

Spill the Boba tea

How Asian Are you? Boba is Not Just a Drink, but a Means to Identify Yourself

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*Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science in Data Visualization
at Parsons School of Design*

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Abstract

Over the past 30 years, bubble tea in America has gone from a niche Taiwanese beverage to a mainstream iconic cultural symbol for Asian Americans. Bubble tea and boba, refer to the same tea-based beverage with toppings. Also, the word boba has become so widely used in this community socially as a controversial noun in the discussion of defying unique cultural traits for immigrants. The purpose of this study is to explore and visualize the reasons behind the popularity of boba. It is hoped that through the cultural symbol created by a beverage in this era, it will trigger people to realize and reexamine the "Asian-ness". Overall, Boba tea might be who they were, but there is much more to them. It's a matter of how people define who they are and who they will be.

Acknowledgements:

Deepest thank you to Daniel Sauter, Alec Barrett, Richard The and Christian Swinehart for your guidance and support.

Jenny G. Zhang, Viet Thanh Nguyen and Lisa Lowe for your comprehensive insights into Asian American cultural politics

Special Thanks to my roommate Jason Yang and my cat Caviar, who gave me great encouragement and support during the pandemic. I am so lucky to have you both.

I would also like to thank the Parsons 2021 Data Visualization cohort! For a very special online experience this year. I hope we can meet in person soon, and I wish you all the best in your future career and life paths.

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master Science in Data Visualization at Parsons School of Design. May 2021

Intro

Been spilling the tea many times, have you ever wondered what is going on with the boba tea on your hand. Let's gossip about this drink. Bubble tea (often called Boba among Asian Americans) is an exciting blend of texture and flavor for the palate from Taiwan. It is a milk-based tea with chewy tapioca pearls inside.¹ Over the past 30 years, bubble tea in America has gone from a niche Taiwanese beverage from first generation Asian immigrants to a mainstream iconic drink for Asian Americans.² I noticed that my Asian American friends and I all love bubble tea, and we all had the moment when we had no idea to eat, somebody suggested: Grab a boba first maybe? It is interesting that during some upset moments at home, we always order boba online for a little boost. Our common love for bubble tea prompted me to look into the reasons behind it and how it developed in the Asian American context.

As beverages, bubble tea and boba, like other terms such as pearl milk tea, refer to the same tea-based beverage with toppings. However, in the context of Asian American cultural identity, the word boba has become so widely used in this community socially that it has become more than a popular connotation of the drink itself. On social media platforms, boba receives 24-hour memes, jokes and discussions. The love of boba has become a measure of one's Asian-ness. It brings them together and gives them something that constitutes a commonly shared experience, something that helps forge bonds and hold things together during otherwise turbulent years of finding their way in broader society.³ Within those Asian American communities, people even poke fun and ask each other, "How Asian are you if you don't like boba?"

I can't help but wonder: What made boba so popular? And why has boba taken its place in the Asian American discussion of cultural identity? The purpose of this study is to explore and visualize the questions mentioned above. In the past year of 2020, COVID-19 pandemic swept the world, the resurgence of explicit, often violent racism towards Asian Americans has triggered people to look beyond the framework of their own growth and interpret their "Asian-ness"

¹ "The Culture-Bending Appeal of Boba Tea." imbible liquid culture, June 26, 2017. Accessed 4th April, 2021.
<https://imbibemagazine.com/boba-tea/>.

² "The Rise of Bubble Tea." Theculinaryedge.Com. The Culinary Edge. June 29, 2020.
<https://www.theculinaryedge.com/blog/the-rise-of-bubble-tea>.

³ "How Bubble Tea Became a Complicated Symbol of Asian-American Identity." Eater. November 5, 2019.
<https://www.eater.com/2019/11/5/20942192/bubble-tea-boba-asian-american-diaspora>. Accessed 4th April, 2021.

objectively from the outside. The discussion of Asian American cultural identity has also become complicated. Not every Asian American is content to associate their identity with a drink. There is a lot of discussion about boba and Asian-ness. As an Asian international student, this study will take an outsider's perspective, to raise awareness of the struggles that immigrants face lifelong. Something as simple as a drink can become a rallying focal point for a subset of the immigrant community.

The project will explore ideas in four main sections in a progressive manner: The brief introduction of bubble tea. Including order history, elements of boba tea, origin and its journey to the United States. Furthermore, the study will introduce what are the reasons behind its booming base on three reasons. The project will dig deeper into boba tea shop's menu, people's posts about bubble tea on Instagram and discussions about #boba and #identity on twitter to visualize their related discussion of boba and Asian-ness.

In terms of data collection: Unlike some existing studies on the relationship between boba and west coast, this study focuses on the bubble tea market in New York City as a sample, thus providing some new perspectives different from the west coast Asian community. In order to better understand bubble tea and its cultural and identity implications, I also distributed a survey on boba drinking habits and opinions to Asian Americans from 18 to 35 years old. Finally, I collected a wide range of posts on Instagram and Twitter about boba tea and Asian identity, this will lead to a discussion on the self-positioning of Asian identity.

Speaking of methodology and visual representation, the working process will be divided into two parts, one is quantitative data. From there succinct data visualization charts will be used to make the boba tea market scannable. The other part is qualitative data, for example, color analysis and text analysis. Hopefully the combination of qualitative and quantitative data will help us to explore the deeper cultural traits of boba tea. Because this research uses a popular food as carrier, the overall visual will also lean towards interactive and playful to fit the pop culture characteristics of boba tea.

Treatment:

1. Background:

When we were young and so alive, Thinking memories the best times of my life, I want coffee when I'm waking up, Tequila to keep a good buzz. No matter how much I love other drinks, I keep coming back to you.

You were my first love, Boba · Love you forever, Boba

-- a song from Jason Chen: **Boba**⁴

The singer of this song, Jason Chen, is an Asian American from those countless Taiwanese immigrant families. Bubble tea (or boba) was also brought to the United States by immigrants. Thus, it became part of their young lives. And he wasn't the only one who wanted to sing lyrical songs to boba tea.

From March 2020 to March 2021, as the data shown from 4 food delivery platform (*Ubereats, Seemless, Doordash and Chowbus*), my roommate, an Asian American and me, an international student from Asia, ordered 152 cups of boba tea, on average three cups per person per week. Living in the apartment in lower Manhattan area, we were mainly exposed to 6 bubble tea shops, our favorite one is called *Teado*, which is opened by an Asian American from Taiwan. If we could, we would probably offer an aria to boba tea. we have spent countless late nights order it as our relaxation time during lock down. Drinks in hand, he always has his Spotify on with some K pop songs, and we usually share jokes about our common strict Asian parents, lactose intolerance and what to order next time.

The boba culture among Asians is so widely shared. For example, Subtle Asian Traits⁵, One of the most active Asian social groups on the web is currently filled with discussions about boba tea. Without spending too much time in this social media group, you will easily get an image an Asian being depicted there. The development of the modern internet has given some people as

⁴ "Boba." N.D.Azlyrics.com,. <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/jasonchen/boba.html>. Accessed 4th April, 2021.

⁵ Subtle Asian Traits (SAT, stylized as subtle Asian traits is a Facebook group dedicated to Internet memes, jokes, and discussion surrounding the Asian experience in the West. Though the posts on the page cover a large range of topics, they mainly focus on Asian culture as experienced by the children of immigrants. The group has over 1.8 million members and has been featured in a variety of mainstream news sources for its insights into the Asian diaspora.

the minority group the opportunity to get together and talk about those common memories of being the descendants of immigrants. In these 24-hour memes, jokes, discussions, I recognized the jokes of some typical Asian American stereotypes: good at math, tiger mom, playing piano or violin, middle-class East Asians with Ivy league aspiration, and numerous boba tea recipes. Interestingly, although we did not grow up in the same environment, we can always find some of the jokes pretty relatable. We found some similar *Asian-ness* in us. Viet Thanh Nguyen, a scholar of Vietnamese descent noted in his article for *Time* magazine: for Asian Americans nowadays, there is a consumer model symbolized by drinking boba tea and listening to K-pop.⁶ Boba tea has become a figurative object of shared memories. However, this feeling is controversial as well, surely these descriptions of Asian seem generalized and somehow sounds relatable. But strangely enough, when I look closely at my roommate, he is not quite the same as these depicted American Asians online, he has his own understanding of culture. He has a different understanding of his own Asian-ness, which does not consist entirely of boba tea. It is a personalized, and gradually changing process. It is obvious that boba tea has indeed generated thoughts and discussions that go beyond a beverage itself. Since it is difficult to use data of a private Facebook group for this public project. Correspondingly, I will collect data from other online social platforms to tell the story of the development of bubble tea in the Asian American community. Before we discuss more profoundly in the direction of cultural aspect or Asian-ness, let's get to know the journey of boba tea from Taiwan to United States first.

Data Details: Appendix 1.1.1

Chart: Appendix 2.1.1

⁶ “Asian Americans Are Still Caught in the Trap of the ‘Model Minority’ Stereotype. And It Creates Inequality for all.” Time. June 25, 2020. <https://time.com/5859206/anti-asian-racism-america/>. Accessed 4th April,2021.

2. What is Boba tea:

Boba tea is an ideal example of collision of cultural products and practices in one drink⁷. Many elements such as the tradition of drinking tea, which has existed in East Asia for thousands of years, may also give us a vague impression of why this drink might be more than a drink and become a repetitive topic for Asian American communities. In the following sections, let's find out the classic recipe of Boba tea.

2.1. Boba tea by element

Name

Now bubble tea and boba are the most common terms to refer to all the drinks sold in boba shops. The name of Bubble tea has many variants, both boba and bubble tea works, you can also call it in Chinese called zhēn zhu nai cha. Among them bubble tea and boba are the most popular expressions here. Some studies have shown that people on the West Coast use boba more often than people on the East Coast⁸. According to the number of Instagram tags, #boba has 2,318,757 posts, while #bubbletea has 2,428,586 posts. and other common tags are "boba milk tea", "milk tea", "bubble milk tea" and "boba drink". Among them, boba is originally a Taiwan slang for “big breasts”, came about when another tea shop used larger tapioca balls.

Chart: Appendix 2.1.2

Tea

The Chinese have a history of drinking tea for thousands of years and have deeply influenced other East Asia countries and areas. Now you may think that many Asians are lactose intolerant and are reluctant to add milk into tea.⁹ But surprisingly, as early as the Tang dynasty (618 - 917), the Chinese began adding butter, cream, and milk to their tea. As the capital of ancient China was in Xi'an, the nomadic peoples of the north interacted closely with midland region of China

⁷ “How Bubble Tea Became a Complicated Symbol of Asian-American Identity.” Eater. November 5, 2019.

<https://www.eater.com/2019/11/5/20942192/bubble-tea-boba-asian-american-diaspora>. Accessed 4th April,2021.

⁸ “004-Boba/Bubble Tea-Asian Americana.” Asianamericana.Come,August 22,2017. <http://www.asianamericana.com/podcast/2017/8/22/004-bobabubble-tea>. Accessed 4th April,2021.

⁹ “How Ancient China Took Its Tea: As a Soup or with Salt, Tea-Drinking Traditions Have Evolved through the Ages.” South China Morning Post. March 13, 2019. <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/short-reads/article/3001502/how-ancient-china-took-its-tea-soup-or-salt-tea>. Accessed 4th April,2021.

back then, and the nomadic traditions also influenced the taste of the Chinese people, and milk and salt or sesame were added to fresh tea.

This habit of exploring the different flavors of milk tea has also continued into modern times, and for tea, the recipe is slightly different from store to store, with the first generation of bubble tea usually using black tea as the base and adding some other tasty elements, such as fruit additives and sugar. It is accepted that people keep adding sugar into bubble tea to satisfy the local craving for sugar. It is said that the milk used in early boba tea was milk powder, but now there is a growing trend for boba tea drinks to use fresh milk and other fresh ingredients.

Tapioca ball: Bubbles, Bubble tea and Amy Yip

Tapioca balls are made from tapioca starch, an extract of the South American cassava plant, which came to Taiwan from Brazil via Southeast Asia between 1895 and 1945¹⁰. Similarly, we can also find a tradition for this jelly-like starch product in Taiwanese and Southeast Asian food cultures. These chewy balls are already leading their way by being added to ice cream or other desserts.

Those original tapioca balls were white and tasteless. During the cooking process, these tapioca balls were cooked in boiling syrup and simmered slowly over low heat, and the initially tasteless bubbles were then tinted with sweetness and the black color of syrup, becoming a representative element of Taiwanese and Southeast Asian desserts. Taiwanese have even created a special adjective for the texture of those chewy product called “Q” or “QQ” texture — the “untranslatable bouncy, rubbery, chewy texture”¹¹. Taiwanese people just love the Q feeling that you can find the chewy texture from many local foods there. It is not surprising that they would be more creative about the Q texture, which lead us to boba tea.

Let’s switch the gears to Bubble now: Bubble in original Taiwanese milk tea refers to the layer of foamy on top of the tea after rigorously shaken¹². slowly is also used to refer to the chewy tapioca balls added into the tea. You can easily get the idea from its round shape. All the

¹⁰ “Boba Explained: Types of Bubble Tea, and How to Order.” Eater. March 16, 2019. <https://www.eater.com/21551108/boba-milk-bubble-tea-explained-how-to-order>. Accessed 5th April 2020.

¹¹ “The Curious Case of Q.” 2017. Roadsandkingdoms.Com. May 1, 2017. <https://roadsandkingdoms.com/2017/the-curious-case-of-q/>. Accessed 5th April 2020.

¹² Worldteanews.com <https://www.worldteanews.com/Features/future-bubble-tea-insights-whos-leading-industry#:~:text=It%20is%20a%20milk%2Dbased%20tea%20with%20chew%20tapioca%20pearls%20inside.&text=The%20term%20bubble%20in%20bubble,to%20the%20pearly%20tapioca%20balls>. Accessed 5th April.

ingredients are simple, easy to get, and cheap, which gave bubble tea the basis for its popularity among the masses.

Taiwanese slowly continued to explore the flavors and toppings of bubble tea, which brought us Boba, which initially referred to the bigger size of tapioca balls in Taiwan. Let's take a look at the shape again. Can bubble pairs remind you of a physical asset of women's body? As far as people can recall, in 1980s, there is a Hong Kong erotic actress called Amy Yip, who has a nick name called Boba, it has slowly evolved into a slang term for breasts. And later it been used to describe large size tapioca balls in Bubble tea. Nowadays, Boba is widely used among Asian Americans, especially in west coast. We will look at the transition closely from the historical perspective.

2.2. The Journey of Boba tea, from Taiwan to the United States

Born in Taiwan in the 1980s as a fiercely contested patent between Chunshuitang and Hanlin Tea house, Boba tea began its journey with immigrants, First seen in Los A before taking the country by storm, this year, the market size was valued at over \$1 billion and is estimated to increase by 1.5 times in the next four years.

1980s: Start from Taiwan

It is clear from the previous discussion that tea and tapioca balls are not rare earlier in Taiwan, they already blended into people's food culture, but it wasn't until the 1980s that somebody thought to add these two foods together. There is still controversy as to who came up with the idea of boba tea, and they even go to court to defense about their copyright. One side of the court stand Chun Shui Tang (Chun Shui Tang Teahouse) in Taichung, where Liu Han Chien, the owner of the teahouse, came back from a trip to Japan and found that the local area would serve cold tea, and he added this idea to his business. Later, in an internal meeting, he poured the above-mentioned tapioca balls, into the cold tea, and unexpectedly, everyone liked the new combination, so he put it on the menu and served it to customers. Later it gradually became the most popular product in the store, made up 80% to 90% of the sales.

But Hanlin Tea Room from Tainan never agree with this story. Instead, Tu Tsong-He, the owner of Hanlin Tea Room, says he added tapioca balls to his tea back in 1986, and later added brown sugar and honey to blend the taste. Regardless of who is the real inventor of bubble tea, there is no doubt that it is a huge success and has even become a major icon of Taiwanese culture. I still remember the time visited Taiwan almost 8 years ago: By knowing how much I like boba tea, my local Taiwanese friend brought me one and said: this is the authentic one from Taiwan, you definitely should try.

1990s: Bubble tea in the hidden menu

After Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abolished the immigration policy that restricted the entry of Asians, waves of Taiwanese immigrants came to the U.S. from the '60s through the '90s.¹³ As immigrants from Taiwan came to America and settled here, Boba began its new journey in America, around LA particularly. At first you could

¹³ "How Bubble Tea Became a Complicated Symbol of Asian-American Identity." Eater. November 5, 2019. <https://www.eater.com/2019/11/5/20942192/bubble-tea-boba-asian-american-diaspora>. Accessed 4th April,2021.

see traces of bubble tea on the hidden menu of some Chinese restaurants, usually in communities with high populations of Taiwanese immigrants. Unlike today's dedicated bubble tea shops, according to many Asian American childhood memories, it was usually a family trip to an Asian supermarket to shop and eat, and the children would ask for a cup of bubble tea as a reward for this shopping trip. It's hard to say that the flavor is pleasing. as quoted from this article on LA Weekly: It's "sweet tea in a thick Styrofoam cup, mixed with non-dairy creamer, ice and a spoonful of black tapioca pearls, which the staff kept in a bucket of syrup on the bottom shelf of a fridge.¹⁴ So boba tea till then its still a subcultural thing exists in Asian community.

1990s till today: Boba tea shop emerges

Not after a long time, many dedicated bubble shops emerged; *Ten Ren, Tapioca Express and Lollcup* were renowned as the first boba tea dedicated shops.¹⁵ Since California became the destination of many Taiwanese immigrants, so does these bubble tea shops. And then bubble tea chains emerged, making bubble tea more commercialized and taking on an irreplaceable role in the Asian American community. *kung fu tea. boba guys* is popping up all over the United States, often next to schools. and it soon become a place for Asians to gather. In this coffee dominated country boba tea has surprisingly taken the country by storm, behind bubble tea's own strong adaptability to the market, there might be other cultural related reason behind it. For example, "Boba" is generally used a bit more in social settings.

In this context when someone asks you "Wanna get a boba", It actually refers to a drink with liquid base and toppings that you can order at a bubble tea shop. You can also order it without toppings, it's up to you.

Boba tea taking the country by storm

The boba tea trend is growing exponentially all over the world including United States. In 2019, the bubble tea market's value was US\$2.4 billion. By 2027, they predict it to be worth US4.3 billion dollars).¹⁶ Bubble tea companies are also making their way in New

¹⁴ "How Bubble Tea Became a Complicated Symbol of Asian-American Identity." Eater. November 5, 2019. <https://www.eater.com/2019/11/5/20942192/bubble-tea-boba-asian-american-diaspora>. Accessed 4th April,2021.

¹⁵ "Bubble Tea Purveyors Continue to Grow along with Drink's Popularity." The New York Times, August 16, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/16/business/smallbusiness/bubble-tea.html>. Accessed 4th April,2021.

¹⁶ "Bubble Tea Market Expected to Reach \$4.3 Billion by 2027." n.d. Alliedmarketresearch.Com. Accessed May 16, 2021. <https://www.alliedmarketresearch.com/press-release/bubble-tea-market.html>. Accessed 5th April 2020.

York, California and many other states. You can effortlessly find a milk tea store, let's say, in the junction of Mott Street in the lower Manhattan Chinatown of New York City, you can find three milk tea stores within just 200 meters. And I should say that the boba tea heat exists other places other than Chinatown as well.

2.3. The location of boba tea shops and Asian population

Since boba tea originated in Asian culture, therefore I wanted to examine the relationship between the location of boba tea shops and the geography of the Asian population. Here Asian American is a general term for immigrants from several Asian countries, but mainly from East Asia. 88% of Asian Americans are comprised of six ethnic groups - Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese.¹⁷ Asian Americans are the most educated, highest-earning, and fastest-growing racial group in the United States in an economy that increasingly relies on highly skilled workers.¹⁸ No internal subdivision of the Asian American community is made in this study, the collective term “Asian American” is used throughout the project.

Take a closer look at New York City, the locations of these 1,500 boba tea shops are highly correlated with the geography of the Asian population.

according to the population of each borough, there are several typical Asian neighborhoods such as Lower Manhattan Chinatown (Canal Street), Brooklyn Chinatown (8th Avenue), Flushing Queens, we can see a large number of boba tea shops gathered. Note that this does not indicate a causality relationship, but only that the Asian population and the number of boba tea shops are highly correlated. So, to draw more conclusions from this observation, a follow-up study is needed.

17 “Key Facts about Asian Origin Groups in the U.S.” 2021. Pewresearch.Org. April 29, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-origin-groups-in-the-u-s/>. Accessed 5th April 2020.

18 “The Economic Status of Asian American and Pacific Islander Women.” n.d. Americanprogress.Org. Accessed May 16, 2021. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2021/03/04/496703/economic-status-asian-american-pacific-islander-women/>.

3. Why is Boba Popular?

As drinking boba becomes a consumer model for Asian Americans, Time to ask: Why is boba so popular across the sea? This section is addressed through three main perspectives: Customizable, Instagram-able and Cultural Identity aspect

3.1. Customizable and Global Circulation of Taste

The novelty never wears off. Boba tea keeps evolving with new interests which has a lot of room for customization to keep a larger audience. Here 30 boba tea shops were randomly picked from NYC, then we sort out the options listed on their menu. As mentioned earlier, every cup comes in three parts - the base, additional flavors, and toppings. You are encouraged to customize each of these parts to your exact tastes. In drink base, tea is still a well-deserved theme, look at the subcategories of it, you will find that green tea gradually become trendy, maybe people out of the pursuit of health. In terms of the add-ons, you will see a lot of fruit flavors, flower flavor variants to enrich the taste buds.

The popularity of Boba shops in the U.S. market is made up of two forces: localization and globalization. In terms of localization: new Boba tea shops are being opened by first- and second-generation Asian Americans. "They're embracing Western influences and trying to adapt, which goes back to changing that narrative that it's not all about the cheap stuff"¹⁹ I found it interesting that a large portion of these options on the menu are called "Latte", and according to my observation and talk with some of the shop owners directly, they have nothing to do with coffee. The word "Latte" is used to refer to milk tea that have real milk added to them. Take *Teado*²⁰ for example, when the drink is called milk tea, then milk occupied 30%, when it comes to "Latte", milk will then be 50% of the drink. Of course, this is not an industry standard, but you can have a feeling of the adoption of name from coffee shops to cater to the local market.

Another strength comes from globalization, New Boba tea shops have sprung up with the upward mobility of wealthier, better-educated immigrants and tourists from China, Hong Kong

19 "Boba Guys Blog — Boba Guys - Serving the Highest Quality Bubble Milk Tea in the World." n.d. Bobaguy.Com. Accessed 6th April. <https://www.bobaguy.com/blog>.

20 "Teado Tea Shop." n.d. Yelp.Com. Accessed May 16, 2021. <https://www.yelp.com/biz/teado-tea-shop-new-york-6>.

and Taiwan²¹ Due to the continued development of Asian milk tea culture and the cultural confidence of those new immigrants, there is also a large proportion of boba tea flavors coming directly from Asia and setting off new trends rather than developing locally. *Xingfu Tang*²², one of the 30 stores we selected, is already a well-established boba tea chain store in Taiwan and is known for its black sugar flavored drinks. “In some ways, it is a quintessential passing of the baton from American hegemony to East Asian hegemony— in the global circulation of taste.”²³

Data Details: Appendix 1.2.1

Chart: Appendix 2.2.1

3.2. Eye-catching color make it Instagram-able

Also, boba is definitely a social drink, inviting others to join in the trend to stay connected Social media become handy with food photography. In terms of the color of bubble tea, the variety of flavors and toppings give bubble tea a richer color. I randomly selected 500 boba tea posts out of the last 10,000 posts, crop out the main part and analyze them based on their colors.

Boba's popularity and its development with more cultural meaning cannot be separated from the dissemination of information through social media networks. The aforementioned Facebook group and Instagram are another place where boba continues to gain popularity. Pictures on Instagram are simple and straightforward, with low color saturation and emphasis on design and aesthetics, thus gradually forming a kind of Instagram style, just like IKEA's Scandinavian style, which represents an attitude and trendy concept of life.

More and more businesses have discovered the current consumer psychology. In order to cater to consumers, the appearance of the products become more appealing, so that consumers take the initiative to share. Layered matcha milk tea or iced tea both present different color textures.

21 “Chronicles of a Bubble-Tea Addict.” New Yorker (New York, N.Y.: 1925), January 29, 2021.
<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/personal-history/chronicles-of-a-bubble-tea-addict>. Accessed 6th April 2021.

22 “Yet Another Wildly Popular Taiwanese Brown Sugar Bubble Tea Shop Is Coming to NYC.” Eater NY. January 17, 2020.
<https://ny.eater.com/2020/1/17/21070464/brown-sugar-bubble-tea-xing-fu-tang-nyc-first>. Accessed 6th April 2021.

23 “How Bubble Tea Became a Complicated Symbol of Asian-American Identity.” Eater. November 5, 2019.
<https://www.eater.com/2019/11/5/20942192/bubble-tea-boba-asian-american-diaspora>. Accessed 4th April,2021.

Zooming in, orange comes out as the obvious core color occupied 55% of the posts: representing milk tea and juice-based drinks. it can even be magenta, owing its hue to the butterfly pea flowers.

Data Details: Appendix 1.2.2

Chart: Appendix 2.2.2

3.3. Boba becomes a controversial cultural symbol of Asian-ness

As delicious as it is, the taste takes a backseat to the social aspect. Here I collected 10,000 latest tweets with keywords "boba" and "identity" and used Machine Learning's LDA (Latent Dirichlet Allocation) to extract keywords based on topic clusters, so as to understand what people are talking about.

The popularity of boba tea assumes the projection of Asian American identity. As mentioned above, in the 1990s, with the emergence of bubble tea shops in the United States, those boba tea shops gradually became a place for Asian Americans to meet and socialize. Though Bubble tea and boba are interchangeable terms for this drink, but as Asian immigrant descendants take root in America, the term "boba" is commodified and commercialized unlike bubble tea. It used to be a drink that carries memories of youth, like the "small friend group chilling in the middle of a hallway" party time. When associate drink with cultural identity, the term became controversial, Asian Americans had their own interpretations. Some believe that boba as a cultural symbol helps Asian cultural identity, while others believe that the association of boba with identity is inauthentic and manufactured.

First of all, we must acknowledge the special significance of boba tea among immigrant communities "it's like an Asian version of Starbucks" quoted from my roommate again: At first, I didn't go there often because bubble tea was good, but usually because my friends gathered there. We ordered bubble tea from a Taiwanese lunchbox restaurant called Rose tea café, but later a special bubble tea shop opened on the corner called Fuku tea, and it slowly became my preferred off-campus meeting place. My Asian American friends and I, immigrant families from Taiwan, China or other East Asian countries such as Korea, found a place where we could gather

together. This is very much in line with the concept of a third place as defined by Starbucks in its own corporate responsiveness : Since founding in 1971, Starbucks has set out to be a different kind of company, one that puts people first.....in our workplace, our communities, and in our stores, a third-place environment where everyone is welcome and we can gather, as a community, to share great coffee and deepen human connection.²⁴ For Asians Americans in the 90's, bubble tea shops weren't just a caffeine fix; they were truly a Third Place.²⁵

Boba tea gives these diasporas a place to put their imagined community. This drink. Together with the entire space, it provides Asian Americans with a haven of belonging. For example, as mentioned in the tweets here. "There's a culture that's helped a lot of us develop an identity as being Asian American in recent years, a lot of it is centered around food, boba, Asian parent jokes and shared childhood traumas, and you guessed it.... Kpop and Asians in entertainment"²⁶ and somebody mentioned community gathering: On Thursdays, we drink boba. Boba/bbt, whatever you call it, has become a symbol of Asian-American identity. Places like @bopomofocafe reflect how we use bbt as a symbol of community gathering.²⁷

On the other hand: Associate boba tea with Asian cultural identity can be regarded as commodification of identity. It is those typical exotic food that satisfies others but not Asians. From the tweets collected, some people complained that boba is too shallow of a measurement of all Asian identity, likened to the often ridiculed "boba liberals": Looks sweet and well-presented, but no real intention behind boba liberals to educate themselves, grow, and fight for Asian culture traits.

24 "Third Place Policy." n.d. Starbucks.Com. Accessed May 16, 2021. <https://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/learn-more/policies/third-place>.Accessed 7th April.

25 "When Food Is More than Food: 'Bubble Tea Addict' Writer Jiayang Fan." NPR, February 6, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/06/964893556/when-food-is-more-than-food-bubble-tea-addict-writer-jiayang-fan>.Accessed 7th April.

26 "No Title." ——. n.d. Twitter.Com. Accessed May 16, 2021b. <https://twitter.com/yepitstiffany/status/1298106070087241728>. Accessed 10th April

27 "No Title." ——. n.d. Twitter.Com. Accessed May 16, 2021c. <https://twitter.com/coldteamedia/status/1195069191411421186>.Accessed 10th April

Boba liberalism, originally coined by Twitter user @diaspora_is_red (whose account is now suspended), is a term that refers to shallow, mainstream Asian American activism. It is used to describe the ethnocentric politics of Asian Americans, usually of East Asian descent, who exclusively advocate for issues that benefit themselves, without acknowledging problematic dimensions of their own history and working to support other people of color.²⁸

It can be concluded that according to the sample of tweets we collected, the discussions about boba and identity are full of ridicule and reflections on boba liberal. Many Asian Americans have come to resent the idea of placing their cultural traits under seeking acceptance within white culture. As mentioned earlier, the concept of Asian American encompasses different cultural forms , boba tea does not represent the preferences of all Asians, it comes from Chinese American preferences, overshadowing the experiences of other Asian Americans. As Lopez and Espiritu (1990) claimed, "the greater the degree of difference between different Asian groups, the less likely pan-ethnicity is" and, indeed, recent findings suggest that there are at least some contradictions in identity across ethnic groups and generations.²⁹ Secondly, even if you are a descendant from east Asian, there are still many people who can't relate to boba identity. you drink boba tea occasionally, but it doesn't mean that you have to be Asian to like boba. The use of "boba" as a personality trait is not so harmful. However, Asian Americans who focus only on "boba" reflect a deeper cultural disconnect in parts of the diaspora.³⁰

Data Details: Appendix 1.2.3

Chart: Appendix 2.2.3

28 "Bubble Tea, Boba Liberalism, and Capitalism's Effects on East Asian Diasporic Identity." Yale-Herald.Com. February 5, 2021. <https://yale-herald.com/2021/02/04/bubble-tea-boba-liberalism-and-capitalisms-effects-on-east-asian-diasporic-identity/>. Accessed 8th April 2021.

29 "'Asianness' under Construction: The Contours and Negotiation of Panethnic Identity/Culture among Interethnically Married Asian Americans." Sociological Perspectives 60, no. 1 (2017): 52-76. Accessed May 10, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26579793>.

30 "Bubble Tea, Boba Liberalism, and Capitalism's Effects on East Asian Diasporic Identity." Yale-Herald.Com. February 5, 2021. <https://yale-herald.com/2021/02/04/bubble-tea-boba-liberalism-and-capitalisms-effects-on-east-asian-diasporic-identity/>. Accessed 10th April, 2021.

Data and Methodology

Data Source

This project does not use individual data source, but rather enriched by personal data, picture, and text base information, thus telling the story of boba and Asian American cultural identity clearly. At the same time, I avoid introducing the topic into more complex, vague, and especially indefinable directions. Such as the exploration of identify. Also, for visual demonstration purpose, since the amount of raw data collected each time is relatively large, I use a lot of randomization to collect a representative part of the data for the final visual presentation.

Personal data

This section explains the reason for choosing boba tea as the research topic. I want to show that boba culture is widely shared among Asians, thus extraditing my personal preference to enlarge to a cultural topic for immigrants. I collected the takeaway orders between March 2020 and March 2021 from 6 different milk tea stores. The actual number of boba tea purchases is higher than what the data shows because offline purchases are not included.

Data Details: Appendix 1.1.1

Survey

This section is a survey that can be completed in less than 10 minutes. The purpose of the 15-question questionnaire is to find out the drinking habits and perceptions of boba tea among the Asian American community aged 18-35. The feedback from the survey is only used as a usability test for the project. Not directly contribute to any of the data visualization piece, thus continuously improving the project.

Data Details: Appendix 1.1.2

Menu of 30 boba tea shops of NYC

Through the Yelp api, I have included a list of 1500 boba tea shops in the NYC area. due to the internal limit set by Yelp, this number is not the complete number of boba tea shops in New York City. On this basis, I randomly selected 30 boba tea shops and have their 1,350 options for the analysis. Firstly, I checked their menu, and sorted the elements needed for boba tea according to the description on the menu. Then I manually tag them. This manual work is made with

reference to one principle: the action, i.e., the liquid to be drunk and the elements to be chewed, so the classification is as follows: Format, Liquid base add-on and Toppings. Finally came out as many as 96 categories, when only talk about tea base, we can see black tea, green tea, oolong tea, and earl grey. Because each tea shop has its own naming principle, it is not very efficient to just follow the information shown on the menu. So, I further categorized and merged these categories into general categories.

Eventually the liquid base has eight categories, including tea, milk, slush, drink, juice, yoghurt, coffee, smoothie, etc. Some categories in the Flavor add-on are duplicated, depending on how they are expressed in the menu. For example, Cappuccino Milk Black Tea is classified as: tea as drink base, subdivided into black tea. flavor add-ons are coffee, subdivided into cappuccino, toppings belong to “undefined”.

Data Details: Appendix 1.2.1

Post of Bubble tea from Instagram

Using the Instagram API, I got the most recent 10,000 posts with hashtags #boba as of April 8. In geolocation, I further filtered the posts sent from within the US and there were 2451 posts. Color analysis was then performed through these posts.

Data Details: Appendix 1.2.2

Twitter discussions of boba

Using the Twitter api, I searched for keywords #boba, #identity and got 3589 tweets, and by using the prebuild library LDA.js, I was be able to extract keywords by cluster to quickly summarize the main content of a bunch of tweets. This data is used for demonstrating the connection between boba and culture identity. The results of the test run came out with the terms “boba” and “identity” appearing too frequently, so these two original search terms were deleted. Then the remaining keywords are categorized into four groups. A name was assigned to summarize each group for better understanding. Four keywords including “American”, “Generation”, “Stereotype” and “Meme” are summarized as Asian American Identity. “People”, “Drink”, “Food”, “Community” are summarized as Culture. “Tea”, “Symbol”, “Asian

Americans”, “Complicated” are summarized as Complicated Symbolism , “Liberals”,

“Political”, “White”, “Diaspora ”are summarized as Boba Liberal.

Data Details: Appendix 1.2.3

Data Limitations

There is a continuous filter process in this project, so there is a risk that the information is not comprehensive. Though randomization is applied here, it does not strictly prove that the selected data samples are representative. Furthermore, in order to better visual display, the project manually selected some data, such as Instagram posts, proceeded to crop 200 boba tea images to avoid the color analysis being affected by the background color. The same rules are also applied to tweets sections: some more informative tweets are manually extracted and placed in the first view, making the information display more efficient. At the same time, the existing java script LDA library is used here, not a LDA model that been particularly trained by tweets, so there is still a lot of room for improvement, if the LDA is customized here, there may be more informative observations.

In summary, this project adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. quantitative data includes number data, such as the production of boba tea market, categories of drink, etc., while qualitative data includes color of post and text analysis of tweets. The main reason for adopting the hybrid approach is to show the meaning of boba tea as a "cultural object", not just a commodity. As common as a drink can leads to social issues related to Asian American.

Narrative Structure

As my research progressed, the project became more and more focused on the discussion of Asian American Identity. There was a time in the middle when the discussion of identity accounted for up to 70% of the narratives. As an international student from Asia, I did not grow up with a racial issue integrated into the daily discussion, and the observations I made were superficial and biased, losing the objective meaning of academic research. Therefore, I return to the original theme, and in the framework of answering the question "Why is boba tea popular?", I then introduce the topic of cultural identity. I use data to speak without actively exporting my opinion. For example, the order history of my Asian American roommate and I in the past year is

used to illustrate that boba culture is widely shared among Asian culture. It can be said that this project is just a gateway to the study of Asian American culture identity, aiming at using a popular figurative entry to provoke people's thinking about themselves.

Design Decisions

This visual piece is ultimately consisting of four parts. The first part is the intro, which introduces why I want to use boba tea as the topic, the elements of boba tea, the origin of boba tea, the development of it in the United States, and a question as the end: why is boba tea so popular overseas? The next three sections will answer this question by reason one: customizable, reason two: Instagram-able, and reason three: not just a drink.

Data Visualization chart

In terms of design, the first part consists of a large scrollly-telling page with various interactive parts inserted in the middle, rather than just scrolling, for example, in the why boba as the research project section, by clicking on the blank shows the details of the order.

In order to avoid excessive use of scrollly-telling, in the three "reason" section, they are mainly separate pages, a sentence prompt on top of each page to lead to a main diagram of data visualization. The type of diagram is determined by the type of data, I was also inspired by some existing interactive articles and data visualization projects as follows.

Section	Intro
Section Detail	Boba tea by Element
Data Type	frequency
Data vis Chart	Word map
Inspiration	A brief history of the past 100 years
Link	https://pudding.cool/2018/12/brief-history/

Section No.	Intro
Section	Boba tea by Element
Data Type	text
Data vis Chart	Interactive Toggles
Inspiration	How big is the crazy rich Asian wealth gap?
Link	https://multimedia.scmp.com/lifestyle/article/2163738/crazy-rich-asians/index.html

Section No.	Reason
Section	Customizable
Data Type	Menu options
Data vis Chart	Forced chart
Inspiration	A day in the life of Americans
Link	https://flowingdata.com/2015/12/15/a-day-in-the-life-of-americans/

Section No.	Reason
Section	Not just a drink
Data Type	Tweets
Data vis Chart	Text display
Inspiration	30 years of American Anxieties
Link	https://pudding.cool/2018/11/dearabby/

Design system

Overall, by choosing food as the main theme, I want to present a gentle but warm color collision, representing the diversity of pearl milk tea flavors and its active presence on social media. In terms of Font, this project altogether used three typefaces: Neue Machina as header or subtitles, Montserret as main content. *Nanum Pen Script* as instructions or hints for interaction.

Speaking of color, in order to avoid visual over busy, the main colors were extracted from the milk tea which are white, orange and black. In the data visualization piece, 8 colors were selected for a collision of tropical vivid life. Also, for visual uniformity, these 8 colors were used to present color scale in the color analysis section.

Applied Area	Hex Value	Color Name
Background	FFF7EB	Floral White
Before Click	E2DAC8	Travertine
After Click	C57650	Red Damask
Text	000000	Black
Data Vis	C57650	Red Damask
Data Vis	5C362B	Cioccolato
Data Vis	3132B1	Cerulean Blue
Data Vis	4F7A70	Dark Green Capper
Data Vis	EA9D49	Sea Buckthorn

Data Vis	EC9FFF	Mauve
Data Vis	F56E55	Crusta
Data Vis	8555D9	Medium Purple

Conclusion

When I decided to start researching boba as my thesis, from an outsider's point of view, I kept presume Boba helped Asian Americans to form their own identity as an immigrant minority. I kept asking my roommate and my other Asian American friends. They always answer me that: "When we were younger, we spent our time after school hanging out at boba shops. Now as adults, we spend our time after work hanging out at bars. We've traded boba for soju."

Boba with its simple ingredients and strong social media presence is a cultural object that is readily adopted by generations of Asian Americans, but at some stage in their lives, people graduated from the boba life. There is obviously a reason why bubble tea is associated with Asian Identity. Food is a universal language that people from any part of the world can relate to and enjoy.³¹ For many consumers in mainstream America, food is often the only point of connection with racialized subjects, such as Asian Americans."³² Boba tea, like much of what was once considered exotic Asian food, originated from a combination of different elements that eventually made its way into the mainstream, thus gaining more visibility of Asians in America. There is something not right to relate one's whole cultural identity to a commodified object. Cultural identity is something dynamic in which you feel you belong to a group of people who are just like you. This is usually because of shared memories and of course, it is continuing to take shape.

Before dug deeper into this topic, I never think too much anything is not right about boba tea and cultural identity. The more I researched, the more I realized struggle and effort that immigrants have with cultural identity in their new environment. Growing up in Asian culture, I felt partly relatable and partly unfamiliar with the boba generation, which also confirmed the definition of cultural identity: it's a matter of "becoming" not "being".³³

³¹ "Food Is A Universal Language That People from Any Part of the World Can Relate to and Enjoy." Thriveglobal.Com. October 5, 2018. Accessed 10th April 2021. <https://thriveglobal.com/stories/food-is-a-universal-language-that-people-from-any-part-of-the-world-can-relate-to-and-enjoy/>.

³² Khoo, Tseen and Loule, Kam, Culture, Identity, Commodity: Diasporic Chinese Literatures in English p22

³³ Hall,Stuart Cultural Identity and Diaspora "How Bubble Tea Became a Complicated Symbol of Asian-American Identity." Eater. November 5, 2019. <https://www.eater.com/2019/11/5/20942192/bubble-tea-boba-asian-american-diaspora>. Accessed 4th April,2021.

Every May is Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. Recently, the resurgence of explicit, often violent racism towards Asians has forced people to re-evaluate themselves outside of ‘model minority’ myth. Overall, boba might be who they were, but there is much more to them. It’s a matter of how people define who they are and who they will be.

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Appendix

1. Data

1.1.1. Order History

Territory	Restaurant ID	Order ID	Order Time	Month	Order Status	Item Name	Customizable	Special Instr	Item Price	Order Price	Currency	Tea	Restaurant	Name	x	y	smallx	smally
5	3e371220-f5	3ed2e4e7-0e	2020-12-14	Dec	completed	Bubble Milk Large, Hot, No Sugar, Whi	5.75	19.26	USD	TRUE	MoTea (E) TT	503	729	833	701			
5	3e371220-f5	3ed2e4e7-0e	2020-12-14	Dec	completed	Fresh Grape! No Sugar, Less Ice	7	19.26	USD	TRUE	MoTea (E) TT	712	732	868	684			
5	a950414b-a2	8daee9298-7e	2020-11-20	Nov	completed	Oolong Milk Large, Zero (0%), No Ice	4.85	21.81	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea TT	1130	849	587	775			
5	a950414b-a2	8daee9298-7e	2020-11-20	Nov	completed	Oolong Milk Large, Zero (0%), No Ice	4.85	21.81	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea TT	1024	473	537	692			
5	a950414b-a2	8daee9298-7e	2020-11-20	Nov	completed	Kung Fu Grei No Ico, Oreo, Large, Little	4.85	21.81	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea JY	755	773	888	822			
5	5505967a-cf	5cd1551-fc	2020-11-08	Nov	completed	Milk Green T No Ico, Medium , 30%	4.85	20.38	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea JY	625	799	522	661			
5	5505967a-cf	5cd1551-fc	2020-11-08	Nov	completed	Oolong Milk No Ico, Large, 0%	4.85	20.38	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea TT	1014	892	845	757			
5	5505967a-cf	5cd1551-fc	2020-11-08	Nov	completed	Oolong Milk No Ico, Large, 0%	4.85	20.38	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea TT	1188	893	850	748			
5	a950414b-a2	70edf8bf-b9	2020-10-04	Oct	completed	Kung Fu Grei No Ico, Bubble(Boba), Lar	4.85	21.81	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea JY	802	485	831	863			
5	a950414b-a2	70edf8bf-b9	2020-10-04	Oct	completed	Oolong Milk Large, Zero (0%), No Ice	4.85	21.81	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea TT	432	686	570	798			
5	a950414b-a2	70edf8bf-b9	2020-10-04	Oct	completed	Oolong Milk Large, Zero (0%), No Ice	4.85	21.81	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea TT	595	629	568	692			
5	8444d857-1f	55fa13bd-b4	2020-09-22	Sep	completed	Oolong Milk Herbal Jelly, No Ice, Large	4.85	15.86	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea TT	1190	666	629	689			
5	8444d857-1f	55fa13bd-b4	2020-09-22	Sep	completed	Milk Green T Bubbles, No Ice, Medium	4.85	15.86	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea JY	1118	746	871	785			
5	c783d294-00	8c72fb1c-9c	2020-09-19	Sep	completed	Oolong Milk Large, No Sugar, No Ice, H	4	14	USD	TRUE	Gong Cha TT	578	897	717	747			
5	c783d294-00	8c72fb1c-9c	2020-09-19	Sep	completed	Green Milk T Large, 30% Sugar, Light, P	4	14	USD	TRUE	Gong Cha JY	928	878	554	726			
5	5505967a-cf	f68676e7-1b	2020-09-11	Sep	completed	Milk Green T Bubbles, Less Ice, Medium	4.85	15.86	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea JY	445	724	817	886			
5	5505967a-cf	f68676e7-1b	2020-09-11	Sep	completed	Oolong Milk Herbal Jelly, No Ice, Large	4.85	15.86	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea TT	829	646	831	754			
5	c38699a1-98	182b36ab-a2	2020-09-08	Sep	completed	Vivi Bubble T Medium, Green Tea, Light	4.5	17.54	USD	TRUE	Vivi Bubble T JY	1159	562	838	708			
5	c783d294-00	c8be3c81-d3	2020-09-08	Sep	completed	Oolong Milk Large, No Sugar, No Ice, H	4	14	USD	TRUE	Gong Cha TT	998	749	830	826			
5	c783d294-00	c8be3c81-d3	2020-09-08	Sep	completed	Oolong Milk Large, No Sugar, No Ice, H	4	14	USD	TRUE	Gong Cha TT	300	534	572	640			
5	5505967a-cf	272cb8f81-b8	2020-09-05	Sep	completed	Milk Green T Bubbles, Less Ice, Large, 3	4.85	17.47	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea JY	410	752	653	715			
5	5505967a-cf	272cb8f81-b8	2020-09-05	Sep	completed	Oolong Milk Herbal Jelly, No Ice, Large	4.85	17.47	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea TT	664	762	567	776			
5	c783d294-00	94d4c639-77	2020-08-30	Aug	completed	Green Milk T Large, 30% Sugar, Less, Pt	4	14	USD	TRUE	Gong Cha JY	969	407	773	601			
5	c783d294-00	94d4c639-77	2020-08-30	Aug	completed	Oolong Milk Large, No Sugar, No Ice, H	4	14	USD	TRUE	Gong Cha TT	1195	415	616	844			
5	c783d294-00	fd49b07-69	2020-08-30	Aug	completed	Green Milk T Large, 30% Sugar, Less, Pt	4	14	USD	TRUE	Gong Cha JY	710	300	861	662			
5	c783d294-00	fd49b07-69	2020-08-30	Aug	completed	Oolong Milk Large, No Sugar, No Ice, H	4	14	USD	TRUE	Gong Cha TT	368	547	849	683			
5	5505967a-cf	2dc46a26-1d	2020-08-16	Aug	completed	Mango Gree Little 30%, Less Ice, Large	5.25	16.53	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea JY	959	419	834	762			
5	5505967a-cf	2dc46a26-1d	2020-08-16	Aug	completed	Oolong Milk Nata Jelly, No Ice, Hot, 0%	4.55	16.53	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea TT	855	742	716	697			
5	5505967a-cf	066200fa-06	2020-08-15	Aug	completed	Mango Gree Little 30%, Less Ice, Large	5.25	16.53	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea JY	307	683	803	825			
5	5505967a-cf	066200fa-06	2020-08-15	Aug	completed	Oolong Milk Nata Jelly, No Ice, Large, (4.55	16.53	USD	TRUE	Kung Fu Tea TT	623	581	869	825			
5	3a104dc1-b6	a7c344f6-2e	2020-08-12	Aug	completed	S3 Brown Su None	5.51	15.14	USD	TRUE	Tiger Sugar (TT	643	416	513	679			
5	3a104dc1-b6	a7c344f6-2e	2020-08-12	Aug	completed	S4 Brown Su None	5.51	15.14	USD	TRUE	Tiger Sugar (JY	598	500	642	817			

1.1.2. Survey

This study is to gather data for my thesis for the Master of Data Visualization program at Parsons School of Design. This study is designed to help better understand the role that bubble tea play in everyday life as well as its impact on communities and identities, especially but not limited to Asian-Americans.

Introduction

Hi everyone, my name is Qinglu Lu. This purpose of this survey is to gather data for my thesis project about bubble tea.

Contact Information

Research lead: Qinglu Lu

Email: luq778@newschool.edu

Consent

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

- There are no anticipated risks or discomforts.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

- You will have the opportunity to be entered in a drawing for three \$50 visa gift cards.

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 research lead.

- Names will be coded in an 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 the research lead

Question Details:

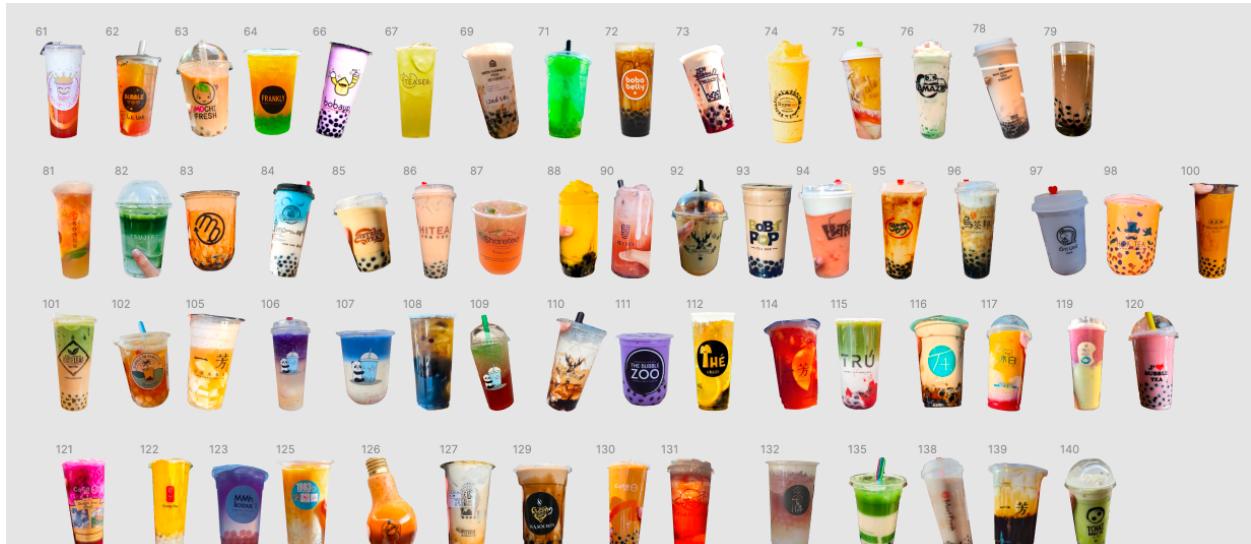
<https://forms.gle/xx9kPcJtoxh1ywQP6>

1.2.1. Menu of Boba tea shops

shop	menu	format	base	milk	liquid	flavor	toppings	tops
Teado Tea SI	Wheat Germ black tea	black tea	tea	0	0	undefined	wheat	other
Dragon Tea	Passion Fruit green tea	green tea	tea	0	passion fruit	fruit	undefined to	other
ViVi Bubble	Tiramisu Slush	slush	slush	0	tiramisu	other	tiramisu	other
M Tea	Milk Tea w. I tea	tea	tea	1	Milk	milk	taro,pudding	jelly
Bubbly Tea	Creamy Foar drink	drink		0	0	undefined	taro,cream	f taro
Xing Fu Tang	Taro Boba M milk	milk		1	taro	taro	taro tapioca	taro
Truedan	Jasmine Latt green tea	milk		1	milk	milk	taro balls,ses	taro
Truedan	Taro Milk wi tea	tea		1	taro	taro	taro balls	taro
Dragon Tea	Taro Ball Mil tea	tea		1		0 milk	taro	taro
M Tea	Fresh Ube M milk	milk		1		0 milk	taro	taro
Machi Machi	Black Milk Te black tea	black tea	tea	1		0 milk	taro	taro
The Alley	Coconut Milk milk	milk		1	coconut	fruit	taro	taro
Truedan	Honey Milk v tea	tea		1	honey milk	honey	taro	taro
Ten Ren's Te	Taro Shredded shredded ice	shredded ice	other	0	taro	taro	taro	taro
Boba Fries	Taro Shake	shake	other	0	taro	taro	taro	taro
Kung Fu Tea	Taro Milk/M green tea	green tea	tea	1	taro	taro	taro	taro
Teado Tea SI	Taro Green T green tea	green tea	tea	0	taro	taro	taro	taro
M Tea	Fresh Taro M milk	milk		1	taro	taro	taro	taro
Coco Fresh T	Red Bean Ta milk	milk		1		0 milk	tapioca,red	tapioca ball
Coco Fresh T	Red Bean Ta milk	milk		1		0 milk	tapioca,red	t red bean
Coco Fresh T	Grass Jelly T milk	milk		1		0 milk	tapioca,grass	tapioca ball
Coco Fresh T	Grass Jelly T milk	milk		1		0 milk	tapioca,grass	jelly
Truedan	Brown Sugar tea	tea		1	brown sugar	brown sugar	tapioca,pudd	tapioca ball
Truedan	Brown Sugar tea	tea		1	brown sugar	brown sugar	tapioca,pudd	other
Bubbly Tea	Oreo Tapioc green tea	green tea	tea	1		0 milk	tapioca,oreo	tapioca ball
Bubbly Tea	Oreo Tapioc green tea	green tea	tea	1		0 milk	tapioca,oreo	other
Trutea	Sweet Taro tea	tea		1		0 milk	tapioca ball,tapioca ball	
Trutea	Sweet Taro tea	tea		1		0 milk	tapioca ball,taro	
Trutea	Sweet Taro tea	tea		1		0 milk	tapioca ball,tapioca ball	
YanYan Tea	Xiaofang Bot tea	tea		1	taro	taro	tapioca ball,tapioca ball	
YanYan Tea	Xiaofang Bot tea	tea		1	taro	taro	tapioca ball,taro	
YanYan Tea	Xiaofang Bot tea	tea		1	Milk	milk	tapioca ball,tapioca ball	
YanYan Tea	Xiaofang Bot tea	tea		1	Milk	milk	tapioca ball,other	
BIAO Sugar	Ube Brown S milk	milk		1	brown sugar	brown sugar	tapioca ball,tapioca ball	
BIAO Sugar	Oreo Brown milk	milk		1	brown sugar	brown sugar	tapioca ball,tapioca ball	
BIAO Sugar	Oreo Brown milk	milk		1	brown sugar	brown sugar	tapioca ball,other	
Tiger Sugar	Brown Sugar milk	milk		1	brown sugar	brown sugar	tapioca ball,j	tapioca ball
Tiger Sugar	Brown Sugar milk	milk		1	brown sugar	brown sugar	tapioca ball,j	cream
Tiger Sugar	Brown Sugar milk	milk		1	brown sugar	brown sugar	tapioca ball,j	jelly
Tiger Sugar	Brown Sugar drink	drink		1	brown sugar	brown sugar	tapioca ball,j	tapioca ball
Tiger Sugar	Brown Sugar drink	drink		1	brown sugar	brown sugar	tapioca ball,j	jelly

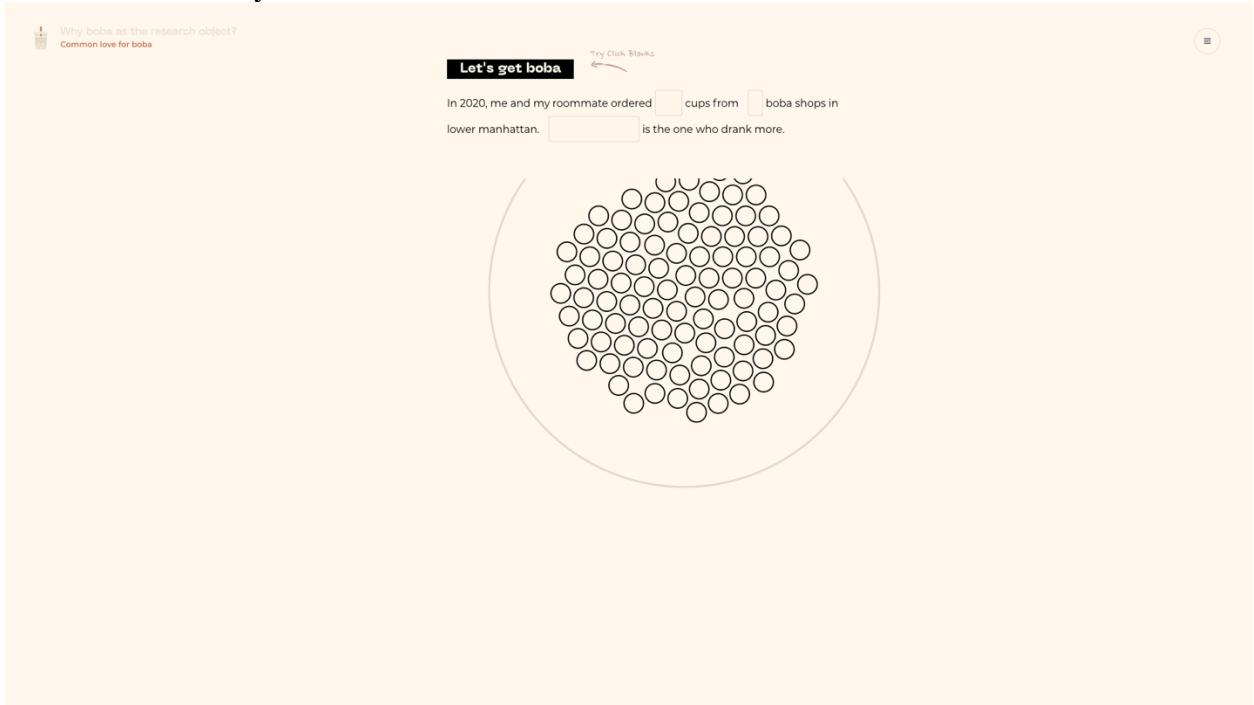
1.2.2. Instagram Posts

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	AA	AB	
media_id	pic_id	perf	inst	short_url	date	date(GMT)	order	caption	NYC_comments_x	likes_count	image_url	video_url	carousel_item_location_id	location_nan	location_url	lat	lon	GPS_NYC	user_id	username	full_name	profile_pic_x	profile_url	GPS	Hasht.st			
2.52E+18	5	bobapic/5.pr	https://insta	https://insta	1615172809	3/8/21	Peach Oolong	芋頭茶	FALSE	8	51	https://instagram.fh02-1.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	2.15E+15	本丽的茶 Be	https://insta	23.123999	113.319292	FALSE	8164502024	melonapple	18岁vancou	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	WA			
2.52E+18	8	bobapic/8.pr	https://insta	https://insta	1615172642	3/8/21	Chocolate B+c to drink	short not	FALSE	0	2	https://instagram.fh02-1.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	1.11E+14	King & Quee	https://insta	14.823796	120.954521	FALSE	1.4538E+10	kingandquee	Kng & Quee	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	WA			
2.52E+18	12	bobapic/12.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615172133	3/8/21	Passion Manjuades	mango	FALSE	0	24	https://instagram.fh02-1.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	137242643	Santa Monica	https://insta	34.01158	-118.49227	FALSE	2971576128	bobaeteandri	Boba Tea & I	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	WA			
2.52E+18	14	bobapic/14.s	https://insta	https://insta	1615172087	3/8/21	Large Drinks	LARGE	FALSE	18	14	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-2.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	16/157783532	11824501603895	2853	FALSE	1.0189E+10	dngteahouse	Ding Tea Ho	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	WA				
2.52E+18	15	bobapic/15.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615171771	3/8/21	Mango Pomi binged Wans	time	FALSE	6	32	https://instagram.fh02-1.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	44961364	San Francisco	https://insta	37.7793	-122.419	FALSE	1.3302E+10	hangrybanan	Hannah + SF	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	WA			
2.52E+18	16	bobapic/16.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615171618	3/8/21	Taro Boba Te ububbletea	soon	FALSE	0	3	https://instagram.fh02-1.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	15/151.2885	15/150.08/e35/p750x750	21469684	271468597884	FALSE	54573982	lamheeh_a	Helen Abrah	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	CA				
2.52E+18	22	bobapic/22.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615170980	3/8/21	Brown Sugar ebobaboba	want	FALSE	0	0	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-2.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/150.2886-16/157533294	143430337649864	4283	FALSE	4.6222E+10	xiekiebabba	T	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	CA				
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2.52E+18	25	bobapic/25.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615171021	3/8/21	Coconut and into your	time	FALSE	0	1	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-2.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	1.561546	103.617419	19	FALSE	4.5917E+10	adam_soco	Adam's Coco	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	CA				
2.52E+18	26	bobapic/26.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615170768	3/8/21	Boba Milk Te	Monday	FALSE	0	10	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-2.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	243749610441	41	FALSE	3.7025E+10	dngteadöff	DingTea Japi	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	CA				
2.52E+18	27	bobapic/27.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615170480	3/8/21	Brown Sugar Morning	FALSE	0	8	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-2.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	157768803	_750952772517	4.1972E+10	boba.milkyy	Boba Milkyy	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	CA						
2.52E+18	28	bobapic/28.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615169183	3/8/21	Boba Milk Te	in Bellatio	FALSE	0	10	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-2.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	158067734	_18527608407	1.0821E+10	yifang.chatss	yifang Fru	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	TX					
2.52E+18	29	bobapic/29.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615169084	3/8/21	Milk Tea wit	Milk	FALSE	2	13	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-2.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	29.7056298	-95.53929	FALSE	4.1259E+10	bebabeefoodss	Veronica	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	TX				
2.52E+18	31	bobapic/31.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615168827	3/8/21	Strawberry & Brewtwo	members	FALSE	0	66	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-2.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	158067744	_18527608407	2.281132380	cocovencov	Coco可	Vi	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	TX				
2.52E+18	32	bobapic/32.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615168731	3/8/21	Brown Sugar	juice	FALSE	0	12	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-1.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	29.7045731	-95.549543	FALSE	2.9307E+10	tigerisugar	Tiger Sugar	1	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	TX			
2.52E+18	33	bobapic/33.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615168996	3/8/21	Frut Boba Trsisters~!	coconut	FALSE	0	2	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-2.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	158111864	_882234735908	8.2153E+9	sisters.ikebu	sisters!	虎	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	TX				
2.52E+18	35	bobapic/35.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615168524	3/8/21	Coconut Milk milk tea	Bobo	FALSE	0	3	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-1.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	157786732	_739064397628	9.64540987E+9	befriend	Eco-friendly	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	CA					
2.52E+18	37	bobapic/37.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615167920	3/8/21	Boba Milk Te you're	you	FALSE	3	23	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-2.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	158067744	_18527608407	9.64540987E+9	befriend	Eco-friendly	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	CA					
2.52E+18	38	bobapic/38.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615162998	2/24/21	Matcha Milk Green Tea	FALSE	2	19	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-2.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	1.03E+14	麥吉 Machi	https://insta	43.6556	-79.38456	FALSE	8472557023	kimseetary	Joyce	4	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	CA	
2.52E+18	39	bobapic/39.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615168021	3/8/21	Golden Pearl Tea	TRUE	1	12	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-1.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	1.08E+14	Fifthy USA	https://insta	-3.86E-16	-7.72E-16	FALSE	4.5518E+10	mycobiagirl	NYCBoba	Tea	https://insta	https://insta	TRUE	CA	
2.52E+18	40	bobapic/40.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615167873	3/8/21	Fruit Tea	花茶	FALSE	0	27	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-1.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	157696203	_257860995810	7.805529877	10113iptea.c	10113iptea.C	PTEA	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	CA				
2.52E+18	42	bobapic/42.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615167749	3/8/21	Grapefruit B	~	FALSE	0	11	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-2.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	1.08E+14	1% Coffee &	https://insta	38.455171	-121.3704	FALSE	4.5526E+10	hungrycamo	Vanessa	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	CA	
2.52E+18	43	bobapic/43.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615167573	3/8/21	Strawberry & %オカ	doodoo	FALSE	0	3	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-1.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	4.29E+14	吉吉珠珠	(S)	https://insta	35.004235	135.766875	FALSE	4.3753E+10	mangosteen	Mangosteen	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	CA
2.52E+18	45	bobapic/45.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615167593	3/8/21	Watermelon pasti tau	boba run	FALSE	1	12	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-1.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	250827627265	4.1338E+10	dooduck.id	Doo Duck	#S	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	CA					
2.52E+18	46	bobapic/46.c	https://insta	https://insta	1615167201	3/8/21	Matcha Bubble pic	D	FALSE	2	9	https://insta	https://instagram.fh02-1.firebaseio.com/.json?auth=	v/151.2885-15/150.08/e35/p750x750	1.14E+14	1% Coffee &	https://insta	38.455171	-121.3704	FALSE	1.7785E+10	bobadaily	sacramento	https://insta	https://insta	FALSE	CA	



2. Visual

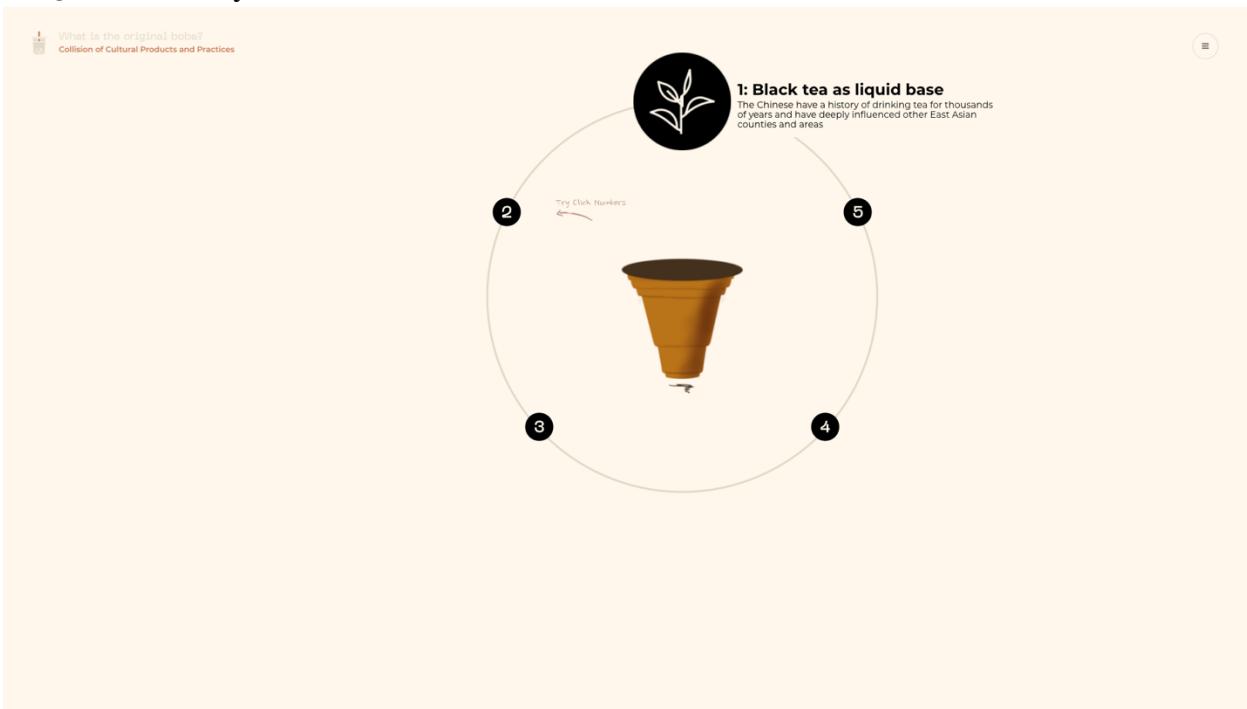
2.1.1. Intro: Order History



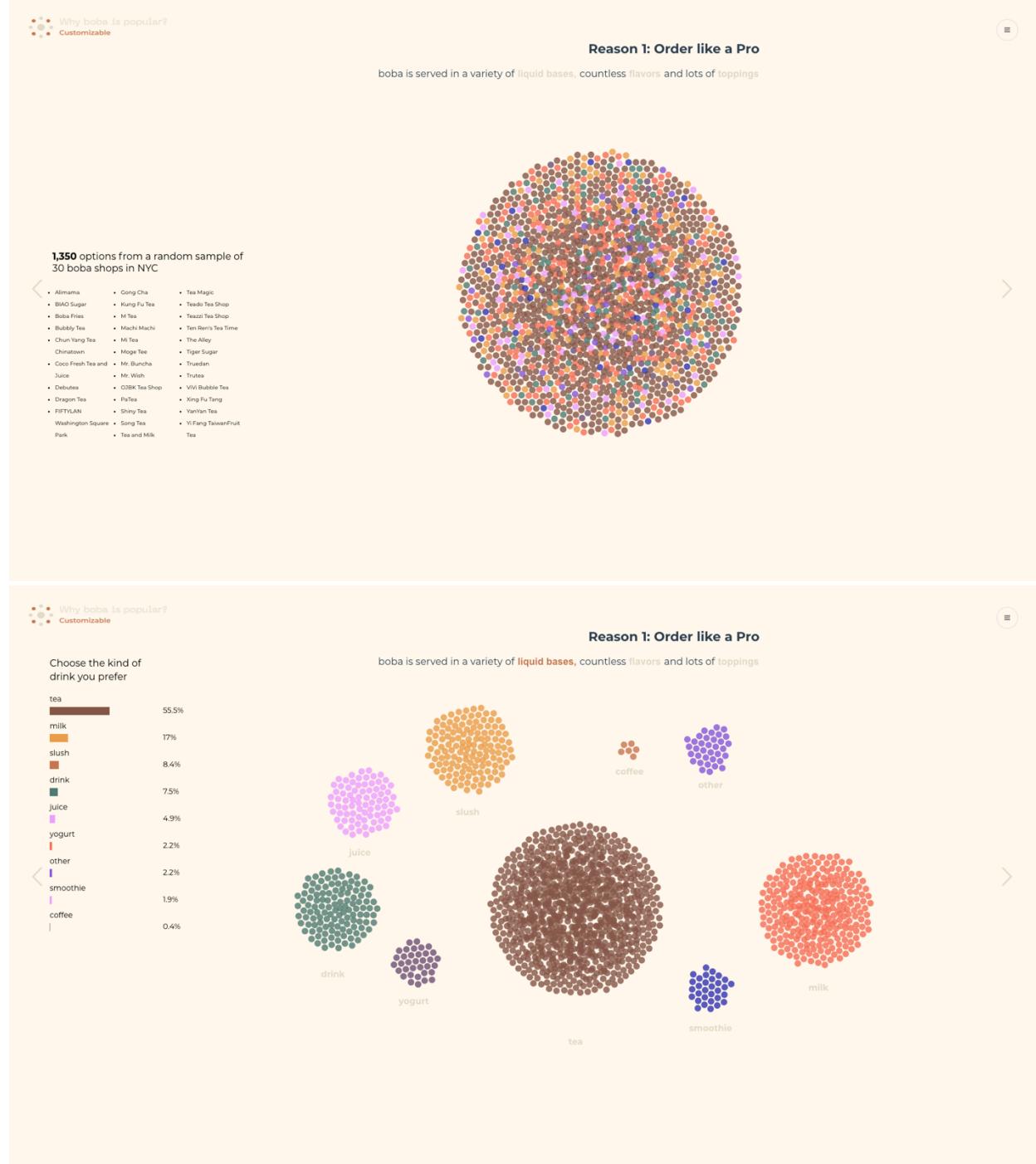
2.1.2. Boba tea by name

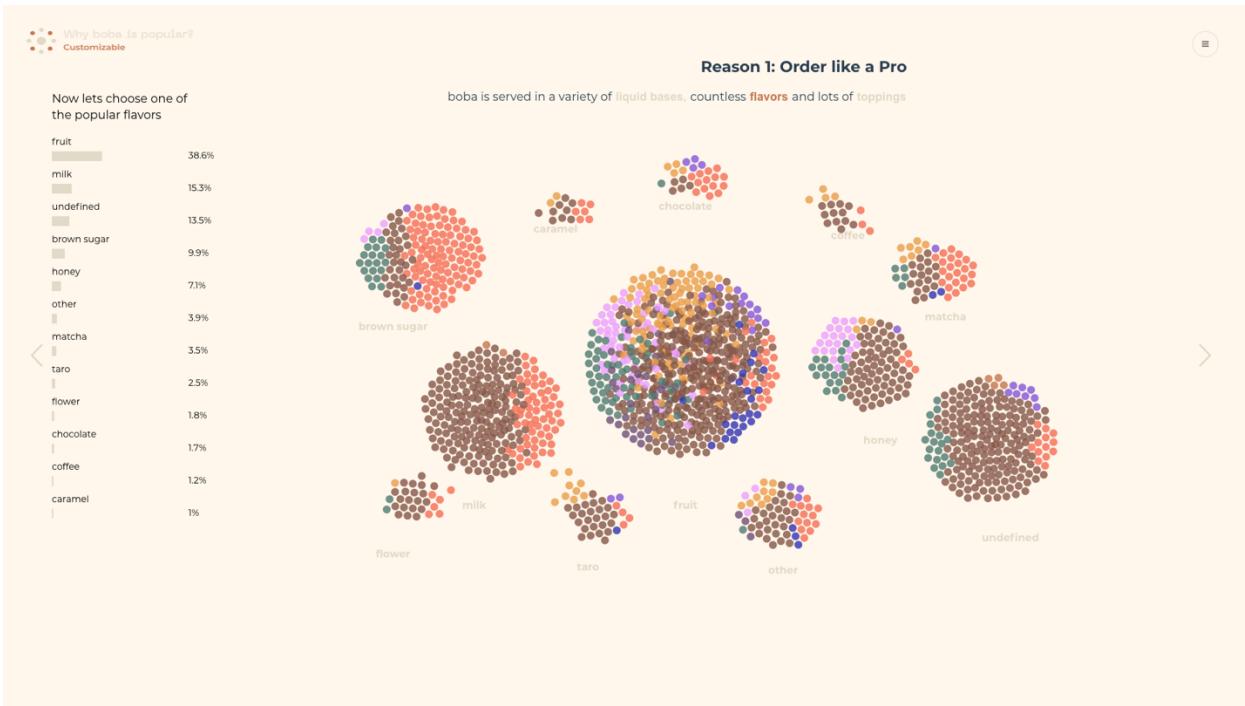


2.1.3. Boba tea by element

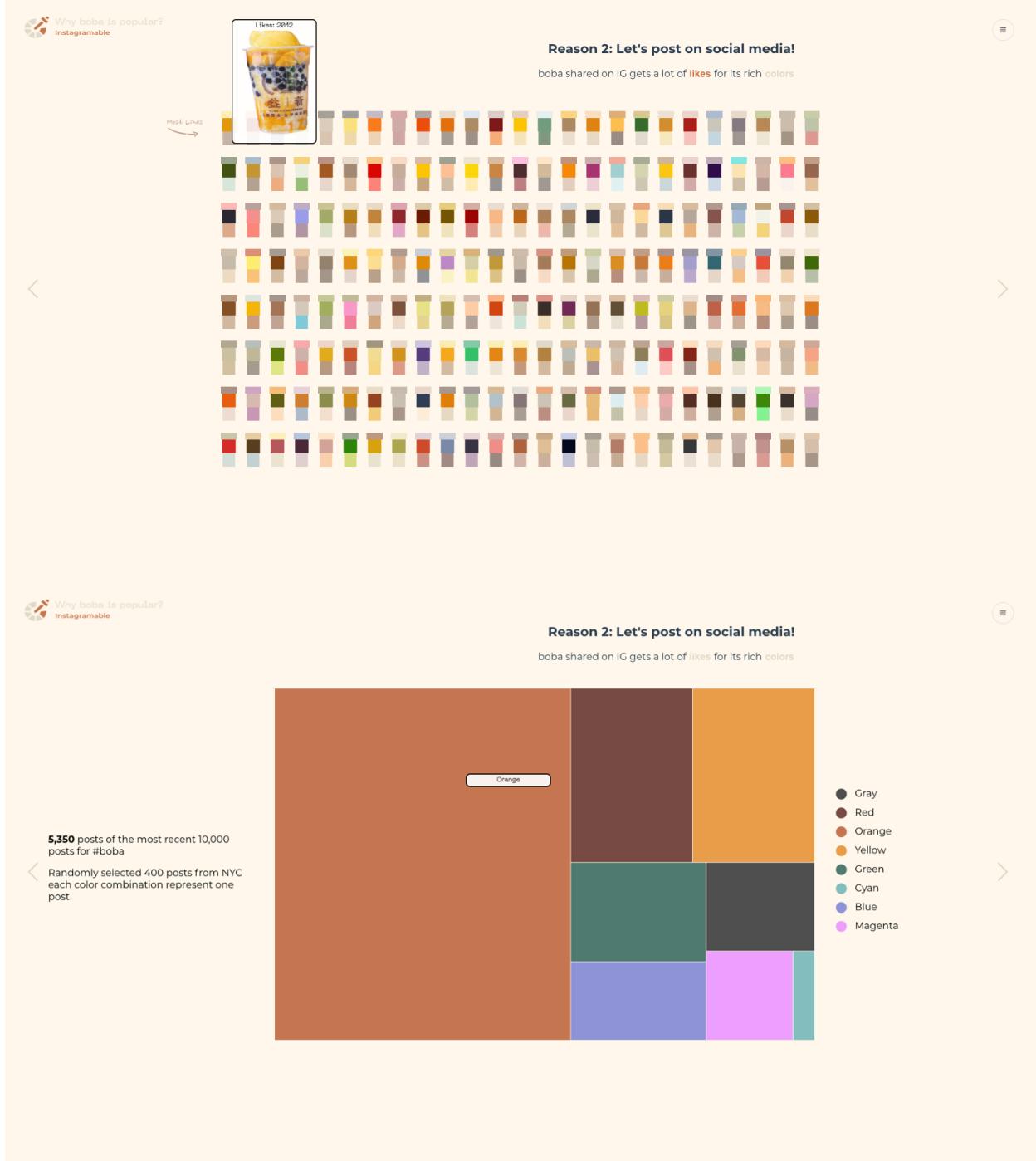


2.2.1. Reason: Customization





2.2.2. Reason: Instagram-able





2.2.3. Reason: Not Just a drink

Why boba is popular?
Not just a drink

Reason 3: A "complicated" mark of Asian Identity

people have a lot to say about boba when it comes to:
Identity, Culture, Complicated Symbolism and Boba Liberal

Topic 1 Asian American Identity	Topic 2 Culture	Topic 3 Complicated Symbolism	Topic 4 Boba Liberal
American There's a culture that's helped a lot of us feel like we're part of being Asian American. In recent years, a lot of it is centered around food, boba, Asian jokes and shared childhood traumas, and you guessed it...Kpop and Asians in entertainment.	Generation Boba generation is our identity. Just a drink?	Stereotype An Asian in the west who identifies as liberal has been the political left, and even tries to pretend to be white or get closer to whiteness. Their Asian identity is very shallow as displayed by the stereotype of "liking boba tea," a stereotypical Asian trait.	Meme Bubble tea is a green tick, a meme. It's also a symbol of its place in our identity that generations of Asian Americans have used to cleave our own place in the world. This is our lives. via @Eater @jennygzheng
People What if we started acknowledging that Asian Americans are an identity besides Asian people? More than just those with a cultural connection to boba. What if we recognize that not all Asian Americans live in places where boba is even accessible.	Drink Been drinking a lot of milk tea in part to feel a sense of belonging and came across this article which basically explains the pitfalls of conflating food with identity (but also its necessity in constructing a community and culture)	Food Boba, pho, chinese food - these cannot be culture bc they're just diet/identity. They're a culture when shared with others over time to form a cultural consciousness - the culture is not the commodity but the awareness of a unique identity that links you to your bro/sisters.	Community On Thursdays, we drink boba. Boba/bbt, whatever you call it, has become a symbol of Asian American culture. Places like @bobaonmilkstreet reflect how we use bbt as a symbol of Community gathering.
Tea literally if I'm ever mad at you just buy me a boba like immediately forgiven, slate clean, new identity. 'hi what's your name, would you like a bagel?' \$@%>E!!!	Symbol Symbol literally if I'm ever mad at you just buy me a boba like immediately forgiven, slate clean, new identity. 'hi what's your name, would you like a bagel?' \$@%>E!!!	Asian Americans However, it was an opening through which I could explore my identity through a critical lens. I ended up writing in <i>Asian American Studies</i> . Fall into "boba liberalism" is dangerous and v easy!	Complicated How Bubble Tea Became a Complicated Symbol of Asian-American Identity - Eater
Liberals "a boba liberal" is someone who centers her Asian identity in buzzy cultural objects but lacks true engagement with the politics of Asian identity. It's the Asian who eats boba for fun, but to prove her Asian bona fides while seeking acceptance within white culture."	Political Yay boba as a gateway to a more complex and real understanding of the Asian American experience, the limits of identity politics, and the importance of a political ideology oriented towards liberation.	White However, it was an opening through which I could explore my identity through a critical lens. I ended up writing in <i>Asian American Studies</i> . Fall into "boba liberalism" is dangerous and v easy!	Diaspora Asian American Boba Liberals really need to read a history book in between their dumpling diaspora identity articles #asianamerica

Why boba is popular?
Instagramable

Reason 3: A "complicated" mark of Asian Identity

people have a lot to say about boba when it comes to:
Identity, Culture, Complicated Symbolism and Boba Liberal

Using LDA (Latent Dirichlet allocation) to analyze of thousands of tweets and instagram posts about #boba to cluster relevant topics.



Reason 3: A "complicated" mark of Asian Identity

people have a lot to say about boba when it comes to:
Identity, Culture, Complicated Symbolism and Boba Liberal

tea	RT Eater "@jennyzhang on bubble 🥤 as a complicated symbol of Asian-American identity https://t.co/dV8nSfCQ0K "	bubble 🥤 is a genuine part of the asian identity and it's so fucking stupid lol sat is literally filled to the brim with bubble 🥤 posts & rants for someone to make it white like boba frappe for stacey ? or some other bullshit sat get angry wangy	How Bubble 🥤 Became a Complicated Symbol of Asian-American Identity https://t.co/56xWeay5x9	my phone died but i had to come back to make it clear: hating boba 🥤 is part of my fucking identity. Do You Get It Yet 🔗
symbol	How Bubble Tea Became a Complicated symbol of Asian-American Identity https://t.co/ODdJfowhzE via @Eater	How Bubble Tea Became a Complicated symbol of Asian-American Identity https://t.co/xIopOgzBms via @Eater	How Bubble Tea Became a Complicated symbol of Asian-American Identity https://t.co/HcI9EUQbVE via @Eater	How Bubble Tea Became a Complicated symbol of Asian-American Identity https://t.co/9UDtHYgaB via @Eater 🔗
asian americans	not sure if boba guys understands what they're being criticized for. call it boba or bubble tea or pearl milk tea - it's an integral part of asian american culture. i mean i can see an amazingly successful boba shop (started by 2 asian americans) miss the point is heartbreaking. https://t.co/GkVzbDyPHG	RT Eater "Bubble tea is a gimmick, a meme, a stereotype, but it's also a reference point for identity that generations of asian americans have used to cleave out their own place in the world https://t.co/jSEvXh1UjO	"Bubble tea is a gimmick, a meme, a stereotype, but it's also a reference point for identity that generations of asian americans have used to cleave out their own place in the world... This is our lives." https://t.co/cjeWxkDBcoo	What if we started acknowledging that Asian American as an identity includes more groups of people than just those with a cultural connection to boba. What if we recognize that not all asian americans live in places where boba is even accessible 🔗
complicated	How Bubble Tea Became a complicated Symbol of Asian-American Identity https://t.co/hLkefk5BDT via @Eater	How Bubble Tea Became a complicated Symbol of Asian-American Identity https://t.co/ESqjZCLcXU via @Eater	@jennyzhang on bubble tea as a complicated symbol of Asian-American Identity https://t.co/kvLsJ0sP9v	How Bubble Tea Became a complicated Symbol of Asian-American Identity - Eater https://t.co/CQHGAxWtj 🔗