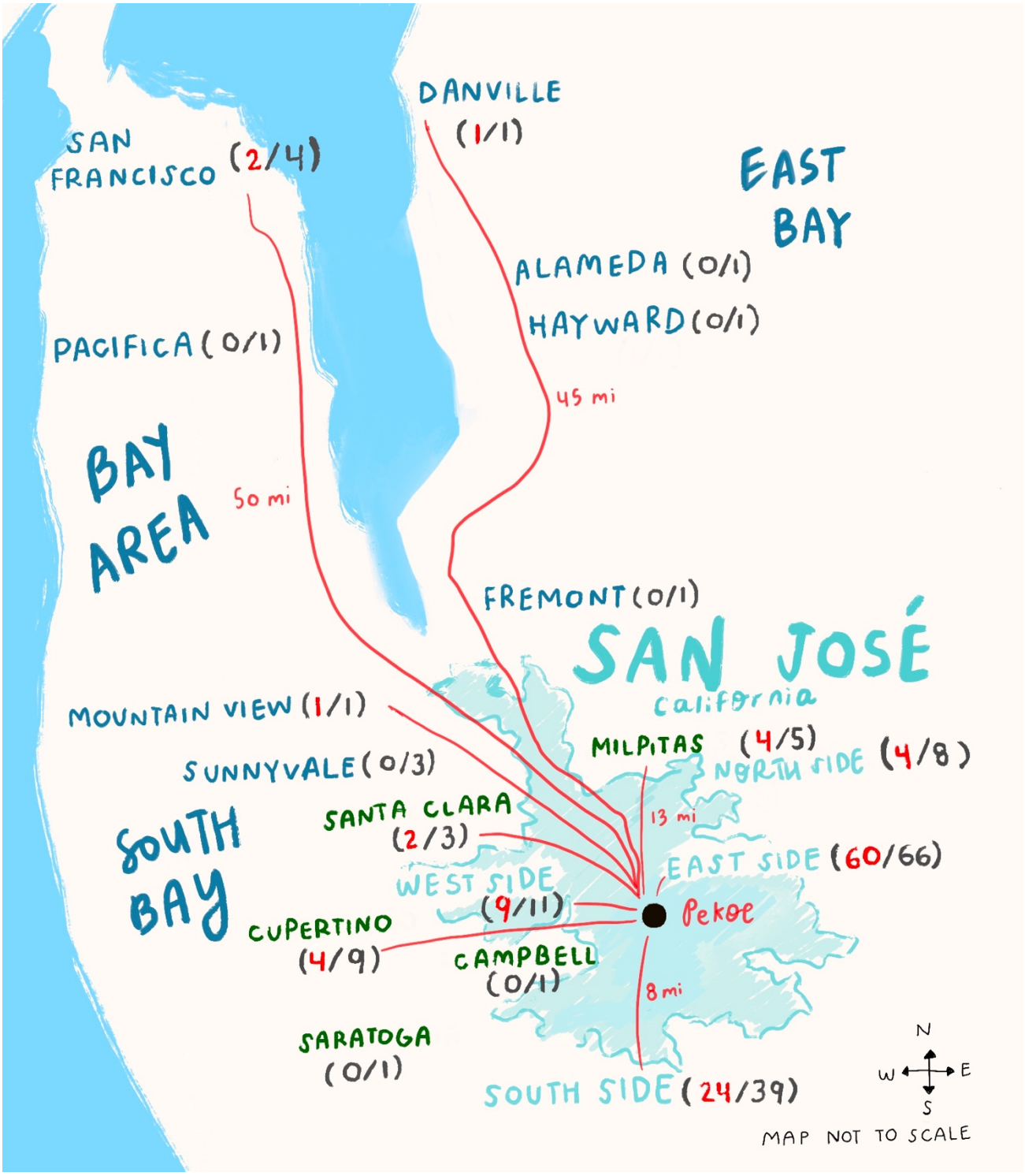

Figure 7. "Do You Know the Way to San José?": Mapping Asian American Youth Travelling to Pekoe Tea Bar Illustrated by author using Procreate and based on Google Maps. Red lines chart paths between the city identified as survey respondents' hometowns to Pekoe. The number in red indicates how many survey participants from each locality [nearby city or region of San José (West side, East side, South side, North side)] has visited Pekoe Tea Bar.

While Sara loves Pekoe's boba, she notes, "The drinks are special, but also the *vibe*… it's kind of like a nightclub… it's got music and humongous screens… and it's always really crowded."[35] In addition, clientele make Pekoe what 22-year-old Japanese-White American from Willow Glen, Oliver Hoffman, deems "an Asian spot," a place where "there's just a bunch of Asians in boba shops, night clubs, restaurants."[36] In this context, "Asian" refers to the largely Asian American clientele who patronize new and trendy eateries across the Bay Area. For Tyler Le, who grew up in West San José, Pekoe is "if you took a night club and then turned it into a boba shop." Located on the opposite side of San José, about 30 minutes across the city, Tyler recounts, "[Pekoe] is not very easy to get to, not near any major highways. You have to take the 280 to 101, then Capital, and go down this wide street for miles. It's such a trip."[37]

Nestled in a largely-residential neighborhood in a nondescript suburban plaza beside Lee's Sandwiches and a Lucky's Supermarket, and ten minutes from the nearest freeway, Pekoe is both largely invisible in its somewhat-remote suburban locality and highly visible to locals and pan-ethnic Asian American youth across the Bay Area suburban sprawl. My middle-aged Vietnamese hairdresser once asked me, "You know that boba shop on the Eastside? All the kids who go there. Always lots of people there. You know what it called?"[38] This hyped shop is Pekoe. Pekoe's Instagram bio (@pekoe_tbar) reads "serving the best premium organic fusion teas in the Bay Area." Open from 11 A.M. to midnight daily, a line of Asian American teens and young adults always trails out the door. "I remember going for the first time and just [thinking],

[35] Sara Takashi, Video zoom call with author, August 23, 2019.

[36] Oliver Hoffman, Video zoom call with author, February 26, 2019.

[37] Tyler Le, Zoom video call with author, March 6, 2019.

[38] Tammy, in-person correspondence with author, July 2019.

'There's video game stuff here…' and it just felt very ABG (Asian Baby Girl) central," Daniel Huang recalled.[39] "I walked in and just saw couples all boo-ed up with their decked-out cars walking in and out of the store at night. It's right next to Lee's Sandwiches and it's so funny for me to see." Pekoe's nondescript location, much like cybercafes of the early 2000s, makes it "barely noticeable and tucked amid other businesses" and alludes to the intentionality of Asian American youth in seeking out sites like Pekoe (Danico and Vo 2004, 178).

"Spoiler Alert!" Alex, a 24-year-old, second generation Mexican American from Mountain View, jokingly exclaims.[40] We watch yet another Honda Civic sporting a trunk spoiler loudly veer into the plaza parking lot as we sip our Pekoe drinks. I hold a "split cup," a multi-compartmented plastic cup with a different drink on each side: "Let's Get High" ("Dark High Mountain Oolong Tea splashed with Pekoe Milk Cream Topped with Coffee Jelly and Silky Black Grass Jelly") and "Foxy Brown" ("Award Winning Assam Milk Tea fused with Organic Demerara, Turbinado, Golden Brown Sugar, and Honey Black Pearls") (Pekoe Menu 2020).

My experience mirrors that of Tyler Le. Tyler describes the typical Pekoe scene:

> My friend and I made a joke. Once the sun goes down, sometimes late, like 10 P.M., you have all these riced out cars driving up the street. A lot of Honda Civics. This is very *stereotypical,* I'm sorry. And then, ABGs come out of the back with the dyed hair, fake eyelashes, caked up faces, hoop earring. They lookin' cute. The guys are all hypebeasts. Got the hat, got the chain. A lot of them dance and are playing hip hop music like P-Lo. They're vaping from their nicotine device and they HIT UP PEKOE. They hit it hard.

In his description, Tyler alludes to various Bay Area cultural references, from car culture to the gendered appearances of hyper-feminine Asian Baby Girls (ABGs) and hyper-masculine Asian Baby Boys (ABBs). He also mentions hip hop music, namely P-Lo, a Bay Area born-and-

[39] Daniel Huang, Zoom video call with author, August 28, 2019.
[40] Alejandro Romero, in-person communication with author, September 5, 2019.

raised Filipino American rapper/producer/songwriter whose music grew popular through the late Hyphy movement of the early 2000s (Tabios 2017). Cars rev into the parking lot "riced up" and "obnoxiously loud as f**k."[41] The drivers of these "f**kboy cars," Amy Tran explained, are

> ABB's, they wear the cross earing, they wear their hair up, they have your I dunno, your sleeve or back tattoo, the two-door car that sounds hella loud, and they vape. They think they're cool, like they think they can say the 'N-word' because 'I grew up in the hood' – But it's a joke. They didn't grow up in Eastside San José, they grew up in *Evergreen,* the bougier area. Evergreen High School is where you get a decent education, like hella people wanted to go to Evergreen and they would use addresses of relatives to get in.[42]

This appropriation of black culture by Asian men, which stems from the participation of Asians in Hip-hop and DJ culture in the 1980s to today, reappears in a highly-problematic way: the casual usage of a racial slur (Tiongson 2013; Wang 2015). Meanwhile, ABB's also represent the youngest iteration of import car drivers. When racialized to Asian Americans, "rice rocket culture" that began in the 1980s, came to symbolize "an icon of toughness… a new brand of American heroism and masculinity" (Rodriguez and Gonzalez 2007, 251). The heteronormative, hypermasculine display of car culture often involves the sexual objectification of Asian woman. As Robyn Rodriguez and Vernadette Gonzalez (2007) write, "the display of both car and [Asian] girl in public spaces is a performance of hypermasculinity" (263). These sexualized Asian women or "Import Models," and import cars function as "accessories" that bolster the performance of masculinity and attract visibility. At Pekoe, these gendered trends persist, as exhibited by clientele Pekoe's owners originally catered to when they opened in 2015.

In 2015, a young Vietnamese American couple bought a portion of Lee's Sandwiches and converted it into a boba shop. Their strategy to attract customers was to use Pekoe as a site for import model meet-ups. A staple of "rice rocket" car culture, "import models" pose sensually in

[41] Tyler Le, Zoom video call with author, March 6, 2019.

[42] Amy Tran, Zoom video call with author, March 3, 2019.

front of imported cars. The model line-up included Filipina American Kimmie Vee and Chinese-French Canadian Dannie Riel, both San José natives and "OG ABGs" (Riel 2015; *It Girls* 2012). This tactic worked, and four years later, Asian American youth continue to visit Pekoe in the hopes of seeing "Import Models" or attractive Asian American female teens and young adults otherwise known as "ABGs."

The early 2000s "Import Model" and "Hyphy" makeup trends used by Asian Americans to appear "tough" and arguably differentiate them from their Asian international counterparts continue with the contemporary generation of "ABGs" or "Asian Baby Gangsters"/"Asian Baby Girls." The Hyphy movement started in the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1990s when the late Mac Dre spearheaded a style of Bay Area hip-hop music and dance that continued through the early 2000s by way of other rappers of color who wanted "young kids our age finding something positive to represent where we're from" (Horowitz 2016; BillyJam 2008). The movement garnered a specific Bay Area style that included sporting streetwear, filled-in high-arched eyebrows, and large hoop earrings. Today's Asian Baby Girl wears false eyelashes, contoured face makeup, ombre-dyed blonde hair, and low-cut, cleavage-baring attire. San José ABG's express both a look and the "lifestyle" which largely includes raving at EDM festivals, drinking boba at Pekoe, and vaping.

The stereotypical and gendered dynamics of ABGs and ABBs goes viral through online quizzes such as the "abgcalculator.com" created by Ku Kim. The landing page of the "Official ABG & ABB Test" reads: "Are you a Kevin Nguyen? Or a Vivian Tran?" with an option to click "For the Ladies" or "For the Boys" (Ku 2020). Notably, both last names indicate Vietnamese heritage and common Westernized names given to U.S. Asian American Millennials and Gen-Zers. Other elements of the quiz reference the Vietnamese American population, bringing into

conversation the hyperfeminine beauty standards of "nails like Wolverine," a nod to the history of Vietnamese nail salons as an ethnic niche occupation since the 1980's (Ku 2020; Eckstein and Nguyen 2018). Of course, in the quiz, geographic location gets mentioned, with the question "Are you from LA, OC, **SJ**, Sydney, Toronto, or Other ABG Central? (Ku 2020, emphasis added)" with a nod toward the ABG phenomena's current global reach. Three questions in the quiz implicate boba as a symbol of ABG culture.

22-year-old Vietnamese American, Kimmie Pham, considers herself a "MaybeG" – a play on the words "Maybe" and "ABG" often referenced in Subtle Asian Trait (SAT) memes.[43] Kimmie loves wearing the archetypal false eyelashes and bold eyeshadow and eyebrow looks, in addition to frequenting raves or electronic music festivals. She's also worked at three boba shops. However, she acknowledges that her body type differs from the conventionally-petite "Asian" body standard perpetuated by both Asian and Western media. She also rejects the "b*tchy" attitude ABG's are stereotyped as possessing. Similarly, Amy Tran, elaborated how ABG is more than a physical appearance but a culture:

> I can't just put on lashes and be an ABG. They rave, it's a whole thing you put on… and certain girls, even if you do that, you're not an ABG. [ABG means] you're an import model, like Danny Riel, that's what ABG makeup models itself after. You fetishize Asian models with a skinny waist and big boobs who dye their hair blonde, have big ass Instagram eyebrows, and they carry a Louis Vuitton bag. They may have tongue piercings. It's a whole stereotype.[44]

Amy Tran continued, "[The ABG] ties into how Asian women are viewed. I met this person off [name of online dating app retracted], and he's like, 'Are you naturally freaky? Cause you kind of look like you are.' He said, 'The short, wholesome ones are always freaks.'" While

[43] Kimmie Pham, Zoom video call with author, February 26, 2019.

[44] Amy Tran, Zoom video call with author, March 3, 2019.

ABG makeup trends emphasize a "tough" outlined eyebrow so sharp it can "cut a b*tch," female-presenting Asians remain infantilized or seen as innocent, childlike, and "wholesome."

Meanwhile, a 28-year-old Filipina American, Ocean Tolentino, explained that she could never look like an ABG as she also feels she does not fit into the normative beauty standards or social routines associated with Asian American hyper-femininity.[45] Having grown up in Eastside San José her entire life, Ocean Tolentino witnessed the rise of "OG ABG's" (Original Gangster or Original ABGs) and discusses ABGs "as an icon of how the Model minority myth failed Asian American women." While the Model Minority Myth praises Asian immigrants, particularly East Asians, and their children for their success as minorities who can attain the socioeconomic and educational status of middle-class whites, ABGs refute such stereotypes associated with the Model Minority trope (e.g. Asian nerds focused only on their studies who equally embody the silent, submissive stereotype imposed on Asian women) (Lee 1996; Peterson 1966; Trazo and Kim 2019)**.** Notably, while the current definition of ABG means "Asian Baby *Girl*," older members of the boba generation remember when ABG meant "Asian Baby *Gangster*." In the 1980's and 1990's, Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian refugees and Filipino immigrants settled in Eastside San José, an area known for heavy gang violence and a strong Hispanic culture. Often, youth joined gangs for a sense of social support and protection as Asian newcomers faced slurs such as FOB's ("fresh off the boat") and physical violence (Do 1999, 63-64). Gang affiliation stemmed from a need to survive in racially-diverse, lower-income neighborhoods (Silv and Collier 2003). When ABG's meant gangsters, I suggest that they modeled their sharply-drawn eyebrows, hoop earrings, and tough attitude on San José's working-class Mexican American or Chicana cholas (Martinez-Morrison 2014). This borrowing of Latinx

[45] Ocean Tolentino, in-person correspondence with author, August 22, 2019

culture directly counters the Model Minority Myth, which exists to pit Asians against black and brown minorities. Veering away from honorary whiteness, and instead, turning toward brownness, allowed for multiracial community formation among San José's youth of color. Though the notoriety of Asian Eastside gangs has decreased substantially due to crackdowns on Vietnamese coffee shops in the 2000s and sheltered young adults leaning toward "safer" or middle-class spaces of recreation such as the boba shop, visiting a locality like Pekoe in Eastside San José allows Asian Americans to witness the "tough" culture for which San José remains known (López 2014). Amy Tran explained, "ABG's go to Pekoe cause ABG's are Eastside San José," and in doing so, linked ESSJ's multiracial history to today's boba culture.

For those not from Eastside San José or familiar with these stereotypes present in Bay Area culture, experiencing Pekoe gets likened to culture shock. Alana Knope, a second-generation Indian American from Southside San José, described Pekoe as such: "It's so serious… like all the Asian hipsters are concentrated in one dark spot. It was very interesting to see."[46] Alana did not know the term "ABG" and instead used "Asian hipsters" to distinguish the type of Asian girls she encountered while at Pekoe. Alana further elaborated on her observations of Pekoe in regard to her conceptualization of Asian American culture:

> I don't think I'd been to any place like [Pekoe] before. It was a place that I could tell was specific to Asian American culture, but not *my* type of Asian American culture. [I asked, 'What's your type of Asian American culture?'] Um, well, I mean, I'm Indian. Boba isn't a big thing in my culture. I think boba tastes good, but I don't think taste is the whole reason why people love it so much. Right? So [pause] for me, I know that it's not aimed at me.[47]

Alana felt able to participate in boba culture when she would hang out with an ethnically and racially diverse friend circle: another Indian American, a Pakistani American, a Filipina

[46] Alana Knope, Zoom video call with author, March 3, 2019.

American, a Russian American, and a White (mixed-European) American. However, she felt that as an Indian American, she was only a background character to the performance of Asian American culture, particularly East Asian and Southeast Asian ABG culture at Pekoe.

"Wanna go on a boba date with me?"

In an interview with Quincy Surasmith (2017) on his podcast, *Asian Americana,* San Gabriel Valley native, Clarissa Wei, described the last place she fell in love: a boba shop.

> The first date... was at Factory Tea Bar… when we broke up, we sat in the same place and ordered the same drinks. The 'bookends,' if you will, of this relationship happened at a boba shop. That's what happens when you live in the San Gabriel Valley: you'll fall in love in a boba shop, you'll get your heart broken in a boba shop.

Not only limited to the ethnoburbs of San Gabriel Valley, a similar phenomenon takes place in the ethnoburbs of San José and its predominantly-Chinese neighbor, Cupertino. Daniel Huang, a 23-year-old Chinese-Vietnamese American who identifies as bisexual, noted, "Yeah, I went on a date with this [Filipino American] guy in Alameda and we went to get mac n' cheese and then boba. Like, after dinner, 'What do you want to do?' 'Oh, let's go get boba nearby.'"[48]

Thao Tran, a heterosexual, 31-year-old Chinese American from Campbell, met her boyfriend through a dating app. "Whenever I ask him why he decided he wanted to officially date me, he always says it's because I had boba with him."[49] She took her now-boyfriend, an Asian American transplant from the Midwest, on his first boba date. They had dinner on Main Street in Cupertino and extended the date with a round of boba at Tea Chansii. Similarly, Ryan Legrand, 18, who identifies as a gay Chinese-White American, explained the appeal of "boba dating." "It's not a huge commitment in terms of time," Ryan explained. "If it doesn't work out

[48] Daniel Huang, Zoom video call with author, August 28, 2019.

[49] Thao Tran, Zoom video call with author, March 10, 2019.

well, you spent half an hour. It's a casual thing. Also, Main Street [in Cupertino] is pretty at night, so getting food and then boba… it's such a cliché, but it's a fun thing to do."[50]

For 22-year-old V, although she is of legal drinking age, she prefers bringing dates to boba shops instead of bars or clubs.

> You go to boba to socialize. And it's better than us going to a bar or club where we can't hear each other and have to scream. You'd be like, "WHAT DO YOU WANT?" And they'd be like, "WHAT?!" [Laughs][51]

Similarly, Thao expressed that bringing someone to a bar after dinner has a different implication than extending a date with boba. However, when it comes to boba dating, most Asian American interviewees expressed a comfort in dating within their race as opposed to outside.

Mac Nguyen, a heterosexual, male 36-year-old Vietnamese American male, explained, "I'll be like, 'Hey, wanna get boba sometimes' or 'Hey, a new boba place just popped up. Let's go!' It's a lot more natural and easy-going when they're Asian Americans. It's like they know what it is, it's somewhat ingrained in them and it's simple."[52] The phrase "natural" also arose in an interview with James Cieres, a heterosexual, 30-year-old, second-generation Filipino American. "Like, when I want to go on a date, I'll suggest, 'Hey, Wanna get boba?' It's so natural," explained James Cieres. He elaborated on the meaning of dating:

> I have a younger cousin who's a junior in college at [name of Bay Area college retracted] and she asked me, 'What's a date?' I said, 'Netflix and Chill' is *not* a date. A date is when you're interested in someone and you have an intention to get to know them, you set a time and place, like go to boba and talk there. And if it doesn't go well, at least it's just a $7 loss [laughs]. I mean, I see some people go on luxurious dinners, but if it doesn't go well… on the other hand, you can get to know people at boba, take a walk. When I

[50] Ryan Legrand, Zoom video call with author, August 31, 2019.

[51] V, Zoom video call with author, February 20, 2019.

[52] Mac Nguyen, Zoom video call with author, March 5, 2019.

> went to UC Davis, there were one or two boba shops, so we'd go there. If it were too crowded, we'd take the boba and go for a walk in the Arboretum.[53]

Asian American interviewees described the ease of suggesting boba as a potential dating location. A casual, affordable option in the world of modern romance, so to speak, dates may come and go, but the desire to drink boba remains constant.

Boba dates often start with a performance of taste, if you will. James Cieres explained, "I judge people based on what kind of drinks they have. Like, oh, you ordered lychee fruit tea? Pretty basic. Or if you say, 'I usually get this, I'm going to try something new,' then I think 'Wow, you must be adventurous!'" Similarly, Mac Nguyen admitted, "Well, the smoothie is good, but when a white person does it, it's like… you're at a boba place. WHY? ! It's like, I'm judging this girl." Mac said that he often "judges" dates based on their boba order. However, he added, "Do you know what the hypocrisy of this is? I order smoothies sometimes!"

When I asked participants if they ever went on boba dates with non-Asian Americans, they expressed exhaustion. "I just don't want to [pause] explain. I don't want to have to convince someone, 'Hey, you should try this.' Or explain what the drinks are," James Cieres lamented. "I mean, I generally go get boba with Asian people. I have gone with someone who was not Asian. I asked them, "'Oh, do you know what boba is?' If they're Asian, I won't ask them," explained Amy Tran. Within San José, many Asian Americans perceive fellow Asian Americans as being more likely to have a shared knowledge about boba and boba culture than local non-Asian Americans. However, as my survey results show, a diverse, multi-racial clientele frequents boba shops. Nevertheless, Asian Americans remain wary of having to justify their love of boba to non-Asian Americans.

---

[53] James Cieres, Zoom video call with author, August 22, 2019.

Amy Tran, a 19-year-old second-generation Vietnamese American, explained that, when dating her white ex-boyfriend, "I was so uncomfortable bringing him to a boba shop because, I don't know, it's just like he stood out so much because he's tall, he's white, he sticks out. Like, if he was alone like yeah, you stick out, but you stick out by yourself, but he would stick out with me. Smack in the middle of Vietnam Town in San José." Her concern stemmed from fear of being judged for "bringing guests" into Vietnam Town:

> I don't know who I could run into… I was always alert, like when I've met people off the internet. Most of the time, they're Asian, so [I could say] that's my friend. But with [a white guy], I can't really say that because most people around here, you know, hang out with [people of] the same ethnicity. Especially because even now, I'm not allowed to have a boyfriend… I didn't want to run into my family friends or my family, especially going to a place like Vietnam Town. I could easily bump into a relative for sure.[54]

As someone who grew up in ESSJ surrounded by her Vietnamese relatives, Amy felt cautious about her non-Asian date making her more easily spotted by elders shopping in the same plaza. While boba shops get likened to safe havens for Asian American young adults, these public spaces do not exclusively serve a youth clientele. Nevertheless, dating in spaces that cater to and attract a largely Asian American young adult clientele makes boba shops an intuitive option for suburban youth.

As scenes within boba shops demonstrate, boba shops foster sites where Asian American youth navigate multiple facets of identity (Balance 2016). From contemplating and overcompensating for their uncertain Asian identity through "policing" their drink orders to unpacking the gendered and racial dynamics made visible in the "ABB" and "ABG" aesthetics of Asian American youth culture within these boba bubble microcosms, boba shops expose at once feelings of both belonging and unbelonging and to Bay Area Asian American youth culture.

[54] Amy Tran, Zoom video call with author, March 3, 2019.

Chapter 8

FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

My findings demonstrate that boba stands as a symbol of Asian American culture, a symbol that while tied to Taiwan in its invention has morphed into a highly-visible trait that bonds Asian American youth across the Bay Area. Beginning as an add-on item to Pho restaurant menus or drinks made from powdered-tea mix at mom-and-pop boba shops, the commodification of the Taiwanese drink continues to grow in popularity across the nation. Today, it remains a phenomenon largely attached to pan-ethnic Asian American youth culture. Like the popular locations of Tapioca Express and Quickly in the early 2000s, boba shops remain nodes of connectivity where Asian American youth scattered across San José gather. Somewhat lost amid the suburban sprawl and residing in neighborhoods that vary drastically in ethnic and racial makeup, socioeconomic status, and historical beginnings, Asian Americans find themselves searching for and living in the same "cultural homes." A serene study spot nestled in Little Saigon amid nail salons and Pho restaurants. A chain shop beside a Safeway, barely visibly across the multi-lane expressway. The trendy store with a perpetual line out the door. The boba shop miles outside your predominantly-white neighborhood where no one knows who you are, but you feel a sense of belonging. Asian American youth continue to seek out ethnic spaces to gather together and study, date, chat, and of course, drink boba. These spaces shape how Asian American youth perceive their ethnic, racial, gender, and class identity and that of others, understand themselves in relation to a diverse Bay Area community, and assert agency in defining themselves through the consumption of boba beverages and patronage of these community spaces.

However, will boba last? When San Gabriel Valley local Clarissa Wei wrote "How Boba Became an Integral Part of Asian American Culture" in 2017, she concluded with the following dream: "I can't wait for that moment when one day, my generation is gray, and we all come back to our respective favorite boba shops. A cup in hand, we will begin telling the story of our lives and how this was where it all started" (Wei 2017). Today, I wonder if such a dream is possible. After all, one of the first boba shops I visited when I was 14 closed by 2012.

This study, like the creative short stories of Stephen Cong (2016) and newspaper narratives of youth reminiscing over boba shops now closed, captures a mere moment within the ever-changing landscape of this nation and a snapshot of Asian American culture. Boba shops, which used to indicate a family-owned business selling tea drinks made with simple powders or syrups at a cheap price, have now become a multimillion-dollar industry. Entrepreneurs, from Asian American foodies and manufacturers of ecofriendly paper straws or biodegradable cups, to mainstream brands that feature boba prints or boba-inspired merchandise, shift the boba industry from its humble origins to an international corporate enterprise. In San José in particular, where big-tech companies like Google continue to change the city landscape through astronomical property value increases and heavy-handed urban planning initiatives, little room remains for the homegrown mom-and-pop shops of the past. As developers redesign San José's landscape for profit at the expense of pushing out low-income and homeless residents from its streets, I cannot help but gaze suspiciously at new, trendy storefronts downtown (archive 408). Recently, I passed by a sign in Downtown San José which read, "Boba for the People." I muttered to my friend, "But who are 'the people'?"

As boba transforms within national popular culture from an Asian American commodity to a marketable, mainstream novelty, this ideological shift could hint toward assimilation into

middle-class whiteness. In essence, a desire to appear accessible to mainstream audiences, as interviewees discussed, implies a "neutralizing" or white-washing of restaurant décor and pandering to the non-Asians "cultured" palate. Again, the push toward assimilating into white, middle-class American dreamscapes continues. Will the appearance of a boba shop in your neighborhood imply the next wave of gentrification (or gentrific-Asian, gentrification by way of upscale Asian-inspired eateries)? Or does the proliferation of boba shops signify a relational assimilation between Silicon Valley residents within cultural landscape destined for flux due to constant demographic changes within its ethnoburbs (Jiménez 2017)?

Today, San José faces immense gentrification by wealthy tech migrants and white transplants. Ocean Tolentino, a 27-year-old Filipina American, grew up in the "*motions hands in air quotes* 'bad' and 'gang-infested'" neighborhood of East Side San José. Later, Ocean's family moved to the southernmost Eastside neighborhood, Evergreen, which is now "the center of tech worker wealth" and Indian Americans. Boba shops including Pekoe straddle the border between these neighborhoods.[55] As Ocean explains, "My parents were able to buy [my house] — they're still paying it off 20 years later — but it was $300,000 twenty years ago and now it's worth $1.5 million." Even within Eastside San José, disparities continue to exist. Property values continue rising to levels affordable only to the wealthiest Silicon Valley workers in Evergreen, an area that borders the predominantly lower-income Eastside neighborhoods. As shifts continue within the contested, colonized environment of San José, California, this piece of Asian American history, as seen through the lens of boba shops, will continue to morph and change.

However, as the scenes of Asian America illuminated by lens of boba shops demonstrate, Asian American youth constantly desire a sense of belonging within their local communities and

[55] Ocean Tolentino, in-person correspondence with author, August 22, 2019.

cultural imaginaries that goes beyond "boba liberalism." This "boba liberalism," a term popularized on Twitter and adopted by film scholar Melissa Phruksachart (2020), refers to "claims to racialized and traditionally gendered heteronormativity" and the "positive attitudes toward global capitalism" (60). Both aspects of "boba liberalism" grow visible through films that uncritically portray the successful Asian/Asian American bourgeois class within the sphere of global capitalism, as demonstrated in representational films such as *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) or the "colormute" casting and lack of class politics present in the Silicon Valley-set film, *Searching* (2018) (Phruksachart 2020). While such terminologies implicate boba as little more than a surface-level Asian trait that exacerbates the problematic prioritization of cultural neoliberalism over cultural politics, I argue that boba and boba culture serve a greater purpose than what gets stereotyped as a shallow, Capitalistic symbol of Asian American identity.

As boba shops shift the colonized landscape of San José, so do Asian Americans inhabiting the space. These boba stories together demonstrate both the complex relationships Asian Americans possess in their understanding of race, identity, social circles, and geographic space. They speak volumes to the working-class boba patrons and children of (im)migrants who expanded their notions of home and community through boba shops, and the youth who seek solace from school work or family life in spaces they can call their own. They culminate in the ephemeral history of San José, California's boba culture that demands its voices not be forgotten.

For Bay Area denizens, especially those in San José, experiencing boba culture seems inevitable. Daniel Huang noted, "I think that [boba] is pivotal if you grow up in the Bay Area, whether or not you identify as Asian American. If you grow up in the proximity of Asian Americans and in this culture, you're probably going to experience boba. And *good* boba."[56]

[56] Daniel Huang, Zoom video call with author, August 28, 2019.

Today, Trinh Thao, a 36-year-old who admitted to distancing herself from anything "Asian" while a high schooler in the 1990s, now loyally visits Happy Lemon, a Taiwanese chain with five locations in San José and Cupertino alone. Trinh realized her love for their "puff cream" drink in 2018, when she finally tried boba as an adult while out with a new-found group of Asian American friends. Trinh confessed, "I went [to Happy Lemon] every day for like three weeks, *three weeks.*"[57] Mac Nguyen, now 36 years-old, continues to feel that "If you need a break, you want to be around people who are Asian, and boba's where you go. There's this surface level safety. We 'study a lot,' we hang out, we go out late at night. So, at the very beginning, we had these [boba] places for us. This is our hangout spot."[58]

***

As my friend Mun-Hee and I walk through the glass doors of Tea Lyfe on April 14, 2019, a Vietnamese American in his mid-thirties hops off his tall metal barstool and greets me with, "I thought it was you! But WAIT. Aren't you supposed to be at UCLA?" Mac Nguyen gives me a strong embrace. I introduce him to my friend Mun-Hee and joke, "I told you I'd run into someone I know. Mac *lives* here." We sit down at a rustic wooden table together and sip boba through Eco-friendly bamboo straws. I order a "Bobbi Vie" (Thai Tea + Vietnamese Coffee + Organic Milk), named after a San José local celebrity, while Mac finishes his VietChata (Vietnamese coffee + Horchata). Lo-fi music sets the mood for Asian Americans studying while families watch their children play on tree stumps set up as low-level tables and seats. Tea Lyfe, run by a Vietnamese and Mexican American couple, is surrounded by Vietnamese restaurants, eyelash-extension shops, nail salons, and five boba shops. Eight years ago, the "Vietnam Town"

[57] Trinh Lam, Zoom video call with author, February 26, 2019.
[58] Mac Nguyen, Zoom video call with author, March 5, 2019.

plaza of Eastside San José did not exist. This 300,000 square-foot shopping center with 265 units developed due to the support of community activists and council members. They argued that it would not only benefit the 85,000 Vietnamese of San José but also the population of San José as a whole (Swift 2007). They were right.

From study spots like Tea Lyfe to the nightlife social scene of Pekoe, young adults of various ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds connect among the suburban sprawl. Boba shops are one way of asserting an Asian American community while creating a bubble where Asian American youth can express themselves freely. Though Asian American youth culture changes over time, boba shops demonstrate the potential for Asian American youth to shape their physical community and build connections, albeit in fleeting moments in shared spaces. Like early 2000's cyber cafes or today's rave scene in the suburbs of California, Asian Americans consume boba as a means to find these ephemeral "cultural homes" (Danico and Vo 2002, 182; Park 2015; Yao 2020). As Sara Takashi bubbly exclaimed again and again in her interview, "I just love boba. It makes me happy!"[59] While studying abroad in Europe, she felt enlivened by new experiences, yet "something was missing," she recalled. "When I was in Spain, we didn't have boba so the whole entire time, I was really sad [when I thought about it]," Sara admitted. Similarly, Ryan Legrand from Cupertino, who now attends college out-of-state, explained, "I'm half Asian-American and half-white. My first memory of having boba was as a young child, probably elementary school age, first or second grade. I was with my family. [Boba] was something familiar and always around me. In general, just being in Cupertino, you have so much access to really good Asian food and that's something I'm really missing right now."[60] Mac

[59] Sara Takashi, Video zoom call with author, August 23, 2019.
[60] Ryan Legrand, Zoom video call with author, August 31, 2019.

Nguyen recalls, “For me, boba’s the staple. When I went to New York City, we couldn’t find it. I finally found one that was pretty good, and it was smack dab in the middle of Chinatown. And when I was in D.C., guess what I was looking for – boba.”[61]

“Why were you looking for boba in all these places?” I asked.

“Because nothing else makes sense to me. I would actually travel 40 minutes by Uber or bus to Kung Fu Tea in Georgetown. Boba is comfort food. Comfort food means home.” For Asian American youth in San José, boba means more than enjoying a sweet beverage. Many Asian American youth, who are now young adults like myself, cannot help but express, “Anywhere I go, boba feels like home” (Chen 2019).

[61] Mac Nguyen, Zoom video call with author, March 5, 2019.

Chapter 9

EPILOGUE

The last few months of my study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time which inevitably altered the social and economic observations present in this study. On Monday, March 16, 2020, the Bay Area received a "shelter-in-place" order. On March 19, Gov. Newsom issued a California state-wide "lockdown" in order to enforce social distancing during these unstable times. In addition, due to the current president's anti-Asian rhetoric, exemplified when he dubbed the COVID-19 the "Chinese Virus" or "Kungflu," anti-Asian attacks rose. Within the first week of California's lockdown, Asian Americans reported over 650 racist attacks across the country (Kandil 2020). These changes devastated small businesses, the hysteria causing a decreased patronage of Asian-run shops in particular. Inevitably, boba shops felt the impact of these changes. Throughout the week of March 14, 2020, the owners of SF-based Boba Guys, Andrew Chau and Bin Chen, fired 400 people and closed 17 boba shop locations (Marek 2020).

However, this unfortunate turn of events only led to stronger relationships among those read and racialized as "Asian" by the nation. Activists expressed outrage regarding anti-Asian sentiments through podcasts, artwork, news articles, and by physically protecting the victimized, Asian-presenting elderly folks residing in San Francisco Chinatown (Hard Knock Radio 2020; Surasmith 2020). Others continue supporting small restaurants by ordering food "to-go." Boba Guys co-founder Andrew Chau, said, "Please help us by sharing stories of (and if possible, financially supporting) your fave business and calling out anti-Asian sentiment and building allyship through the #WashTheHate campaign" (Boba Guys 2020; *ABC7 News* 2020).

In late April through May, despite the "shelter-in-place" order and mandated closing of hundreds of small businesses in California, several Bay Area boba shops managed to stay open

as “essential businesses.” Patrons could purchase boba through non-contact means such as delivery apps or websites. When picking up boba outside the boba shop, as no customers could enter the store for the sake of protecting boba workers, we waited outside while maintaining a six-foot distance and wearing face masks. A gloved hand placed the plastic bag filled with sealed boba cups into an outdoor box, called out a patron’s name, and they were good to go. After the unjust murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, minority-owned boba shops like Viva La Boba in San Bernardino demonstrated solidarity by donating boba drink proceeds to Black Lives Matter and affiliated organizations or providing free beverages and snacks for local protestors. As of early June, I am happy to write that several boba shops continue to thrive in San José, with young adult workers and shop owners (now wearing facemasks and gloves) greeting me from behind a plastic barrier. “Bobaristas” manage to learn my name, despite my masked-face and the dozens of orders they receive each hour. I still have conversations with fellow patrons, only now outside the boba shop, six-feet away, wearing a mask (with a boba-printed pattern, of course). The boba scenes have changed, but the love remains.

I started this study with a love for boba and am happy to say that hearing the word boba still sparks joy over a year later. But boba means something different now. Since I documented these stories of Asian American history in San José between February 2019 and May 2020, so much has already changed. Future studies must take up the question of what the next chapter of boba, youth culture, and Asian America looks like in San José and beyond.

Appendix A
Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES
STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

"Wanna Get Boba?": The Bond Between Boba Shops and Asian American Youth in San José, California

Angel Trazo, Asian American Studies MA Student, under the direction of Professor Valerie Matsumoto, PhD, from the Department of Asian American Studies and Department of History at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), is conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are young adult in the Bay Area (age 18-40) and have familiarity with boba shops in San José, California and neighboring localities of Cupertino, Milpitas, Saratoga, and Campbell. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study is designed to better understand the role that boba shops in play in shaping youth identity and youth culture in diverse (sub)urban neighborhoods in California.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Answer a short survey (10 minutes) on Google Forms with questions related to your relationship with boba and boba shops. The survey will also ask questions regarding participant's identity: age, race, ethnicity, school or work affiliation, and boba drink and boba shop preferences.
- Participate in a brief (30-40 minute) interview to elaborate on questions asked in the survey and answer additional questions about your hometown, friend circles and social life, and feelings of inclusion/exclusion in spaces such as boba shops.
- Study activities will take place at the boba shop venue or via phone interview or video interview at the participant's convenience.

- I will also take additional notes on the people I have interviewed or who take the survey for my Field Observations. Pseudonyms which have been assigned to interviewees will be recorded, but names will not be included in Field Observations.
- The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications. However, your name will not be used. Confidentiality will be maintained by use of pseudonyms and by limiting inclusion of identifiable data in thesis.
- I would like to audio record this interview. The interview will not be audio recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do **not** want this interview to be recorded. You may also change your mind at any point of this study, just let me know.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take a minimum of ten minutes (survey only) to no more than an hour (survey and interview). If questions arise following the interview session, the researcher will reach out via email for a brief follow-up.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

Possible benefits from participating in this study include having a conversational and confidential space to reflect on your experiences in boba shops and living in Los Angeles.

The results of this research may provide new understandings of how youth self-identity and youth culture influence and are influenced by (sub)urban places, such as boba shops.

Will I be paid for participating?

No, you will **not** receive payment for participating in this study.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Confidentiality will be maintained by means of and storing all data on password protected devices that can only be accessed by the Principal Investigator. Names will be coded in internal database to protect identifiable data. Pseudonyms will be used when presenting findings.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

The research team:

Principal Investigator, Angel Trazo
Phone: (408) 858-5070
Email: angeltrazo@g.ucla.edu

Faculty Sponsor, Professor Valerie Matsumoto
Phone: (310) 825-4508
Email: matsumot@history.ucla.edu

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email:participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

Last Revised: 2/7/2020

Appendix B
Survey Questionnaire

Survey for "'Wanna Get Boba?': The Bond Between Boba and Asian American Youth Culture" Study

PAGE 1

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
This study is designed to better understand the role that boba shops in play in shaping community culture in diverse (sub)urban neighborhoods in California.

ELIGIBILITY:
- 18+
- Familiar with San Jose boba shops* You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you have been to one or more boba shops in San Jose, California. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

INTRODUCTION:
My name is Angel Trazo and I am a Graduate Student pursuing my Master's of Arts in Asian American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). I am conducting a research study under the direction of Professor Valerie Matsumoto, PhD, from the Department of Asian American Studies and Department of History at UCLA.

CONTACT INFORMATION:
Principal Investigator, Angel Trazo
Email: angeltrazo@g.ucla.edu
This survey takes about 10 minutes to complete.
This research has been certified as exempt from IRB review per 45 CFR 46.101, category
IRB#19-000282

1. EMAIL ADDRESS

PAGE 2

CONSENT:
Please read carefully. No signature is required.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?
There are no anticipated risks or discomforts.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?
+ You will also have the chance to be entered in a drawing for a $10, $20, or $50 boba gift card (any store)!
+ Possible benefits from participating in this study include having a conversational and confidential space to reflect on your experiences in boba shops and living in San Jose.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of and storing all data on password protected devices that can only be accessed by the Principal Investigator. Names will be coded in internal database to protect identifiable data. Pseudonyms will be used when presenting findings.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?
You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?
If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, please contact:

Principal Investigator, Angel Trazo
Email: angeltrazo@g.ucla.edu

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):
If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email:participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

This research has been certified as exempt from IRB review per 45 CFR 46.101, category 2 on February 20, 2019.
IRB#19-000282

PAGE 3

GENERAL INFORMATION:
This section of the survey will ask personal questions about your identity to better understand the population partaking in this study.

1) First Name
2) Last Name
3) Hometown (i.e. San Jose, CA)
4) Current Residence (i.e. San Jose, CA or Los Angeles, CA)
5) What high school did/do you attend?
6) Age (18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30-31-32-33-34-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, 56-60, 61-65, 66+)
7) What generation are you? (Check multiple boxes if your parents are different generations):
   a) 1st generation (I am an immigrant who recently moved to the US)

b) 1.5 generation (I was born in another country but have lived most of my life in the US/consdier the US as my home)
c) 2nd generation (my parents are immigrants, I was born in the US)
d) 3rd generation (my grandparents are immigrants, I was born in the US)
e) 4th + generation

8) Please select which race best describes you (Check all that apply):
   a) White
   b) Black or African American
   c) American Indian or Alaska Native
   d) Asian
   e) Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   f) Hispanic or Latino
9) Please select which ethnicity(ies) best describe you (Check all that apply):
   a) Asian Indian
   b) Bangladeshi
   c) Burmese
   d) Cambodian
   e) Chinese (Except Taiwanese)
   f) Filipino/a
   g) Hmong
   h) Indonesian
   i) Japanese
   j) Korean
   k) Laotian
   l) Pakistani
   m) Sri Lankan
   n) Taiwanese
   o) Thai
   p) Vietnamese
   q) Other Asian ethnicity (Please specify below)
   r) Native Hawaiian
   s) Samoan
   t) Tongan
   u) Guamanian or Chamorro
   v) Other Pacific Islander (Please specify below)
   w) Cuban
   x) Guatemalan
   y) Mexican
   z) Puerto Rican
   aa) Salvadoran
   bb) White European (Please specify)
   cc) Hispanic/Latino (Please specify)
   dd) Native American (Please specify)
   ee) Central/South American (Please specify)
   ff) African (Please Specify)
   gg) Other Identity Not Listed (Please specify)

10) Please select which gender identity best describes you (Check all that apply):
    a) Female
    b) Male
    c) Transgender Male
    d) Transgender Female
    e) Gender non-conforming/Non-binary
    f) Not Listed (Please specify)
    g) Prefer not to answer
11) Please select your preferred pronouns (Check all that apply):
    a) she/her/hers
    b) he/him/his
    c) they/them/theirs
    d) Not listed (Please specify)
    e) Prefer not to answer
12) Please select your sexual orientation (Check all that apply):
    a) Asexual
    b) Bisexual
    c) Gay
    d) Lesbian
    e) Pansexual
    f) Straight (Heterosexual)
    g) Queer
    h) Questioning or unsure
    i) Not Listed (Please specify)
13) Are you currently a student?
    a) Yes, I am currently attending high school (High School/GED)
    b) Yes, I am currently attending college (Community College/4-Year College)
    c) Yes, I am currently attending vocational school (i.e. Training in Nursing, Cosmetology, Car Mechanics)
    d) Yes, I am currently pursuing a Post Baccalaureate, Master's, or Doctorate degree (i.e. MA or PhD student)
    e) No, I am not a student.
14) Are you currently employed?
    a) Yes, I work part-time.
    b) Yes, I work full-time.
    c) No, I am not currently working.

PAGE 4

Tea Information
This section of the survey will ask questions about your tea preferences.

15) Which term do you use to describe the cup of milk + tea + round tapioca balls:
    a) Boba
    b) Bubble Tea/Bubble Milk Tea
    c) Milk Tea

d) Pearl Tea/Pearl Milk Tea
e) Tapioca Tea
f) A non-English word (Please specify)

16) Which regions in Los Angeles do you normally go to for boba?
a) Boba
b) Bubble Tea/Bubble Milk Tea
c) Milk Tea
d) Pearl Tea/Pearl Milk Tea
e) Tapioca Tea

17) How often do you Tea Lyfe?
a) This is my first time visiting.
b) I've been here in the past, but it's been a while.
c) About once a year.
d) 2-3 times a year.
e) Once every 2 months.
f) Once a month.
g) 2-3 times a month.
h) Once a week.
i) 2-3 times a week.
j) 4-5 times a week.
k) Basically everyday.

18) In your opinion, how much influence do the following factors have on whether you visit a boba shop? (None at all/A little/A moderate amount/ A lot/A great deal)
a) Atmosphere (Furniture, Decorations)
b) Closeness to home
c) Closeness to school
d) Closeness to work
e) Music
f) Food
g) My friends work here
h) Price
i) The tea/boba is good
j) Special features (i.e. offer Split Cups, Glittery Drinks, Glass Bottles)
k) Stamp Card (i.e Buy 10 bobas, get 1 Free)

19) In your opinion, how much influence do the following factors have on whether you visit a boba shop? (None at all/A little/A moderate amount/ A lot/A great deal)
a) Tea Taste
b) Tapioca Pearl Taste and Texture
c) Price
d) Healthy/Organic Options
e) Lactose-Free Options
f) Range of flavors
g) Range of toppings
h) Ability to Adjust Sweetness

20) When you go to boba shops, what do you typically go there for?
a) Purchase boba and leave

b) Go on a date
c) Socialize with friends
d) Do work
e) Study
f) Attend a meeting for school or work
g) Hang with my family
h) Other

21) When you go get boba, you usually go with... (Check all that apply)
a) Friends of mostly the same race as me (i.e. I am "Asian." Most of the friends I get boba with also identify as "Asian")
b) Friends of mostly the same ethnicity as me (i.e. I am "Filipino." Most of my friends I get boba with also identify as "Filipino")
c) Friends of mostly a different race than me (i.e. I am "Black." Most of my friends I get boba with are "Asian")
d) Friends of mostly a different ethnicity than me (i.e. I am "Chinese." Most of my friends I get boba with are "Vietnamese)
e) An ethnically/racially diverse group of friends (i.e. I go with my Armenian friend, Vietnamese friend, White friend, White/Jewish friend, and Guatemalan friend)
f) My family (i.e. parents, siblings, cousins)
g) My significant other
h) A stranger I met on the Internet
i) A colleague or someone from work
j) Myself

22) Briefly describe your first boba experience (Who introduced you to boba? Where were you? How old were you?)
23) Describe your Favorite Boba Order(s) (i.e. Mango Milk Green Tea, 100% Sugar, 50% Ice, with Boba and Brown Sugar Milk Black Tea)
24) List your Top Five Favorite Boba Spots
25) Rate each statement on a scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree):
a) Boba is healthy.
b) I like trying new boba flavors.
c) Boba is expensive.
d) I often travel 10 miles and more to get boba.
e) Most of my friends go to boba shops.
f) I feel comfortable in boba shops.
g) Boba is part of Asian American culture.
h) Boba is part of mainstream American culture.
i) Boba will always play a large role in my life.

PAGE 5
Thank you!

Your responses are invaluable to my research and I cannot thank you enough for taking the time to answer this survey. Feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

I hope you have a great rest of your day!

Best,
Principal Investigator, Angel Trazo
Email: angeltrazo@g.ucla.edu

Would you like to be entered to win a $10, $25, or $50 gift card to the boba shop of your choice?

1. Yes
2. No

Would you like to participate in a short 30 minute interview (phone, Zoom, in-person)?

1. Yes
2. No

Appendix C
Interview Questions

Hello. Thank you for taking your time to talk to me. I am working on a project which I eventually hope to publish on the topic of the relationship between diverse suburban communities and boba shops in California. I am hoping to understand how youth have formed their understanding of identity, race, and ethnicity. My long-term goal is to publish this work in a book in the upcoming years. Note: Areas of study include Northridge/San Fernando Valley and San Jose/Bay Area.

- How old are you?
- What is your Race?
- What is your Ethnicity?
- What is your employment status?
- Did you grow up in (insert area of study)? How long have you lived here?
- What high school did you attend?
- What was your experience growing up in (insert area of study)?
- In reflecting about growing up in (insert area of study), how did you form friendships? What did you and your friends do for fun? Where did you go to spend time together?
- What are some of your favorite things about growing up in (insert area of study)?
- Which are your favorite places in (insert area here)? Specifically, what are your favorite boba shops in (insert area here)?
- What factors influence your choice of favorite boba shops?
- Do you know which country boba originates from?
- How were you introduced to boba?
- Does boba/going to boba shops play a large role in your life?
- What does boba mean to you?
- What is your favorite boba flavor?
- Have you ever worked in a boba shop? If so, could you describe your experience?
- How do you define “race”?
- How do you define “ethnicity”?
- How do you define “identity”?
- How do you describe yourself? What factors have influenced your sense of self/self-identity?

Interview Introduction Script

Hello, _____. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my study. This interview will take approximately 30-40 minutes. With your consent, this interview will be recorded.

Your name will remain confidential, and all information from this interview will be displayed under a pseudonym. I encourage you to speak openly about your experiences. If you have any questions, feel free to let me know. We can pause the interview at any time.

Questions are based on how you answered your survey, however these are only guidelines. My main goal is to have an open conversation to your experiences with boba and boba shops.

Appendix D
Promotional Materials

SUBJECT HEADING: Calling All Boba Lovers! This Survey's For You.

Dear *name of participant*,

My name is Angel Trazo and I am a Graduate Student pursuing my Master's in Asian American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). I am conducting a research study under the direction of Professor Valerie Matsumoto, PhD, from the Department of Asian American Studies and Department of History at UCLA.

Eligibility You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a young adult (between the ages of 18 and 40) who is familiar with boba shops in/around San José, California. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done? This study is designed to better understand the role that boba shops in play in shaping youth identity and youth culture in diverse (sub)urban neighborhoods in California.

If you would like to participate in a quick 10 minute survey, please click the link below.
Survey link (Note: Consent form is the first page of the survey)

If you would like to participate in an interview (in-person, Skype, or phone call), please reply to this email and let me know. Interviews will take approximately 20-30 minutes, and your name will remain confidential.

Thank you so much for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you!

With gratitude,
Angel Trazo

Angel Trazo *(she/her/hers)*
University of California, Los Angeles | 2020
M.A. Asian American Studies
angeltrazo.com

UCLA

Angel Trazo (Principal Investigator), a Master's student in Asian American Studies at UCLA, is conducting a research study.

CALLING ALL BOBA LOVERS!

THIS SURVEY'S FOR YOU.

take the survey to...

+ ENTER TO WIN $10, $20, OR $50 WORTH OF BOBA!

+ TALK BOBA WITH A FELLOW ADDICT

+ HELP ANGEL GET HER ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES DEGREE

eligibility

+18 OR OLDER

+LIVE IN/ARE FROM BAY AREA

+DRINK BOBA

SURVEY LINK IN BIO

Participation in the survey is not required in order to participate in the raffle.

Appendix E
List of Boba Shops in San José, California

I define "boba shop" as a location whose main product is boba (comprises at least 75% of the main menu). This data was collected using Yelp, Google Maps, and information from interviewees.

#	Name	Region of San José	Location	Address
1	**Amor Cafe and Tea**	SOUTH	Oakridge Mall	925 Blossom Hill Rd, San Jose, CA 95123
2	**B-909 Icy Tea**	EAST	Little Saigon	2569 S King Rd Ste C5 San Jose, CA 95122
3	**BAMBU Desserts & Drinks**	NORTH	Berryessa	1688 Hostetter Rd D, San Jose, CA 95131
4	**BeiBay Tea (now Gong Cha)**	SOUTH	Almaden	1180 Blossom Hill Rd, San Jose, CA 95118
5	**Black Pearl**	EAST	Eastside	5663 Snell Ave, San Jose, CA 95123
6	**Boba Bar**	NORTH	Downtown	310 S 3rd St, San Jose, CA 95112
7	**Boba Fitt Drinks**	EAST	Eastside	1051 E Capitol Expy, San Jose, CA 95121
8	**Boba Pub**	SOUTH	Blossom Valley	1576 Branham Ln, San Jose, CA 95118
9	**Boba Tteok**	N/A	Food Truck	N/A
10	**Bobaholics**	EAST	Eastside	1055 E Brokaw Rd #40, San Jose, CA 95131
11	**Bobo Drinks**	EAST	Eastside	779 Story Rd, San Jose, CA 95122
12	**Breaktime Tea**	NORTH	Eastside	110 E San Fernando St, San Jose, CA 95112
13	**Bubbly**	EAST	Little Saigon	1816 Tully Rd #166, San Jose, CA 95122
14	**Buddy Tea House**	NORTH	Downtown	481 E San Carlos St, San Jose, CA 95112
15	**Coco Cafe Tea & Snacks**	EAST	Eastside	1727 Berryessa Rd, San Jose, CA 95133
16	**Cool Tea Bar**	EAST	Eastside	3005 Silver Creek Rd #184, San Jose, CA 95121
17	**Ding Tea**	EAST	Eastside	3151 Senter Rd Suite# 120, San Jose, CA 95111
18	**Dzui's Cakes & Desserts**	EAST	Eastside	2451 Alvin Ave San Jose, CA 95121
19	**Fantasia Coffee & Tea**	WEST	Santana Row Shopping Center	378 Santana Row, San Jose, CA 95128
20	**Gong Cha**	NORTH/EAST	Pacific Rim Plaza	1701 Lundy Ave, San Jose, CA 95131
21	**Gong Cha**	NORTH	Downtown	140 Paseo De San Antonio, San Jose, CA 95112
22	**Gong Cha**	EAST	Eastridge Mall	2200 Eastridge Lp Ste 2000 San Jose, CA 95122
23	**Gong Cha**	WEST	Westgate Mall	1600 Saratoga Ave #115, San Jose, CA 95129

24	**Happiness Cafe**	NORTH	Near Milpitas	1688 Hostetter Rd Ste C San Jose, CA 95131
25	**Happy Lemon**	WEST	Blossom Valley	630 Blossom Hill Rd Ste 30 San Jose, CA 95123
26	**Happy Lemon**	NORTH	Downtown	567 Coleman Ave, Ste 10 San Jose, CA 95110
27	**Happy Lemon**	EAST	Eastside	3005 Silver Creek Rd #112, San Jose, CA 95121
28	**Happy Lemon**	EAST	Berryessa	311 N Capitol Ave suite c, San Jose, CA 95133
29	**Happy Lemon**	WEST	Saratoga	5379 Prospect Rd, San Jose, CA 95129
30	**Honeyberry**	NORTH	Downtown	3655 N 1st St Ste 102 San Jose, CA 95134
31	**i-Tea**	EAST	Evergreen	2936 Aborn Square Rd San Jose, CA 95121
32	**Ice3 Creamery**	SOUTH	Almaden	4750 Almaden Expy Ste 116 San Jose, CA 95118
33	**Jasmine Kocha**	SOUTH	Willow Glen	3129 Meridian Ave, San Jose, CA 95124
34	**Jazen Tea**	SOUTH	Oakridge Mall	925 Blossom Hill Rd, San Jose, CA 95123
35	**Jazen Tea**	EAST	Eastside	3065 McKee Rd, San Jose, CA 95127
36	**Jazen Tea**	EAST	Eastside	1834 Tully Rd, San Jose, CA 95122
37	**K S Pearl Tea Inc**	EAST	Eastside	3005 Silver Creek Rd # 134, San Jose, CA 95121
38	**Kung Fu Tea**	WEST	Lion Market (Little Saigon)	457 Saratoga Ave, San Jose, CA 95129
39	**Lucky Tea**	WEST	Valley Fair Mall	2855 Stevens Creek Blvd, Santa Clara, CA 95050
40	**LK Tea & Grill**	NORTH	Downtown	2780 Aborn Rd, San Jose, CA 95121
41	**Matcha Love**	WEST	Mitsuwa Plaza	675 Saratoga Ave San Jose, CA 95129
42	**Meow Tea**	EAST	Eastside	2857 Senter Rd G, San Jose, CA 95111
43	**Milk Tea Lab**	SOUTH	Branham	1601 Branham Lane
44	**MILQ Tea Lounge**	NORTH	Downtown	301 N Jackson Ave #2B, San Jose, CA 95133
45	**MLKY**	NORTH	Downtown	30 E Santa Clara St #120, San Jose, CA 95113
46	**OH MY BOBA**	WEST	Berryessa	1030 Piedmont Rd suite e, San Jose, CA 95132
47	**Oooh**	EAST	Silver Creek Plaza	1783 E Capitol Expwy San Jose, CA 95121
48	**Passion-T Snacks and Desserts**	EAST	Eastside	2266 Senter Rd Ste 128 San Jose, CA 95112
49	**Pekoe**	EAST	Evergreen Plaza	3276 S White Rd, San Jose, CA 95148
50	**Pho 21 & Boba 21**	EAST	Eastside	2569 King Rd Ste C-9 San Jose, CA 95122
51	**Pho Boba**	SOUTH	South	5815 Cottle Rd, San Jose, CA 95123
52	**Pho Passion and Mintea**	NORTH	Downtown	301 E Santa Clara St Unit A San Jose, CA 95113
53	**Playa Lounge**	NORTH	Downtown	1615 McKee Rd San Jose, CA 95116
54	**Pop UP Tea**	EAST	Eastside	3276 S White Rd, San Jose, CA 95148

55	**Pop Up Tea**	SOUTH	Branham	185 Branham Ln, San Jose, CA 95136
56	**Pure Tea Bar**	EAST	Eastside	6195 Santa Teresa Blvd, San Jose, CA 95123
57	**QQQTea**	WEST	DeAnza	1600 S De Anza Blvd, San Jose, CA 95129
58	**Quickly**	EAST	Eastside	2200 Eastridge Loop #1091, San Jose, CA 95122
59	**Rabbit Rabbit Tea**	WEST	Valley Fair Mall	2855 Stevens Creek Blvd, Santa Clara, CA 95050
60	**Rainbow Tea House**	EAST	Seven Trees	4100 Monterey Hwy San Jose, CA 95111
61	**Shake Tea**	SOUTH	Oakridge Mall	925 Blossom Hill Rd #1378, San Jose, CA 95123
62	**ShareTea**	NORTH	Downtown	1728 Hostetter Rd #30, San Jose, CA 95131
63	**ShareTea**	WEST	Valley Fair Mall	2855 Stevens Creek Blvd, San Jose, CA 95128
64	**ShareTea**	WEST	South	5627 Cottle Rd, San Jose, CA 95123
65	**Silky Monkey Milk Tea**	NORTH	Downtown	6054, 2255 The Alameda, Santa Clara, CA 95050
66	**Simply Boba**	EAST	Eastside	005 Silver Creek Rd #192, San Jose, CA 95121
67	**Sinceretea**	NORTH	Downtown	3128, 392 E Taylor St, San Jose, CA 95112
68	**Sincha Tea**	NORTH	Downtown	2487 Alvin Ave, San Jose, CA 95121
69	**Sip N Bowl**	NORTH	Willow Glen	1163 Lincoln Ave San Jose, CA 95125
70	**Snowflake Dessert House**	WEST	Mitsuwa Marketplace	4306 Moorpark Ave San Jose, CA 95129
71	**Soyful Desserts**	EAST	Little Saigon	999 Story Rd, San Jose, CA 95122
72	**Soyful Desserts**	EAST	Little Saigon	3005 Silver Creek Rd Ste 170 San Jose, CA 95121
73	**Sweet Gelato Tea Lounge**	EAST	Little Saigon	979 Story Rd #7084, San Jose, CA 95122
74	**T4**	SOUTH	Almaden	6950 Almaden Expy, San Jose, CA 95120
75	**T4**	NORTH	Berryessa	1671 N Capitol Ave San Jose, CA 95132
76	**T4**	EAST	Little Saigon	969 Story Rd #6081, San Jose, CA 95122
77	**Tapioca Express**	SOUTH	Oakgrove	5681 Snell Ave #1, San Jose, CA 95121
78	**Tapioca Express**	EAST	Eastside	2285 McKee Rd, San Jose, CA 95133
79	**Tapioca Express**	EAST	Eastside	81 Curtner Ave, San Jose, CA 95125
80	**Tapioca Island**	EAST	Eastside	5815 Cottle Rd, San Jose, CA 95123
81	**Tastea**	EAST	Eastside	3247 S White Rd, San Jose, CA 95148
82	**Tastea**	EAST	Eastside	1160 N Capitol Ave, San Jose, CA 95132
83	**Tea Alley**	NORTH	Downtown	40 S 1st St, San Jose, CA 95113
84	**Tea FM**	EAST	Eastside	1783 E Capitol Expy, San Jose, CA 95121
85	**Tea Lyfe**	EAST	Little Saigon	8018, 989 Story Rd, San Jose, CA 95122
86	**Tea Society**	EAST	Eastside	1654 E Capitol Expy, San Jose, CA 95121

87	**Tea Villa**	EAST	Eastridge Mall	2200 Eastridge Loop STE 9212, San Jose, CA 95122
88	**Tea Village**	NORTH	Downtown	231 E Santa Clara St San Jose, CA 95113
89	**Teaspoon**	WEST	Mitsuwa Marketplace	4328 Moorpark Ave, San Jose, CA 95129
90	**TeaTop**	WEST	Near Cupertino	6158 Bollinger Rd, San Jose, CA 95129
91	**TeaZer**	EAST	Eastside	22 N White Rd, San Jose, CA 95127
92	**Teazu**	EAST	Little Saigon	969 Story Rd #6033, San Jose, CA 95122
93	**Teehee**	EAST	Little Saigon	979 Story Rd #7012, San Jose, CA 95122
94	**The Sweet Corner**	EAST	Little Saigon	989 Story Rd Ste 8039 San Jose, CA 95122
95	**The Tea Zone & Fruit Bar**	SOUTH	Almaden	4750 Almaden Expy j, San Jose, CA 95118
96	**The Tea Zone & Fruit Bar**	WEST	Winchester	980 S Winchester Blvd West San Jose
97	**The Tea Zone Lounge**	NORTH/EAST	Capitol	403 N Capitol Ave, San Jose, CA 95133
98	**Tisane**	EAST	Eastside	2980 Capitol Expy #50, San Jose, CA 95148
99	**Tleaf Teapresso**	SOUTH	Oakridge	860 Blossom Hill Rd, San Jose, CA 95123
100	**Toco Toco Bubble Tea**	EAST	Eastside	1694 Berryessa Rd, San Jose, CA 95133
101	**Tpumps**	WEST	Near Cupertino	7290 Bollinger Rd, San Jose, CA 95129
102	**Tra Temptation**	NORTH	Berryessa	3245 Sierra Rd, San Jose, CA 95132
103	**TSpot**	NORTH	Berryessa	2520 Berryessa Rd, San Jose, CA 95132
104	**TZone**	SOUTH	Almaden	5700 Village Oaks Dr Suite 40, San Jose, CA 95123
105	**Urban Tea Cafe**	EAST	Eastside	1310 Tully Rd Ste 108 San Jose, CA 95122
106	**Vampire Penguin**	NORTH	Near Milpitas	2671 Cropley Ave, San Jose, CA 95132
107	**Viola Bakery and Tea**	EAST	Eastside	3005 Silver Creek Rd Ste 174 San Jose, CA 95121
108	**Yummi Tea Cafe**	NORTH	Near Milpitas	2191 Morrill Ave, San Jose, CA 95132

Works Cited

ABC7. "Coronavirus Impact: SF-based Boba Guys may not be able to reopen all stores after COVID-19 pandemic ends." *ABC7 News.* Last modified March 19, 2020. https://abc7news.com/6028665/?fbclid=IwAR3c6z8zdNHUl6lUI2Bu5Eoivjy7uAPz1gWMX57ORYrOu8lFx1NVAhKc3Iw

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Balance, Christine B. *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016.

BillyJam. "Recognize: Bay Area Female Rappers." *Amoeba.com.* August 15, 2008. https://www.amoeba.com/blog/2008/08/jamoeblog/recognize-bay-area-female-rappers.html

Boba Guys. "Boba Guys." *Facebook*. Last modified March 19, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/bobaguys/

Boba Made. *The Little Book of Boba Tea.* Los Angeles, CA: Boba Made, 2018. http://bobamade.com/shop/printables/the-little-book-of-boba-tea/

Boudreau, John. "T For Tech? No: T for Tea." July 10, 2009. *San José Mercury News (CA),* 1A.

Burrill, Robert and Milpitas Historical Society. *Images of America: Milpitas.* Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2004.

Chang, Mitchell J. 2015. "Sense and Sensibility: Considering the Dynamic between Scholarship and Lived Experiences" Pp. 44-58 in *Critical Approaches to the Study of Higher Education: A Practical Introduction* Edited by Ana M. Martinez-Aleman, Brian Pusser, and Estela Mara Bensimon.

Chang, Olivia. "People can't believe Hillary Clinton called bubble tea 'chewy tea.'" *Business Insider,* Last modified April 20, 2016. https://www.businessinsider.com.au/people-cant-believe-hillary-clinton-called-bubble-tea-chewy-tea-2016-4

Chau, Andrew and Bin Chen. *The Boba Book: Bubble Tea and Beyond.* New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2020.

Chau, Andrew and Bin Chen. *Boba Guys: Fall/Winter 2019.* San Francisco, CA: Boba Guys, 2019.

Chen, Jason. "'Boba' Acoustic - Jason Chen Original." November 26, 2019. *YouTube.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Em_Y4VwkGI

Cheng, Wendy. "The Changs Next Door to the Diazes: Suburban Racial Formation in Los Angeles's San Gabriel Valley." *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 1 (2012): 15-35.

Choy, Catherine Ceniza. *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003.

City of Cupertino – City Hall. "Bobateeno." *Facebook.* September 18, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/cityofcupertino/photos/a.58997469676/10156710014459677/?type=1&theater

Cong, Steven. "Fill My Cup Half Full: Boba Stories." M.A. thesis, Asian American Studies, UCLA, 2016. eScholarship https://escholarship.org/content/qt461210j5/qt461210j5.pdf

Danico, Mary Yu and Linda Trinh Vo. "'No Lattes Here': Asian American Youth and the Cyber Cafe Obsession." In *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity,* edited by Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004.

Data USA. "Cupertino, CA." *Data USA.* 2017. https://datausa.io/profile/geo/cupertino-ca/

Data USA. "San Jose City (East Central) & Alum Rock Puma, CA." *Data USA.* 2017. https://datausa.io/profile/geo/san-jose-city-(east-central)-&-alum-rock-puma-ca

deGuzman, Jean-Paul. "Beyond 'Living La Vida Boba': Social Space and Translation, Hybrid, Asian American Youth Culture." *Amerasia Journal* 32, no. 2 (2006): 89-102.

Do, Hien Duc. *The Vietnamese Americans.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999.

Eckstein, Susan and Thanh-Nghi Nguyen. "The Making and Transnationalization of an Ethnic Niche: Vietnamese Manicurists." *International Migration Review* 45, no. 3 (2018): 639-674.

Fantasia Coffee & Tea. "Fantasia Coffee & Tea." *Facebook.* Retrieved on February 15, 2019 https://www.facebook.com/FantasiaCoffeeTea/

Fukuda, Curt and Ralph M. Pearce. *San Jose Japantown: A Journey.* San Jose, CA: Japanese American Museum of San Jose (JAMsj), 2014.

Hard Knock Radio. "HKR-Anti-Asian Sentiment During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *MixCloud.com.* March 24, 2020. https://www.mixcloud.com/HardKnockRadio/hkr-anti-asian-sentiment-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR2-iF120sP6OcszK9sz0P56F3un0s9vuBLmcFmgiwJ9D2Dt_ztBlOpWieI

Harris, Jenn. "A boba emoji is coming. Meet the woman who designed it." *Los Angeles Times.* March 6, 2020. https://www.latimes.com/food/story/2020-03-06/boba-emoji-yiying-lu

Henderson, Judith, Terry Christensen, Charlene Duval, Ellen Garboske, Phil Grasser, and Mary Jo Ignoffo. *Reflections of the Past: An Anthology of San José.* Encinitas, CA: Heritage Media Corporation, 1996.

Hickle, Johanna. "Tea Lyfe." *Content Magazine.* May 1, 2018. http://content-magazine.com/home/tea-lyfe/

Horowitz, Steven. "An Oral History of Hyphy." *Complex.* June 13, 2016. https://www.complex.com/music/2016/06/hyphy-oral-history

It Girls. "Kimmie Vee - Import Tuner Model," *Super Street Network.* August 28, 2012. http://www.superstreetonline.com/girls/impp-1208-Kimmie-vee-import-tuner-model/

Jiménez, Tomás R. *The Other Side of Assimilation.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017.

Kandil, Caitlin Yoshiko. "Asian Americans report over 650 racist acts over last week, new data says." *NBC News.* March 26, 2020. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-americans-report-nearly-500-racist-acts-over-last-week-n1169821?fbclid=IwAR2Veq9Cu3xWagFT5yHIx_Pnx1CEBpuhhRjtvnyiqbWjtZhqUHvBVNqifLE

Kaufman, Joanne. "Those blobs in your tea? They're supposed to be there." *New York Times* August 17, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/16/business/smallbusiness/bubble-tea.html

Ku, Robert Ji-Song, Martin F. Manalansan, and Anita Mannur. *Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader.* New York, NY: NYU Press, 2013.

Lee, Erika. *The Making of Asian America.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015.

Lee, Stacey. *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1996.

Li, Wei. *Ethnoburb: The New Ethnic Community in Urban America*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008.

Lin, Daisy. "Lollicup: From Boba to Business Empire." *Reach Further: East West Bank.* April 24, 2017. https://www.eastwestbank.com/ReachFurther/en/News/Article/Lollicup-From-Boba-to-Business-Empire

Liou, Gloria. "This is Silicon Valley: I feel myself becoming part of the machine." *Medium* February 27, 2019. https://onezero.medium.com/this-is-silicon-valley-3c4583d6e7c2?fbclid=IwAR37_YqpUKiKuOXh0689QYHLhyDnF4ixcEEx4lfRKwTCL2_ZrjmfncD6dzU

Lowe, Lisa. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 24-44.

Lung-Amam, Willow S. *Trespassers?: Asian Americans and the Battle for Suburbia.* University of California Press, 2017.

Maira, Sunaina and Elisabeth Soep. *Youthscapes: The Popular, the National, the Global.* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.

Mankekar, Purnima. "'India Shopping': Indian Grocery Stores and Transnational Configurations of Belonging." *Ethnos* 67, no. 1 (2002):75-97.

Marek, Grant. "Boba Guys founder on what it's like to fire 400 people, shutter 17 locations in a single day." *SF Gate.* March 22, 2020. https://www.sfgate.com/food/article/Boba-Guys-founder-on-what-it-s-like-to-fire-400-15147048.php?utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=socialflow&utm_source=facebook.com&fbclid=IwAR1N-74JlZpvmlONDJzIaUMFNfGlupBl8REL6nu4hv0d6QT2LtnWk5s1Egw

Martinez-Morrison, Amanda. "Black and Tan Realities: Chicanos in the Borderlands of the Hip-Hop Nation." *alter/nativas: Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* (2014): 1-24.

Montoya, October. "Part 1: Urban Villages and Transit-Oriented Gentrification." *Archiva 408: a living archive or historical, cultural, and political information in and around the rapidly shifting city of San José, CA.* Retrieved December 8, 2019. https://archive408.com/2019/08/12/part-1-urban-villages-and-transit-oriented-gentrification/

Nguyen, Beth. "Preserving Vietnamese Tradition in Silicon Valley." *Museum of Food and Drink + Eater.* 2016. https://www.eater.com/a/mofad-city-guides/san-jose-vietnamese-history

Nguyen-Okwu, Leslie. "Boba Explained: A Taxonomy of Taipei's Bubble Tea." March 6 in *Eater.* March 3, 2019. https://www.eater.com/2019/3/6/18240387/boba-milk-bubble-tea-explained-how-to-order

Nicolaides, Becky M. "Introduction: Asian American Suburban History." *Journal of Ethnic History* 34, no. 2 (2015): 5-17.

O'Dea, Mark. "I'm a Boba Girl (Parody)." October 17, 2019. *YouTube.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svVU-ECeGso

Ong, Nicole. "Pearl milk tea and what it means to me." *Lynbrook High School: The Epic* October 2, 2019. https://lhsepic.com/5867/features/pearl-milk-tea-and-all-it-means-to-me/?fbclid=IwAR38WuDC4DH93oFuBciE-SMAZxhc2oyiO5VnngCbkVY822M1ljQg3YvtS8Q

Oyen, Meredith Leigh. "Asian Pride" In *American Countercultures* edited by Gina Misiroglu. New York, NY: Routledge, 2015.

Pacio, Nerissa. “Youths Drink in Ambiance at Tapioca Tea Shops.” October 31, 2002. *Cupertino Mercury News (CA),* 3.

Park, Judy Soojin. “Searching for a Cultural Home: Asian American Youth in the EDM Festival Scene. *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture* 7, no. 1 (2015):15-34.

Petersen, William. “Success Story: Japanese American Style.” *The New York Times Magazine.* January 9, 1966. http://inside.sfuhs.org/dept/history/US_History_reader/Chapter14/modelminority.pdf

Phruksachart, Melissa. “The Bourgeois Cinema of Boba Liberalism.” *Film Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2020): 59-65.

Riel, Dannie. “Pekoe Meet & Greet.” *Youtube.* April 12, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZsgFZDn_XE

Rodriguez, Joe. “San Jose officially becomes the 10th largest city.” *The Mercury News.* March 24, 2011. https://www.mercurynews.com/2011/03/24/san-jose-officially-becomes-10th-largest-city/

Rodriguez, Robyn Magalit and Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez. "Asian American Auto/Biographies: The Gendered Limits of Consumer Citizenship in Import Subcultures.” In *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* edited by T.L. Nguyen Tu and M.T. Nguyen. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

Samson, Carl. “Genius College Students Create a ‘Boba Watch’ App to Track Milk Tea Expenses.” *Nextshark.* October 11, 2019. https://nextshark.com/boba-watch-app-college-students/

San José. “Visit San José California: Little Saigon.” *San Jose.* March 30, 2020 https://www.sanjose.org/neighborhoods/little-saigon

Santizo, Natalie. “Te de Boba: Food, Identity, and Race in a Multiracial Suburb.” M.S. thesis, Justice Studies, Arizona State University. Retrieved from ASU repository, 2016. https://repository.asu.edu/items/38776

SF Gate. “Bubble tea: The fad that forgot to fade.” *SF Gate.* September 12, 2014. https://www.sfgate.com/food/article/Bubble-tea-The-fad-that-forgot-to-fade-5751614.php

Shankar, Shalini. “Creating model consumers: Producing ethnicity, race, and class in Asian American advertising.” *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 3 (2012): 578-591.

Silicon Valley One World. “Asians Outnumber Whites in Silicon Valley.” *SiliconValleyOneWorld,* April 20, 2015. http://www.siliconvalleyoneworld.com/2015/04/20/demographers-asians-now-outnumber-whites-in-silicon-valley/

Silv, Mike and Aram Collier, dir. *Now & Then: Who I Became.* 2003; San Francisco: Roja Productions, 2003. Hi8 Camcorder.

SJ Environment (@SJEnvironment). "Bye Bye Boba: how to properly dispose of your bubble tea." Twitter, October 13, 2018. https://twitter.com/sjenvironment/status/1051204237877686272

Soja, Edward. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places.* Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

Subtle Asian Traits. "Subtle Asian Traits." *Facebook.* Retrieved March 6, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/groups/1343933772408499/2481116028690262/?comment_id=2502601109875087&notif_id=1590080260981759&notif_t=group_comment_mention

Surasmith, Quincy. "Helpers in the Time of Coronavirus." *Asian Americana.* May 7, 2020. http://www.asianamericana.com/podcast/2020/5/6/011-helpers-in-the-time-of-coronavirus

Surasmith, Quincy. "Boba/Bubble Tea." *Asian Americana.* August 8, 2017. http://www.asianamericana.com/podcast/2017/8/22/004-bobabubble-tea

Tabios, Nina. "Rapper P-Lo keeps it real local." *SF Chronicle.* July 5, 2017. https://www.sfchronicle.com/music/article/Rapper-P-Lo-keeps-it-real-local-11268041.php

Temblador, Samuel. "UCLA graduates bring new boba truck to Westwood Village." *Daily Briun* October 30, 2013. https://dailybruin.com/2013/10/30/ucla-graduates-bring-new-boba-truck-to-westwood-village/

Tiongson Jr., Antonio T. *Filipinos Represent: DJ's, Racial Authenticity, and the Hip-Hop Nation.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Tokunaga, Tomoko. "Forming Identity and Girlhood Through Consumer Culture." In *Learning to Belong in the World: An Ethnography of Asian American Girls.* Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2018.

Tomb, Geoffrey. "Tapioca-Laced Teas Offer Café Crowd a Slippery Sip 'Just When You Think You've Tried it All, Someone Will Concoct a New Flavor." September 2, 2000. *San José Mercury News (CA),* 1A.

Trazo, Chantal. "Understanding K-Pop Stan Culture; How the Spread of Korean Pop Music in the Digital Age has Impacted Fandom." Undergraduate thesis, Sociology, University of San Francisco. eScholarship, 2020.

Trazo, Talitha Angelica and Woohee Kim. "'Where Are You From?': Using Critical Race Theory to Analyze Graphic Novel Counter-Stories of the Racial Microaggressions

Experienced by Two Angry Asian Girls." *Intersections: Critical Issues in Education* 3, no. 2 (2019): 112-133. https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/intersections/vol3/iss2/6/

Trieu, Rose. "Three Taiwanese Bubble Tea Chains Race to California." *Forbes.* January 1, 2014. https://www.forbes.com/sites/rosatrieu/2014/01/01/three-taiwanese-bubble-tea-chains-racing-for-california/#3c2fea2827a8.

Tsu, Cecilia M. *Garden of the World: Asian Immigrants and the Making of Agriculture in California's Santa Clara Valley.* Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Ulloa, Sylvia. "Hip, Casual Tea House Serves Fun Island Fare." May 11, 2006. *San José Mercury News (CA),* 41.

United States Census Bureau. "The Asian Population: 2010." 2010. https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-11.pdf

Wang, Bing. "Strait to the Point: A Transnational Analysis of the Formation of a Taiwanese American Identity." M.A. thesis, Asian American Studies, UCLA. eScholarship, 2020.

Watson, Aleta. "Student Hangout Offers 60 Versions of a Coffee Break." March 11, 2005. *San José Mercury News (CA),* 42.

Wei, Clarissa. "How Boba Became an Integral Part of Asian American Culture in Los Angeles." *LA Weekly,* January 16, 2017. https://www.laweekly.com/restaurants/how-boba-became-an-integral-part-of-asian-american-culture-in-los-angeles-7819797

Welty-Tamai, Lily Anne, Cindy Nakashima, and Duncan Ryuken Williams. "Mixed Race Asian American Identity on Display." *Amerasia Journal* 43, no. 2 (2017):176-191.

Wen, Kristine. "Bubble Tea Tales: The History of Boba, How bubble tea popped into the scene." *Chowhound.* July 5, 2019. https://www.chowhound.com/food-news/213021/history-of-boba-bubble-tea/

Wilson, Matthew. "Cupertino coding team's app celebrates all things boba." *Mercury News.* December 31, 2017. https://www.mercurynews.com/2017/12/31/cupertino-coding-teams-app-celebrates-all-things-boba/

Wong, Bernard P. *The Chinese in Silicon Valley: Globalization, Social Networks, and Ethnic Identity.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006.

Wongsuphasawat, Krist. "How Can I Drink Bubble Tea Without Finishing the Tea Before the Bobas?" *Medium.* October 5, 2018. https://medium.com/s/story/boba-science-how-can-i-drink-a-bubble-tea-to-ensure-that-i-dont-finish-the-tea-before-the-bobas-7fc5fd0e442d

World Population Review. “San Jose, California Population 2019.” 2019. http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/san-jose-population/

Wu, Elaine. “Boba Hot Pot, the Winter Food Trend You Didn’t Know You Needed, Has Arrived in San José.” *Eater: San Francisco* February 5, 2020. https://sf.eater.com/2020/2/5/21116124/boba-hot-pot-milk-tea-lab-san-jose

Yao, Diamond. “Raving Asians Make the Bass Drop: The New Rave Culture.” *Plan A Magazine.* March 6, 2020. https://planamag.com/raving-asians-make-the-bass-drop-the-new-rave-culture/?fbclid=IwAR3QpMOOPEDJb1xYM4ZhG7lu3pN4eP_HKp4Q9tLJlSCVWlR_tJzwxE3vWgI

Yu, Connie Young. *Chinatown San José, USA.* San Jose, California: History San José, 1991.

Zhang, Jenny G. “The Rise (and Stall) of the Boba Generation: How bubble tea became far more than just a drink to young Asian Americans.” *Eater.* November 5, 2019. eater.com/2019/11/5/20942192/bubble-tea-boba-asian-american-diaspora.

Zeng, Aurora. “The Growth of Boba Culture in the San Gabriel Valley.” *Alhambra Source* August 28, 2017. https://www.alhambrasource.org/story/the-growth-of-boba-culture-in-the-san-gabriel-valley

Zhou, Min. *The Accidental Sociologist in Asian American Studies.* Los Angeles, CA: Asian American Studies Center Press, 2011.