

Minor Mobilities: A Historical Analysis of Little Saigon through Oral History

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Critical Asian Humanities in the Department of  
Asian and Middle Eastern Studies in the Graduate School  
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2022

ABSTRACT

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## Abstract

After the Vietnam War ended in 1975 many Southern Vietnamese were displaced and forced to relocate. Many of those refugees settled into an area located in Orange County, California and for the past fifty years have worked together to establish the community and space that is now recognized as Little Saigon. This thesis is a study of Little Saigon in particular, how Vietnamese immigrants have *deterritorialized*, or rejected the dominant notion of having to assimilate and adopt American culture to fulfill the American dream. Instead, community members have made purposeful interconnections to *reterritorialize* to construct a space meaningful to them where they, through their own minor strategies can productively and successfully live their own version of the Vietnamese American dream, thus allowing them to climb the ladder of upward mobility and attaining opportunities to physical mobility. I first trace the ways in which first- and second-generation Vietnamese immigrants physically alter the space in Orange County to a space that is accessible and makes sense to them by analyzing historical and present maps. Next, I examine the ways Vietnamese culture is produced and maintained in the United States for this community by examining the content and distribution of entertainment shows such as *Paris By Night*. Lastly, I trace the impact of Vietnamese contribution to the nail salon industry and how the expansion of manicuring services has allowed for Vietnamese women to successfully become independent entrepreneurs and breadwinners in their family.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 *Stories: Learning that I am Minor*

I do not have many memories of when I first came to the states. Mainly, it was because I was only two and a half when I first stepped foot onto US soil. My Má raised my brother and I to speak Vietnamese so we could communicate with my grandmother and other family members remaining in Vietnam. It was the only language spoken at home. So naturally, I am quite proficient in Vietnamese, and it would shock my mother's friends when I would greet them. It is odd because they would say "She speaks so well for someone born here" but then would consider me "basically an American" despite later learning I came from Vietnam. To everyone else though, especially the majority, I was anything but an American.

Like many other young immigrant children, I went through the traditional bullying in school. Getting called names like "fob" and "chink" were typical everyday occurrences but it did not matter because I did not understand what those words meant at the time. I thought maybe if the white kids at school did not want to play with me then maybe I should try with the kids that looked like me, but even then, those kids did not want to hang around with someone that did not speak English. Finally, one day we had a new student with bright orange hair and freckles on her face join our kindergarten class. She and I soon became close friends, and everything was quite peachy until "Back to School Night." When I arrived, she ran to give me a hug and introduced me to her

mother as her best friend who did not look to happy when she saw who her daughter had just tightly hugged. The next day, she came into class with a solemn look and told me her mother did not allow her to be friends with someone like me anymore. Thus, was the story of my first heart break.

My younger self could not fathom what had happened and I went home sobbing. I told my mother what had happened, and she said it was probably because I did not know how to speak English so I should hurry and learn so I could make friends and fit in. What I later discovered is fit in for people like us, meant to conform and assimilate to what is deemed the “normal” or “proper.” Younger me made it a resolution to quickly learn English and fit in just like my mother said. It was essentially my goal to become an American. Finally, one day in the fourth grade, my mother took me and my brother from school and brought us along with her to test for her citizenship. We knew this day was coming since she had been listening to the same cassette tape for months asking her all these questions like, “Ai là tổng thống đầu tiên của nước Mỹ? Ba màu của lá cờ mỹ là gì?” (Who was the first president of the United States of America? What are the three colors of the US flag?) Night and day we would listen to this cassette in Vietnamese and English until we all knew the questions and answers by heart.

Luckily for my brother and I, we did not have to get tested because if my Má passed then we got our citizenships too, like two freebies. The process was simple, the representative asked her two questions and when she answered them correctly, we were

told to all raise our right hands and recite the pledge of allegiance. When it was time to fill out our paperwork, the representative came over to urge my brother and I to change our names to English names and left the room to give us some time to think. In my mind I thought, "This was my chance to become a true American and finally fit in." So many names were running through my mind, "Lucie, Daisy, Stacey," just all sorts of names ending with that -ie sound. About five minutes later, the representative returned and said, "Did you pick a name?" Immediately, I was going to reply "Susie, I want Susie!" but before I could say anything I took a quick glance at my Má who looked at me with a terrified facial expression and pleaded with her eyes for me not to say a different name.

I turned to the representative and told her, "No I'm fine, I want to keep my name." To that, she replied "How about you reconsider? Your names are so difficult to pronounce. You're an American now, aren't you?" I shook my head adamantly, "No, thank you." The representative then rolled her eyes at us and left. A wave of relief washed over my Má but I was suddenly so enraged. Who did she think she was, that she could urge me so forcefully after I said no? Why does my name need to change in order to make it easier for everyone else? Why do I *need* to be an American? Why should I fit in? Years and several other discriminating events later I realized, I should not try so hard to become an American to fit in because to the majority's eyes, I do not look the part, thus meaning that I cannot play the part. Instead, I should pour my efforts into

strengthening minority communities, like my own community of Little Saigon, in Westminster California.

## **1.2 Concepts**

Though the urban space of Westminster, California has been occupied by the Little Saigon community for a relatively brief period of fifty years, its history is rich and deep. The community has a large Asian demographic, particularly Vietnamese. According to the 2019 census, Orange County which contains the areas of Westminster, Garden Grove, and Santa Ana reported an estimation of over 650,000 Vietnamese residents in the area.<sup>1</sup> This is the largest concentration of Vietnamese people outside of Vietnam. While there were few instances of Vietnamese living abroad, the largest Vietnamese diaspora occurred after the fall of Saigon in 1975.

Diaspora, according to Paul Gilroy is not just the movement of people from one place of origin to another but is “characteristically produced by forced dispersal and reluctant scattering”.<sup>2</sup> The word “forced” and “reluctant” are significant when looking at the involuntary migration following the wartime trauma that Vietnamese immigrants faced, because it left them to be rather stuck or in an immobile position. Thus, to many displaced groups, diaspora can create a characteristic tension between on the one hand, resentment, and bitterness through the dispersal journey and, on the other, an obligation

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<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau (data.census.gov), American Community Survey, 2019 ACS Demographic and Housing

<sup>2</sup> Gilroy, Paul, *Diaspora and the detours of identity. Identity and difference* 3 (1997).

of remembrance and commemoration. Gilroy refers to this tension as “diaspora consciousness”.<sup>3</sup> Through their shared struggles, the new residents of Westminster grouped together to recreate familiar sights and experiences by opening Vietnamese shops businesses that catered directly to the new and incoming refugees. Despite this effort, their new copycat versions of what they knew to be Vietnamese were not identically reproduceable; diaspora runs counter to the idea that identities from those in the homeland and those displaced are culturally and politically indistinguishable.<sup>4</sup> This is because migrants face different economic, geographic, and political pressures in the new land that aren’t as apparent or are often times inexistent in their place of origin. For the Vietnamese, political differences were strong among those in the homeland who were now forced under a newly communist regime and the Vietnamese abroad who were staunchly anticommunist.

Despite the harsh political turmoil, the new Vietnamese immigrants accepted that they had to find ways to survive in a new country. In the first couple waves of migration, only the intelligentsia or those who had ties in the southern Vietnamese military and governmental elite were sponsored and brought over to Camp Pendleton, a large military base in Southern California. Many decided to relocate to Orange County, and especially to the Westminster area after they were released. It was during this time

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<sup>3</sup> Gilroy, 318.

<sup>4</sup> Gilroy, 332.

when the space of Westminster began change. The issue of space can be a sensitive and complicated one because urban spaces, especially those similar to Westminster, California, are characterized by a range of material, authoritative, political, and cultural interests, among others. Doreen Massey proposes to recognize “space as a product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions”.<sup>5</sup> As this thesis seeks to show, Westminster’s urban spaces were indeed a product of dynamic interrelations and interactive sub-communities that helped to give cultural, political, economic, and material shape to the area. Before the new Vietnamese immigrants settled into the Westminster area, they were in contact with local governmental, church, and volunteer sponsorship programs who helped them into the area. These programs would provide education, translation, and financial aid to the new residents to help them better acclimate. These constant interactions and connections between sponsorship programs, immigrants, and fellow refugees helped transform the Westminster area into a space that is now the backbone of the Vietnamese American community in the United States. That space, however, did not stay stagnant during those early years of expansion. It underwent generations of changes that transformed the area from a barren and understated cultural space to a definitively Vietnamese enclave that is bustling with Vietnamese vendors. This is because space is “always in a process, as a never closed

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<sup>5</sup> Massey, Doreen, and Doreen B. Massey. *For space*. Sage, 2005. 10

system", meaning space is always under construction, constantly being built and rebuilt.<sup>6</sup> Major plays have been made in the last fifty years since the first wave of Vietnamese immigrants relocated to Westminster. It was through radical movement and change that allowed the first group to not only change the physical details of the area but also allowed for the coalescing of individuals to create a community bond. Thus, as Massey encourages, we ought not think space as something that only surrounds a given community, but also as something from which community members can derive cultural and relational meaning.

Like Massey's model of space as cultural relational, Stuart Hall offers similar remarks about identity. To Hall, identity is "always as subjectivity is, in process".<sup>7</sup> In particular, the identity of the diasporic subject is continually established, reshaped, and renewed according to the surrounding community. From when the first wave resettled into Westminster, to their building of a small-town network, until the blossomed community of Little Saigon now, the identities of each individual member have undergone a series of changes along the way. Especially for diasporas, identity is "always constructed through splitting".<sup>8</sup> For diasporas, leaving the homeland creates not only a physical divide in population between those in the homeland and those who

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<sup>6</sup> Massey, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Hall, Stuart, "Old and new identities, old and new ethnicities." *Culture, globalization and the world-system* (1991), 69

<sup>8</sup> Hall, 69.

migrated but also causes a split in feelings towards associating and remembering or forgetting their place of origin. In the case of Vietnam, identity was already split before migration occurred. Wartime largely separated the nation into those who aligned with the North and those with the South. After the fall of Saigon, the staunch difference in political beliefs between Northern Vietnam which supported a communist takeover and Southern Vietnam who fervently fought against it caused an even greater rift for the Vietnamese. After immigrating the refugee's sense of national identity is further split between their homeland which is now communist and allegiance to this new land, what Hall calls a "fragmentation and erosion of collective social identity".<sup>9</sup> Especially in the case of diasporas, national identity becomes bifurcated; on the one hand, there is an allegiance and loyalty to one's homeland and, on the other, an acceptance and acclimation to one's new place of residence. Such was the case for the new Vietnamese residents of Westminster who were extremely conflicted over being loyal to their homeland, and who also, faced the inability to accept the new political change that resulted from the communist takeover. To further exacerbate their struggles, the new Westminster residents found it difficult to settle into their new homes due to the disapproval of the locals already living in the area despite receiving help from local organizations.

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<sup>9</sup> Hall, 66.

As the first wave of Vietnamese immigrants settled into the Westminster area and started to create an ethnic enclave for themselves, later waves of immigrants also wanted to settle in a place that was already culturally established for them. This was met with pushback from preexisting residents who rejected and resisted the growing Vietnamese demographic in town. Although many preexisting locals were regretful and aware of the effects of the damages left in Vietnam after America's involvement in the Vietnam war, many were still strongly against allowing such huge waves of minority residents into their city. For Vietnamese immigrants therefore endured a sense "double minority"; they were minor in their new country and, considered rebels to the new Vietnamese government abroad, minor in their home country. Deleuze and Guattari help expound on the concept of the minor by explaining the characteristics of the minor. Though their argument focuses on minor literature, it is equally applicable to minor communities like Little Saigon.

Deleuze and Guattari speak largely for a departure from majoritarian nationalism by encouraging a state of community through "active solidarity" and evolution.<sup>10</sup> They first pose that "A minor literature is not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority makes in a major language".<sup>11</sup> This is primarily done through "deterritorialization" of the author, which can be seen as a rejection or

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<sup>10</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, Félix Guattari, and Robert Brinkley. "What is a minor literature?." *Mississippi Review* 11, no. 3 (1983), 16

<sup>11</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 16.

alteration of the social components within a space, meaning that incorporating something from the outside into a space deterritorializes it. Oppositely, there is “reterritorialization,” in which the space becomes transformed or recoded thus creating a new stability for that space. Thus, through a deterritorializing process, the space becomes new and distinct from what it once was, hence reterritorialization. Since minor literature emerges from within a dominant or major culture, through the author’s deterritorialization, they are able to produce a way of connecting to a group they are already a part of as well as to the group they are alien to. Minor communities must precisely use the principles of deterritorialization to make sense of the space they exist in by reterritorializing the current environment into one suitable for them. Especially for the Vietnamese refugees who due to their limited funds and lack of mobility, were left in an impossible position, unable to go back home and yet unable to travel and resettle in other parts of the United States. This left them with the only choice to transform the area into one acceptable to them.

Secondly, Deleuze and Guattari pose that in a minor (community), “everything in them is political”.<sup>12</sup> This is particularly true for the first several waves of Vietnamese immigrants coming into Westminster since their lives were so directly affected by politics. They sought to create a community that not only shared their love and yearning

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<sup>12</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 16.

for their home country but also one that understood the treacheries communism caused on their family and friends back in Vietnam. Due to this, they created a space strictly anti-communist and did this by rejecting the flag of the new socialist republic of Vietnam.

The last characteristic of a minor community is that “everything has a collective value”.<sup>13</sup> What this means is that within a minor community, everything is done for the greater good or for the benefit of all. The first several waves of immigrants who came to Westminster had a tremendous responsibility. They bore the burden of building and developing Vietnamese speaking and Vietnamese catering restaurants, shops, and businesses. Each individual primarily did this for his and herself to better acclimate to the area while still preserving a sense of home and familiarity. However, these decisions to make things accessible for a Vietnamese crowd served the community and was thus valued by the collective.

### ***1.3 Becoming Little Saigon***

Mobility for Vietnamese diaspora is perceived to be minor because of the unfortunate position displacement caused them to be in. Left with little assets and no support to establish or rebuild, achieving success in the form of the American dream is incredibly difficult to achieve when the people trying to achieve it are not educated, do

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<sup>13</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 17.

not speak English, and are of another race. Upward mobility is the hallmark of the myth of the American dream, and it necessitates assimilation as the dominant marker of being “American.” The minor in minor mobilities points to a different spatial and temporal engagement, if not outright rejection of that dominant narrative. In short, to conceive of minor mobilities is to devise a strategy of survival and prospering otherwise, outside the hegemonic discourse of the “American” way.

In this thesis, I will argue that Vietnamese immigrants were able to successfully establish a new home in the United States by using non dominant or minor strategies to build a community and achieve their own version of a Vietnamese American dream despite facing the forced mobility of leaving Vietnam and the immobility of not being able to return. Minor communities in the US are deeply complex, dynamic, and multi-layered that are built and maintained through constant interactions of community members to preserve and strengthen cultural and social bonds. Some of the key concepts I employ in my thesis are deterritorialization, reterritorialization, the construction of space, and leveraging the minor. They are useful to think and write about the acclimation process of the first several waves of Vietnamese immigrants into Westminister, the community building process, as well as the rejection of complete American assimilation for minor communities who live in America.

In chapter one, I will be discussing the initial resettlement period of Vietnamese refugees into Southern California after the Vietnam War. I analyze the ways in which

Vietnamese settlers to the area were able to create a community by developing areas and businesses that catered to their cultural and social needs. Next in chapter two, I examine how their culture is produced and maintained in the United States and abroad by closely looking at entertainment variety shows such as *Paris By Night* and *Van Son*. Lastly, in chapter three I discuss the impact the impact the nail industry and Vietnamese community have on each other mainly focusing on how entrepreneurship in manicuring has allowed Vietnamese Women to become successful business leaders in the beauty sector market.

## **2. Mapping Little Saigon**

### ***2.1 Historical Background***

When we look at how community is defined, it is quite straightforward.

Roughly, it can be defined as a group of people who share common interests that live in the same area (such as a city, town, or neighborhood), according to Merriam-webster.<sup>14</sup>

While this rather simple dictionary definition may resonate with some, for many others, this definition does not even begin to scratch the surface. Community can be incredibly complicated, deeply layered, and multi-factored. In looking at Little Saigon, there is so much more that meets the eye than just a “group of people who live in the same area.”

Though the community has a rather brief history of less than fifty years, its development has been incredibly rich. In this chapter, I will analyze the growth of the area that is considered Little Saigon from 1975 until present and examine what factors have contributed to its evolution. I argue that Little Saigon has counterbalanced this rather straightforward assumption of community by giving examples of the ways community members have deterritorialized and reterritorialized through the constant construction of space into the economically and culturally thriving place that it is now. For this section, I will mostly rely on GIS mapping and google earth imaging to physically show

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<sup>14</sup> *Merriam Webster*, s.v. “Community.”

the representative boundaries of the community as well as oral histories to show the personal experiences and feelings community members have towards Little Saigon.

Before looking at the physical space of Little Saigon, a brief history should be explained about why so many Vietnamese immigrated to the US during the period of 1975-1990. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, many Southern Vietnamese faced interrogation, torture and abuse, and even died under the hands of the new communist government. Many were placed in political prisons and forced to give up their assets and belongings and relocate to high surveillance areas. Under the Ford administration, many of these southern citizens were rescued and brought over to US as refugees and asylum seekers. This attempt at rescue in 1975 brought over approximately 125,000 Vietnamese as a part of the first wave.<sup>15</sup> This rescue, however, did not apply to “regular” people as most from the first wave were elite officials, those who held titles in the military and government, or those who were employed by the United States.

This left many citizens in non-elite positions to have to escape Vietnam to neighboring countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines by boat, leading them to be known as “boat people.” Many of these travelers faced treacherous journeys and died along the way. In an interview for the Vietnamese oral history project, Nancy

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<sup>15</sup> Võ, Linda Trinh. "Constructing a Vietnamese American Community: Economic and Political Transformation in Little Saigon, Orange County." *Amerasia Journal* 34, no. 3 (2008): 84-109. 85

Nhung Pham, recalls her seventh attempt to escape Vietnam on her way to Bidong island. "At that time, I had already fainted. I didn't even know if it was day or night. I remember opening my eyes, looking over, and seeing the pirates holding their hammers. And then I closed my eyes and fainted."<sup>16</sup> After they had reached these destinations, many of them went through an interview process regarding where they came from and whether they had any ties to the communist regime in Vietnam. Many of these southern Vietnamese were then brought over through church organizations, sponsored by US families who felt they needed to give back after US involvement in the war, and through various US governmental programs. Some included the Amerasian Programs for multiracial Vietnamese with American fathers, the Humanitarian Operation program for former prisoners of the Communist 're-education' camps, and the Orderly Departure Program for family unification.<sup>17</sup>

Through these first two waves, Vietnamese refugees were strategically dispersed throughout the fifty states, though mainly across four major military bases, the majority of over 50,000 was placed in Camp Pendleton, just outside of Oceanside California. After a period of education in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes and skills and job training, the refugees were given financial assistance to go wherever they wished.<sup>18</sup> With

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<sup>16</sup> Nancy Nhung Phan, interview by Tramanh Vu, November 19, 2012. Vietnamese Oral History Project. University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA.

<sup>17</sup> Vo, Linda Trinh, and Mary Yu Danico. "The formation of post-suburban communities: Koreatown and Little Saigon, Orange County." *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*(2004). 21

<sup>18</sup> Vo, 91.

some examination, an initial small few picked Orange County, California as their choice for relocation. The weather conditions in OC played a big factor as it is warm and mild nearly year-round. Although this does not mimic the weather in Vietnam, especially the humidity aspect, it is similar enough climate which meant little to no adjustment period for the new settlers.<sup>19</sup> At the time, the Westminster area of Orange County was an underdeveloped area, mainly residential and agricultural.

## **2.2 1970s-1980s Lost in Space**



**Figure 1 GIS Map of Bolsa St in 1970**

By looking at the Geospatial map of the Westminster area in 1970, aurally, there are obvious plots of blocks that are empty land. Since the mapping and photography

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<sup>19</sup> Berg, Tom, "Why Westminster? Eleven reasons the Vietnamese came to Little Saigon and why they stayed," *OC Register*, April 30, 2015.

imaging technology in the 1970's was not so advanced, the image is slightly blurred and unlabeled. This space was mostly inhabited by lower-and middle-class Caucasian Americans that did not use the land for commercial purposes. There were few white-owned store fronts, but the entire area was generally residential. This is partly because the area had only been established as an incorporated city named Westminster in 1957. It was an opportune time for Vietnamese refugees to arrive in Central Orange County during the 1970s and 1980s since residential areas along with commercial properties were in a state of decline thus making the land relatively affordable.<sup>20</sup> These new immigrants relied on the affordability of this area to begin their settlement. This was another contributing factor as the first wave of immigrants received enough cash subsidies and support from the United States government to buy land and open their own commercial businesses.

In 1978 three extraordinary people helped pave the way for Vietnamese business to rapidly grow and proliferate in Westminster. Danh Quach, Frank Jao, and Yen Do all started their businesses around the same time resulting in the quick expansion of Vietnamese businesses in the area and migration. Danh Quach became one of the first Vietnamese refugees to open a shop on Bolsa street, called Danh's Pharmacy. This street is pertinent to the development of Little Saigon and is considered the nucleus for early

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<sup>20</sup> Vo, 91.

Vietnamese storefronts. His shop not only sold medicinal goods but served as an all-purpose, one-stop-shop for new local Vietnamese residents. Frank Jao started as a small real estate agent who rapidly transformed his business into a commercial real estate firm. He convinced many investors to loan money to new Vietnamese locals who wanted to start their own businesses. With his help, Vietnamese owned commercial businesses expanded tenfold within the next twenty years. Lastly, Yen Do founded the *Nguoi Viet* (Vietnamese People) newspaper out of his garage.<sup>21</sup> At first, he was the writer, editor, and publisher for this paper and went door to door handing out his editions to his neighbors for free. He would write articles and give tips on the “American” way of living as well as provide current information on the events occurring in Vietnam. Soon, friends and other refugees joined his cause to help him write and distribute this news to the growing Vietnamese population in town. The paper remains a highly trusted source today with over 20,000 subscribers. Some other notable businesses include Hoa Binh supermarket and Vien Dong Restaurant. Hoa Binh was the first Vietnamese grocery store that supplied familiar cooking supplies and ingredients and Vien Dong was one of the first restaurants that served affordable meals to with a taste of home to new local population.

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<sup>21</sup> Vo, 91.

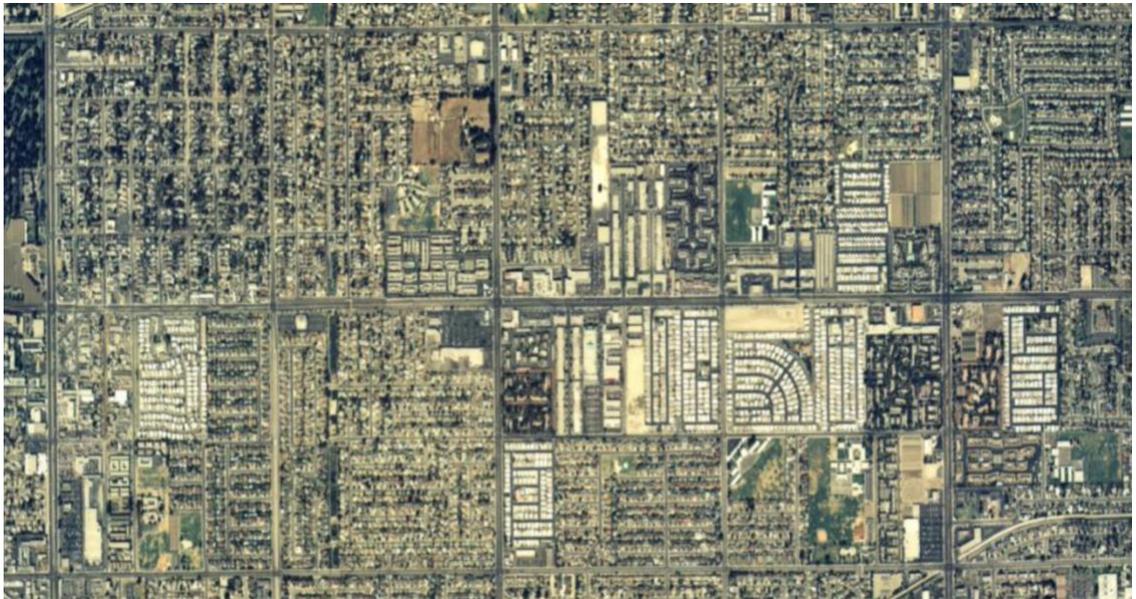
In examining this initial take off, it is apparent that these pioneers had no real support when they first started. Like the land seen on this historical map, their support was barren and empty but had room for growth. Ann Thy Thao Nguyen remembers, “When I came here to Orange County in 1980, this entire Bolsa neighborhood was just grass, nothing like the current prosperity.”<sup>22</sup> It was only after word getting out that there were Vietnamese capable of opening their own businesses in America, did more fellow Vietnamese refugees migrate to the area. With courage, few people like Danh, Frank, and Yen were able to help build the Vietnamese enclave to be what it is today. They were able to deterritorialize by altering the unused space and reterritorialize by creating businesses that were productive and resourceful for themselves and the people around them. Thus, through hard work and input, these people can be considered the “architects” that have slowly helped construct this space into something more than just space, but into a place that is not “random or accidental, but purposefully built”.<sup>23</sup> Purposefully is key because it highlights how Little Saigon is the product of the deliberate interrelations and interactions created by people who not just coexist but cohesively work together to construct the space that becomes community.

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<sup>22</sup> Ann Thy Thao Nguyen, interview by Thuy Vo Dang, January 12, 2013. Vietnamese Oral History Project. University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA.

<sup>23</sup> Aguilar-San Juan, Karin. *Little Saigons: Staying Vietnamese in America*. U of Minnesota Press, 2009. 1

### **2.3 1980s-2000s Key Developments**



**Figure 2 GIS Map of Bolsa St in 1990**

The period from the early 1980s to early 2000s was the largest growth period for Little Saigon but was also a time of racial and political turmoil. Looking at the GIS map for the Westminster area in 1990, a significant number of changes has occurred. There has been significant commercial changes to the area. The freeway has more cars traveling, which is most likely due to the increasing population in the area. Perhaps the largest indication of growth, however, is the construction of the Westminster Mall. This is because malls are strategically placed in areas that are expected to have great urban development and high foot traffic. As such a large land and financial investment, malls can be incredibly risky to build. However, with an influx of immigrants coming to the area it was properly assumed that the demand for consumer goods would increase, thus making the construction of the mall a very profitable venture.

Similar to the rapid construction of other commercial areas during this period, it is obvious that overwhelming growth also took place on Bolsa. It is clearly visible that these once empty plots of land have now been filled in. Though this image only offers an aerial view, it is evident that these new structures are a combination of new residential housing, commercial plazas, and valued religious buildings. The initial handful of businesses have expanded to over 1000 on Bolsa street. Investors believed in profit potential of Vietnamese business and thus lent numerous loans to new entrepreneurs. Bolsa street now became a hub of individual Vietnamese shops offering food, groceries, and other valued services such as postal services, dental care, and more. Tra Van Mai, a narrator for a VAOHP project shares, "Before, Little Saigon was a big dump full of trash and very little people compared to what it is today... After a while, Vietnamese people started going there to start businesses and set up a community where the community can gather and communicate with one another."<sup>24</sup> As Tra Van mentions, communication was key. These new businesses were not only Vietnamese owned but were intentionally catered to Vietnamese consumers. This meant that store owners could operate their businesses in Vietnamese. They no longer needed instructional guides on living the "American" way because they were not serving American crowds. Having access to language was important because this meant new waves of Vietnamese immigrants could

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<sup>24</sup> Tra Van Mai, interview by Tuan Mai, February 20, 2012. Vietnamese Oral History Project. University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA.

have an easier time finding jobs since they could reach out to employers in Vietnamese. By utilizing these non-dominant methods such as rejecting the need for assimilation and learning English, Vietnamese in the area were able to recode a way of life that not only made sense to them but also helped them to become more economically prosperous. Furthermore, was through these cultural and linguistic interactions that the area of Westminster became more than place in which people simply coexisted but became a community as a product of these interrelations.

With the area now flooding with Vietnamese immigrants, all the storefronts on Bolsa started to fill with Vietnamese businesses. The narrowing of these businesses on a small two-block radius was convenient since it made it extremely walkable for people to go from their housing accommodation to their place of occupation. Since public transportation was limited, it was convenient for the new residents to be able to live close to their places of employment.<sup>25</sup> Having everything centralized in one area meant that they did not have to spend money on public transportation or buy a car. Since many came from low education and low socioeconomic backgrounds, many could not afford such luxuries such as driving a car. Most immigrants worked minimum wage service jobs that required them to be on their feet for long hours in the day. Since many new immigrants needed to find work immediately, Vietnamese bosses understood this

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<sup>25</sup> Vo, 93

struggle and hired them for minimum wage or even below that amount. This system worked to the other's advantage since new business owners needed cheap labor and new immigrants always needed to find work. The centralization of businesses on Bolsa street made it incredibly convenient since people did not need to travel far for any particular service. People who lived in the area could visit the dentist, go to the groceries, eat out, and go to work all on one street. Also, importantly they could do all this in the comfort of speaking their mother tongue. Thus, the walkability of services and labor available on Bolsa street was a major decision factor for the resettling of new immigrants. Being able to easily communicate and physically connect with others made it possible for community members to intimately associate with each other highlighting the importance of linguistic and spatial proximity in the community building process. This is because community is not just a group of people who live in the same geographic area but a product of people who coexist in an easily navigable and interrelated space united by cultural, linguistic, and political connections.

This strip of Bolsa street became even more pronounced with Vietnamese activity in 1987 when Frank Jao built a massive two-story mall right in the middle of Bushard Street and Magnolia Avenue.<sup>26</sup> He named his mall Phuoc Loc Tho meaning fortune, prosperity, and longevity like the three San Xing deities in Chinese astrology

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<sup>26</sup> Aguilar, XV.

and mythology. As an accommodation to English speakers, it is called Asian Garden Mall. This mall is likely the most important Vietnamese symbol in all of Little Saigon. Inside exists a cultural hub of over 300 hundred businesses, 200 of which are individual jewelry booths. Upon entering, there is an immediate sensory overload as one smells different Vietnamese dishes being cooked, hears the blaring Vietnamese karaoke being blasted, as well as being kissed by the soap bubbles from the toy seller's shop. Taking inspiration from Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas, Frank Jao wanted to change the shopping and dining experience by bringing in cultural elements.<sup>27</sup>

This building became the quintessential spot that everyone wanted to go to each weekend. It has everything Vietnamese and attracted people of all ages. There are stores selling stationary items and anime gear for the young ones, tailoring of ao dai's and other tunics for the fashionable ladies, and coffee shops where older men could sit, play Chinese Chess, and talk about their war stories. Asian Garden Mall represents the "center" and the "heart" of the Vietnamese American community.<sup>28</sup> Its construction changed locals lives because it provided hundreds of jobs to newcomers and its experience elicits memories so dear, personal, and meaningful to the group of people that could no longer go back to their homeland anymore. It also served as a place of education as nonlocals or children of first-generation immigrants could learn what it

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<sup>27</sup> Roosevelt, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Aguilar 8.

was relatively like to enjoy the tastes, sounds, and experiences of what it is like to be in Vietnam without physically being in Vietnam. In sum, Phuoc Loc Tho is a cultural nexus made by the Vietnamese originally for the Vietnamese, however, its establishment in the US, dual name translation to Asian Garden Mall, and welcome reception to visitors from everywhere makes it an inclusive place for all. It is the spatial center but is also the cultural center for Vietnamese within another country. Phuoc Loc Tho touches on the cultural, social, and political; it is a true symbol of the Vietnamese spirit in America.

In 1988 at Phuoc Loc Tho, former Governor George Deukmejian rubbed the Happy Buddha's belly and officially announced the recognition of the city of Westminster also to be known as Little Saigon in the naming ceremony. With this renaming, it was finally starting to seem like these immigrants were able to build a home away from home. The area was no longer a resettlement colony for Vietnamese refugees but finally turning into a community space with shared language, memory and experience, and culture. In 2003, lobbyists proposed to put freeway exit signs pointing towards Little Saigon and cement slabs in certain parts of town that would say "Welcome to Little Saigon" thus territorializing the space. "Territorializing means establishing the scale, boundaries, and 'imageability' of a place."<sup>29</sup> As Massey suggests, space is always under construction. Up until this point, Westminster had undergone

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<sup>29</sup> Aguilar, 10.

countless construction and giving the space a clear demarcation of Little Saigon not only notes the physical boundaries of the area but also recognizes it as a culturally and socially bound space shared by a cohesive Vietnamese American community. Thus these cement slabs or notable buildings such as Phuoc Loc Tho serve as a way of territorializing by claiming the space. This does not mean the exclusion of anything or anyone non-Vietnamese, but it gave Vietnamese people a defined grasp on what is Little Saigon and what is holding their city together.

This territorialization however, did not come about without contention. One board voter rejected having the welcome signs be in both Vietnamese on the grounds that the foreign language is ethnically specific and thus would segregate a group of people.<sup>30</sup> It was not only local leaders who had opposed this sudden growth in the Vietnamese population and businesses in the area. Prior to the welcome sign debate, in 1981, a petition was passed around and signed by 105 local Westminster residents that demanded for the city council to prohibit business licenses to be issued to Vietnamese immigrants<sup>31</sup> Although this petition was rejected, this kind of racism was not new to the Vietnamese living in America. Vietnamese immigrants understood the kind of bias towards the white majority and their unfair use of power. They had firsthand experience with this when American soldiers stepped foot on their shores and torched the jungles

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<sup>30</sup> Danico and Vo, 31.

<sup>31</sup> Roosevelt, Margot, "Frank Jao's story: From refugee to business mogul," *OC Register*, April 30, 2015.

in their homeland. The rising success of these Vietnamese businesses brought so much fear for white locals as their profits were slowly getting taken away. Frank Jao recalls “Vietnamese stores would get gunshot through their windows”; “drivers would roll down their windows and give us the finger and use the F-Word.”<sup>32</sup> Despite this ill-treatment, the new Vietnamese residents stood their ground. They multiplied and made new roots by raising their children and seeking new opportunities through business ventures. This resilience caused old Westminster locals to fear the growth of the community along with its wealth, voice, and power. Many who realized their new Vietnamese neighbors were here to stay felt discontented and fled to other areas. This phenomenon known as white flight was common in areas with growing ethnic neighborhoods. However, to neighborhoods like Little Saigon, culture, politics, and ethnic belonging are a parcel of community which is why there is a lingering threat from those on the outside of it. In California alone, this exodus occurred in cities such as Oakland, Los Angeles, and San Jose. Jack Toan remembers, there “were a lot more American companies and business in there and eventually just kind of [got] pushed out and the community changed quite a bit.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Roosevelt, OC Register, (2015).

<sup>33</sup> Jack Toan, interview by Thuy Vo Dang, August 13, 2012. Vietnamese Oral History Project. University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA.

During this period, Vietnamese were not only gaining financial power but also political power. As more Vietnamese immigrants were learning English and getting an American education, they realized as a community that like the Americans that fight for their rights, they should be represented by those who will fight for theirs. They wanted a voice in America but they also wanted to fight for the freedom of those back home and needed someone who was willing to speak up for them. Tony Lam, the owner of Vien Dong restaurant became the first Vietnamese American to hold a political position in the US. He won a seat on the Westminster city council in 1992, against another Vietnamese American candidate, Jimmy Tong Nguyen.<sup>34</sup> It is worth it to note that while Tony had a large backing from the Vietnamese community, it was not their votes that drove him to victory. Many immigrants were illiterate in English and since a majority of them had not earned US citizenship, they were unable to vote. In that year, Vietnamese votes only contributed to 30% of his total votes. This was an incredible win as he earned votes from non-coethnics who were willing to support him and the causes he was fighting for. He won re-election for three terms and ended his political career in 2002.

Throughout his career, he faced not only backlash from white locals and other residents of Westminster but from his own Vietnamese community at times. The biggest incident in his career occurred when community members picketed him for not joining

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<sup>34</sup> Danico and Vo, 26.

in protest against a pro-communist Vietnamese community member. In 1999, this member displayed a picture of Ho Chi Minh and the Socialist Republic Flag of Vietnam on the store front of his video store caused outrage to thousands of people in the community. This action allowed for Little Saigon to be a space of political mobilization again because as Deleuze and Guattari mention, everything about the minor is related to politics. A reason why so many Vietnamese Americans subscribe to the republican party and to George W. Bush at the time was largely due to his father's, former president George H. W. Bush's staunch anti-communist sentiments. After what their homeland had been through, Southern Vietnamese could not accept this kind of action. Consequently, this incident produced numerous legal battles, an enormous police bill, and highly negative publicity for the Vietnamese community in the eyes of law enforcement and local officials.<sup>35</sup> This incident only shows how unified the members of the community are in face of what they believe in.

Again, Phuoc Loc Tho takes a considerably large cultural and political presence in 2000 when presidential candidate, George W. Bush came into town waving the red and yellow flag of South Vietnam. To the Vietnamese immigrants who were so deeply affected by the new political structures back home, anti-communist sentiment was extremely important to them. They needed their leader in this new country to also hold

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<sup>35</sup> Danico and Vo, 33.

the same beliefs as they did which was why the presidential candidate carrying flag of South Vietnam was both symbolic and significant to them. In his speech that day, George W. Bush elaborated, "You can move to England and not be an Englishman. You can move to France and not be a Frenchmen, But if you move to America, you're an American."<sup>36</sup> The notion of being an "American" was significant since Southern Vietnamese had left their home and did not have a place to return to. Being American was all they had left and what they had to now work towards. However, they needed to be American in their own way. They needed to defy the dominant methods of the majority and recode a way of living that made sense to them even if it meant voting for Bush just because he considered them "Americans" while waving the South Vietnam Flag. While Bush was able to earn the favor of many, to others, he lost their vote for his lack of mention for Vietnam. Lan Quoc Nguyen attended the campaign that day and shared "He's at the heart of the Vietnamese community, how can he not mention a word about Vietnam?"<sup>37</sup> Another confessed, "All my life is left behind in Vietnam. I'm sad Bush didn't address about Vietnam and the fight for freedom there."<sup>38</sup> Since then, Phuoc Loc Tho has remained an important site for political contention as policy leaders, local and national, often lobby and campaign in the space.

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<sup>36</sup> Aguilar, 8.

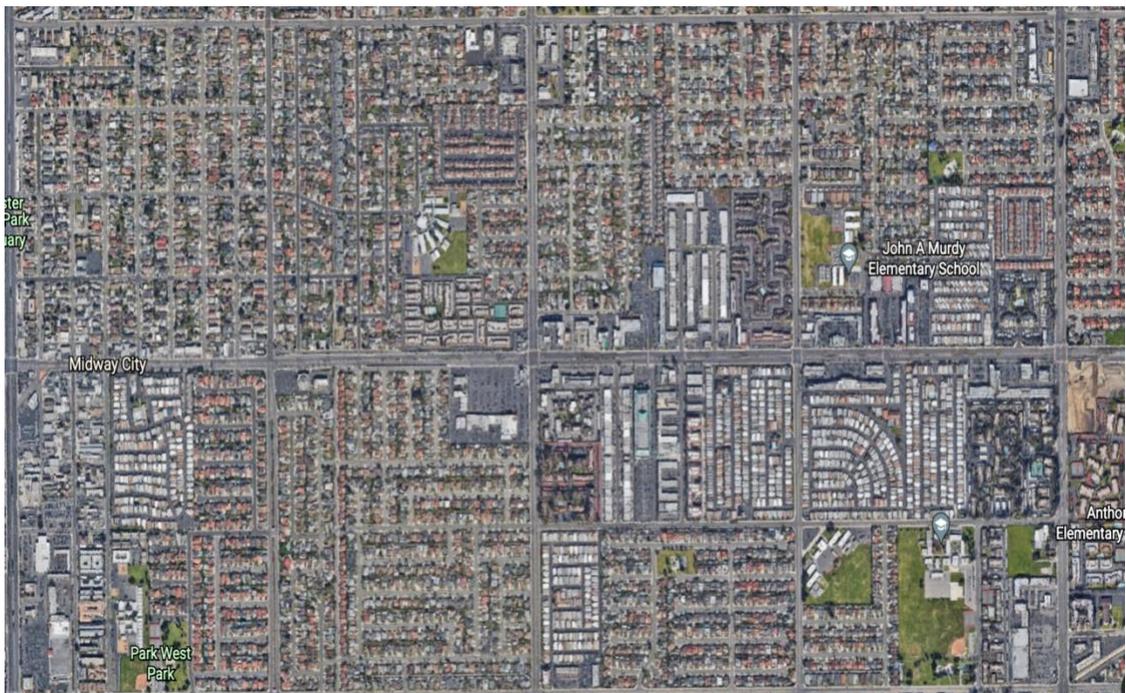
<sup>37</sup> Pasco, Jean O., Tran, Mai, "Bush Stumps in Little Saigon," *Los Angeles Times*, September, 14, 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Pasco, Los Angeles Times, (2000).

The growth that occurred in Little Saigon from the early 80's to early 2000's was very significant. Large steps were taken towards constructing and fostering a neighborhood suitable for the new Vietnamese immigrants in the area. Not only were they successful in establishing communal residential housing but were also able to financially provide for themselves. They accomplished self-owned businesses and hired other Vietnamese immigrants as workers, thus providing the local community members with jobs. They were able to centralize these businesses on Bolsa Street which increased foot-traffic in the area and provided easy mobility for workers, patrons, and visitors due to the walkability. Like Maslow who in his hierarchy of needs, demonstrates the pyramidal classification for society's universal needs, lists the most basic needs such as physiological and safety needs at the bottom and more abstract needs such as self-actualization and transcendence at the top, the new immigrants also fulfilled these needs in a similar fashion. First, they needed to first satisfy their basic needs such as food and shelter. They then were able to fulfill their psychological needs such as belonging through establishing cultural hubs like Phuoc Loc Tho or joining church organizations, where they could often meet their friends and other loved ones. Lastly, their self-fulfillment or rather community fulfillment needs were met through the representation they gained through local politics. Political work is done behalf of larger groups of constituents and many Vietnamese representatives were working for their community representation or for a collective value as Deleuze and Guattari posed. While this

process was not easy and there were some setbacks along the way such as the fear and resistance from old locals, the Vietnamese immigrants were able to establish a community from quite literally nothing. They clearly worked very hard towards this progress and only more success followed.

#### ***2.4 2000s-Present, Currently Little Saigon.***



**Figure 3 Google Earth Image Bolsa St in 2020**

In the last period from the mid 2000's to present, significant changes took place. The map is now street labeled and includes names of various buildings as well, such as schools, health services, grocery stores, and other businesses. With the help of google

earth imaging, Little Saigon is now able to be viewed not only in high resolution but also with 3-D technology. With the 3-dimensional function, viewers can see every angle of every street, every building, and every corner. Even more impressive, is the pegman icon which allows people, worldwide to walk the streets of Little Saigon. With this function, people can navigate through streets and plazas through their own screens at home, as if they were their themselves. The pegman function even allows people to see inside some buildings. For major buildings such as Phuoc Loc Tho, viewers are able to drop the pegman onto the blue dots provided and see the inside contents of the mall. What makes this change so incredible is the level of access people now have for specified mapping and how detailed reality is presented. The work done by google is significant since the google car that updates these map images typically comes once every year in major cities. This means that viewers can constantly see updated map imagery. However, work in updating this imaging can be done by locals. 3-D images are crowd sourced users who upload to the Google Maps database, and it is likely that many of these images were submitted by the very local community members soliciting these businesses. In this way, members are not only active participants in how the community is shaped but also in ways that let the community be seen.

Like technological improvements that occurred with the map imaging, Little Saigon also changed significantly over the past twenty years. During this time, the majority of the left-over farmland was sold to large property owners who wanted to

turn the land into other investments such as apartment complexes. Three new plazas were established right on Bolsa street heading towards Brookhurst. These included the T&K plaza, the Catinat plaza, and the Little Saigon Village. All these centers are completely run by Vietnamese business owners and fifty percent of the rented space is occupied by small businesses such as travel agencies, insurance firms, tax offices and more. The other fifty percent is food-related businesses, such as restaurants, dessert shops, and boba shops. While the landscaping changed significantly, attempts were also made towards beautifying the space by including plants, shrubbery, and lampposts every hundred feet. Most significantly, the South Vietnam Flag and American Flag are joined together on lampposts, adorning the community.<sup>39</sup> This joining of these flags in one space is symbolic because it addresses the prior tension between native to America and foreigners from Vietnam and creates a unity under being Vietnamese American. Thus, community members are less directionally leaning towards being Vietnamese and becoming more balanced with their struggle to become assimilated “Americans” through their own reterritorialization of the community and way of life.<sup>40</sup>

While more residential and commercial areas have popped up in the area, previously established buildings have changed as well. Circling back to Asian Garden mall, the space has been transformed into one of memory, nostalgia, and tourism.

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<sup>39</sup> Vo, 102.

<sup>40</sup> Vo, 102.

Though Phuoc Loc Tho still remains the largest cultural center in the community, it does not bear the same meaning as when it was first opened. Now, less and less people come to visit the mall. Though it used to be a main shopping destination, less profits are being made since people are not buying many things from there anymore. Online shopping is a large competition for consumers who can easily make purchases in the comfort of their home. With third and fourth generation Vietnamese Americans being born and raised in America there's less interest towards Vietnamese goods. Many Vietnamese music stores and trinket shops have been closed because they are no longer popular areas of interest. Now people avoid going there because of the constant traffic and fender benders that occur in the parking lot.<sup>41</sup> Most of the people visiting the mall are no longer locals but out-of-towners who know of the mall's fame. Many of these people include tourists from Vietnam or locals bringing their friends from other cities to give them a cultural lesson.

This downward popularity for the mall has been noted and steps have been made towards keeping the mall as cultural hub. Though there is less foot traffic during the daytime, in the recent years, vendors have been gathering at the mall's front parking lot to promote a seasonal night market. The night market is only opened on weekends in the summer months between June and September and has been extremely successful. Like the initial impact that Phuoc Loc Tho had on the first-generation Vietnamese

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<sup>41</sup> Aguilar, 9.

American immigrants, the night market provides a similar experience except outdoors. Inspired by other night markets such as the 626 night market in Santa Anita, California, the Asian garden night market is flooded with vendors selling foods, florals, trinkets and more. On the way to the night market, one can start hearing the live performance entertainment starting a half of a block away. Usually, local performers are invited to sing karaoke, dance, or perform open mics for the live audience. Many performers will invite onlookers to come up to the make-shift stage for a duet or as a volunteer. This participation thus turns locals once again into active players. On top of the loud entertainment, night market goers and passersby are greeted by the smells of the food vendors grilling squid, kabobs, corn and more. In one parking lot, people can eat not only traditional foods such as phở or bún bò Huế, but can also enjoy desserts, boba, sugar cane drinks, and can even learn about current street foods served in the streets of Vietnam. This rediscovery of the mall has garnered great attention and has attracted people from nearby cities to come visit, if not for the Vietnamese cultural, at least the experience.

As more and more people came resettled into Little Saigon, the Vietnamese American community grew larger and larger. New residents did not have the same concerns that the early pioneers did of being able to financially provide for their families in America or sponsor their remaining family over from Vietnam. Since the first-generation immigrants had built a strong foundation in Westminster and were able to

make a home for themselves, the following generations were worried about how to preserve this idea of home and what Vietnam means to them in the new country. The war memorial in Freedom Park Westminster was an effort to preserve this idea of nation and sacrifice. The Westminster War Memorial displays an American and Vietnamese soldier posing in solidarity as both American and South Vietnam flags are waved atop of them, completed with an eternal flaming torch in front of them.<sup>42</sup> The depiction of both soldiers shows the collaboration of both American and South Vietnamese effort to fight for Vietnam's freedom. Built across from Westminster city hall, the memorial is a symbol of unification and the acceptance of being Vietnamese American. At the opening ceremony in 2003, both US and Vietnamese veterans gathered over a crowd of over 9,000 to give speeches on how like the statues, both American and Vietnamese soldiers were "allies with a common mission" who both suffered tremendously despite their heroism.<sup>43</sup> While the memorial originally did not have strong support from old Westminster locals, the recognition of also White soldiers made the planning and execution of the memorial much more accepted. This memory meant a lot to the immigrants those who lost everything and had to leave their home. As the first Vietnam war memorial to commemorate the lives of Vietnamese soldiers as well, being able to remember their fallen loved ones in this new nation was incredibly significant. Thus,

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<sup>42</sup> Aguilar, XVI.

<sup>43</sup> Vo, 35.

memory and being remembered plays a large part in diasporic communities such as Little Saigon. As Gilroy states, diaspora consciousness largely takes place here as the war memorial serves not only as a place of commemoration but also of the bitterness that resulted from the war. The Little Saigon community stands out especially because it is built on these memories and these shared feelings of a large group of people who suffered displacement and movement together. It was in their interrelated collective experiences of hardship and memories of home that allowed them to develop such a culturally rich and distinct community.

Other efforts to preserve culture and heritage include the Miss SoCal Vietnam pageant, the Tết festival on Bolsa Grande's high school campus, and the Tết parade on Bolsa street, the weekend of the lunar new year. A local resident, Mr. Anthony Le Duc shares that these events are "a positive thing we want to keep for the future generations"<sup>44</sup> The Miss SoCal Vietnam pageant aims to select a queen that most represents Southern Californian Vietnamese women. Though the competition is still a beauty pageant, the contestants must represent Vietnamese culture by first and foremost through modeling traditional *áo dài* (tunics) made by local Vietnamese American designers. Furthermore, in the questions section, they are asked their stance on community related issues such as, education, current events, Vietnamese American

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<sup>44</sup> Anthony Le Duc, interview by Thuy Vo Dang, May 21, 2012. Vietnamese Oral History Project. University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA.

culture and are given bonus points if they answer in Vietnamese. "In a pageant that is steeped in culture and prides itself in retaining its Vietnamese heritage [their] ability to speak the language [is] an asset that the judges clearly appreciate."<sup>45</sup> Pageantry thus becomes a part of community building and maintaining through recognizing members of the community for their cultural knowledge on current Vietnamese American issues and connections to localities within and beyond the community. The Vietnamese Lunar New Year or Tết festival has attractions such as lion dancing, Vietnamese food stalls, and traditional games like Bầu Cua Cá Cọp (squash-crab-fish-tiger), which is a gambling game similar to craps except with images. Like the Rose parade in Los Angeles, sections of Bolsa street are closed off from traffic so parade performers can march in celebration. Local schools around the area usually participate by volunteering their marching bands and orchestras to perform in the march. Old veterans living in the area are usually honored including local community leaders. The continual maintaining of these events shows how community is a multi-layered, dynamic collection of people, ideas, and values. These qualities need to be constantly reinforced, demonstrated, and performed for and by the community in order to preserve social and cultural bonds.

There are many special appearances from California government officials, such as the Westminster mayor, the governor, and other local political leaders. At these

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<sup>45</sup> Phan, Thuy, "New Miss Vietnam Southern California a self-proclaimed 'tomboy,'" *Nguoi Viet*, 2015.

events. Political representation during this period has incredibly expanded for the community. Vietnamese American political candidates are not only lobbying for local positions such as city chairman or education board member but have even ventured so far as representing the entire state. Janet Nguyen became the first Vietnamese American woman to serve as a district supervisor for Orange County in 2007 and a state senator for California in 2014 for two, two-year terms. Her success was not easily won since she had to fight against White and other Vietnamese American candidates. Janet had to fight against the constant rumors that she was a “communist” despite strategically attending anti-communist rallies. This was a common and effective smear tactic utilized against Janet and other Vietnamese American contenders<sup>46</sup> Since the Little Saigon community is still staunchly anti-communist, Janet had to speak out against other political leaders who were supporters of the Vietnam war in order to win the Vietnamese vote. Especially since she is quite young for a politician, even those in the community doubted her ability to lead, speak up for their concerns, and represent them. However, she satisfied many in the community and is currently a California state assemblywoman.

A lot has significantly changed since the first Vietnamese immigrants came to Orange County. With so many people constantly joining the area and commercial businesses having grown so successful, the price of real estate has gone up exponentially

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<sup>46</sup> Danico and Vo, 99.

since the 70's. Homes that used to cost 60-70 thousand are now nearing the millions. Land rentals prices for business properties have also continued to rise. Owning a business on major streets like Bolsa and Brookhurst are extremely costly and risky since property rent is so high. Due to this reason, many in the community have migrated outward in the nearby cities of Fountain Valley, Garden Grove, and Santa Ana. For more convenience purposes, people are relocating closer to freeways and major streets such as Brookhurst Street and Beach Boulevard. The recent generations have less attachment or demand for Little Saigon in comparison to the earlier generations because they are mostly all fluent in English and have less reliance on ethnic businesses and services.<sup>47</sup>

Through their parents sacrifice and harsh discipline to focus on their education many successful second and third generation Vietnamese Americans have moved out of the Little Saigon area into higher scale neighborhoods around the area such as Irvine, Huntington Beach, and Anaheim Hills. To people in this generation, there is no such necessity to stay centralized in Little Saigon because they don't have such strong ties to the area and are no longer bound to it. To them, where they live is home, just close enough to home (Little Saigon). Many of these people in the second and third generations have even helped their parents move out of Little Saigon, but frequently go back and forth from their new place of relocation to Little Saigon. According to Dzung

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<sup>47</sup> Danico and Vo, 103.

Bach, “it’s like you can go to other places but you’ll come back because you feel like you belong here, even though there are things you don’t like and people you don’t want to be around but there’s still something that makes you want to be here. Even if you buy a house in Irvine, you’re still going to come back here at least once every week, just for the food, and the people who look like you where you came from.”<sup>48</sup>

While more recently, there has been a steady flow of people outward, tourism has long been a big factor in keeping constant foot traffic into the city. As a growth strategy, Little Saigon is often marketed as a business and local tourist destination. Since the opening of some of the first restaurants in the area, non-locals have been guided into Little Saigon through local tourism which relies on a certain desire and appreciation for cultural knowledge and diversity along with the affordability factor of the experience.<sup>49</sup> With the recent addition of the earlier cultural events mentioned and the revamping of such areas such as Asian Garden Mall into a night market, more people especially including non-ethnics have been visiting the city to see what the area is all about. This is especially because the tourist industry markets Little Saigon to be a compelling destination due to it being culturally unique and most importantly cheap.<sup>50</sup> Cheap is a significant motivational factor coming to visit Little Saigon since visitors expect to pay

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<sup>48</sup> Dzung T. Bach, interview by Jennifer Hoang, February 24, 2012. Vietnamese Oral History Project. University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA.

<sup>49</sup> Aguilar, 99.

<sup>50</sup> Aguilar, 99.

for goods and services at a lower rate than one normally would in urbanized areas. Places like grocery stores, restaurants, and boba shops are especially coveted for quality goods provided at inexpensive price ranges. Tourism, accessibility, and affordability are important within communities because these qualities bring the value and economy of the area up. When non-locals come into town, they usually are not coming for only one place or thing but often are visiting multiple places within Little Saigon and going back to tell their friends and family what they did, ate, saw and so forth. Word of mouth is an incredibly powerful tool that has increased the mobility of Little Saigon, meaning that as more and more people talk about it, it becomes a place of interest that travels further and further to people out of town, state, or even abroad.

This sort of mobility was unimaginable in the 70's when the first wave of refugees came to the United States. When the first immigrants came to the US, they were essentially left immobile after they resettled. In terms of status and physically being able to travel, they had very little wiggle room since settlers did not have wealth or the language abilities to make it very far in America. However, as they started to open their own businesses, make homes for themselves, and slowly establish Little Saigon as a community, new opportunities were presented. Bolsa street, becomes a cite of growth in terms of mobility and status since it was extremely walkable and accommodating to new immigrants who did not possess means of transportation. The success of some of the first immigrants like Frank Jao, greatly inspired others to pursue this upward mobility.

Later, as more community members are acclimating to life in America, and slowly accumulating wealth, they became incredibly mobile. Especially with the follow generations of American born Vietnamese adopting more values of the American dream and becoming accepting the model minority role, more and more are transitioning out of Little Saigon into more upscale communities. Since most in this generation do not have their own memories of Vietnam themselves, they do not feel so bound to stay in the community that the first generation worked so hard to build. No longer confined to Little Saigon, many are moving upward and outward. With such a large Vietnamese American community existing in Orange County, visitors from the homeland and tourists have mobilized in and out of Little Saigon. To Mr. Anthony Le Duc, “this area is populated with many people coming from far away. That is to say it attracts Vietnamese people with its cultural activities no matter how far they might be.”<sup>51</sup>

Just in examining mobility alone, it is apparent that significant changes have occurred in this neighborhood since the 70s. Going from immobile to incredibly mobile, the first wave of Vietnamese immigrants have greatly changed the geography and demographic of Westminster. With the GIS imaging and google earth technologies, these physical changes are clearly visible. Though this group has successfully settled in America and has even created an ethnic enclave for their community, it is a community

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<sup>51</sup> Le Duc, VAOHP, 2012.

bound by memory. To Nghi Moc Chau, “Little Saigon helps Vietnamese people to remember Vietnam. When you go there you feel that you are Vietnamese, and no longer an American because of the activities, Vietnamese language, and businesses located there. It is a community.”<sup>52</sup> However, a sense of belonging is not the only unanimous feeling that tourists feel. Almost fifty years after the fall of Saigon, southern Vietnamese, especially those that relocated to the US, still hold strong anti-communists beliefs. Though some Vietnamese Americans have tried their best to let go, many still march in protest especially on the anniversary date of the Fall of Saigon. Little Saigon serves as a site of memory but also regrowth. It was constructed by those who sought new opportunities for themselves and strengthened by unity of settlers who worked together to turn the space into a community. Continuing to search for room for growth, residents are no longer staying so centralized in Little Saigon and have become incredibly mobile with their movements. Many have moved to nearby cities or other Vietnamese American enclaves, however despite some leaving, Little Saigon still remains home. People frequently go back and forth and in and out of town to go shopping or eating at well-known places. In many of the VAOHP interviews, many mentioned coming back to celebrate Vietnamese culture during the holidays and to eat the delicious food in town.

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<sup>52</sup> Nghi Moc Chau, interview by Eric Chau, June 1, 2014. Vietnamese Oral History Project. University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA.

While the futurity of the Little Saigon is unknown, the work that the first refugees have put in to turn what once was an empty space into a community was remarkable.

By analyzing the historical examples of how the community of Little Saigon was constructed, I argue that community cannot be defined so straightforwardly merely as a group of people that live together but is constructed through various conditions and qualities such as language, politics, and culture. The community members of Little Saigon especially have been able to produce an incredibly cohesive space through their deterritorialization of rejecting the dominant notions deemed by major American society to live and behave. Instead, they have reterritorialized a comfortable way of living that is desirable for the collective community members in Little Saigon through adopting minor strategies more suitable to them such as improving accessibility, inclusivity through language, political solidarity, bonding through cultural places and practices and so forth. They have been able to escape a point of immobility after being displaced and have transcended into a space that is incredibly mobile, both physically and socially.

### 3. Sustaining Culture and Identity

“Xuân đã về, xuân vẫn mơ màng trong nắng vàng, khắp chốn tiếng reo vang”

These lyrics are perhaps the most well-known lyrics to the Vietnamese population during the Lunar New Year season. These are the opening lyrics to the song “Xuân Hẹn Mặt” (“Spring Meeting”) which aims to welcome the new spring season and new year with all its good fortunes. In Little Saigon, this song can be heard in grocery stores, restaurants, and at the Tết (Lunar New Year) festival, in the time leading up to the Lunar New Year celebration. What does this music symbolize to Vietnamese abroad? To some, this kind of music is soothing and reminiscent of the celebratory nature of how the Lunar New year is welcomed back home in Vietnam. However, to other community members, the constant streaming of Vietnamese New Year’s songs is tacky.

Not all overseas Vietnamese have the same homogenous feelings and nostalgia about leaving the homeland. Especially as second and third generations of overseas Vietnamese have emerged and acclimated well to new geographical locations, these sentiments of nostalgia have shifted. What these new generations possess is rather an inherited nostalgia, one without memory or experience, passed on from friends and relatives. It is important to recognize their experience as well and not group all Vietnamese immigrants together as sharing the same experiences. Again, as Stuart Hall notes, collective social identity has simultaneously experienced fragmentation and

erosion.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I attempt to examine the complex relationship of the effects of variety shows such as *Paris by Night* and *Van Son* on older generations of Vietnamese Americans in constructing transnational communities such as Little Saigon by analyzing the songs and performances on these entertainment shows and looking at interview and oral histories addressing this topic. Although this chapter will mainly explore the impact and involvement of the first- and second-generation waves of Vietnamese immigrants, I will also touch upon the cultural effect these shows have on current younger generations and explore what these shows mean to these different generations. I will discuss prewar/wartime music in juxtaposition with rising pop genres, the transnational aspect of these shows, and the modes of dissemination for these variety shows in analyzing this generational shift. I argue by constantly shifting the locations of their shows and accessibly dispersing their content, *Paris By Night* and *Van Son* have increased Vietnamese cultural mobility and have stimulated active community participation. They have helped strengthen Vietnamese communities abroad by stitching the local to the global through maintaining Vietnamese culture despite being away from Vietnam.

### **3.1 Themes and Concepts of Live Entertainment Shows**

What are shows such as *Paris by Night* and *Van Son*? These two very popular shows are live performances constructed by Thúy Nga Entertainment for Paris By Night

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, 64.

and Van Son Entertainment for *Van Son* that include singing, dancing, and acting in comedy skits by famous Vietnamese artists. These shows travel to cities with large Vietnamese populations and perform several times in that location. Within those performances, one is filmed and created into movies and sold to those who are unable to attend the live performance. This not only gives people opportunities to view the show without paying to travel to these locations but also provides financial stability to these companies to future content. Both Thúy Nga and *Van Son* Entertainment are based in Little Saigon, California. *Van Son* is a much younger company in comparison to *Paris by Night*, which has a much more complex history.

Before *Paris by Night* was given its official name, it was just a music company founded by a young music entrepreneur named Tô Văn Lai in 1963. During the Vietnam war, he had to cease operations and resumed his business after he migrated to France. Many Vietnamese still had strong connections to France due to its occupation of Vietnam, or what was considered French Indochina, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. He renamed his company Thúy Nga entertainment after his wife and named the show *Paris by Night* in 1984. By the late 1980s, Thúy Nga Entertainment relocated to Orange County, California which held the largest number of Vietnamese people living outside of Vietnam at the time. Even after its relocation to the OC, the name *Paris by Night* not only symbolizes the rebirth of Tô's business but also shows the colonial ties France has to Vietnam. For Tô Văn Lai, the show was meant to fill the cultural void

many Vietnamese French immigrants felt after fleeing their homeland. Producers and entertainers are enabled to disconnect from images of communist Vietnam by inventing an exilic culture that's drawn on the diverse cultural elements from Vietnam's French colonial past.<sup>2</sup>

Both shows heavily exert anti-communist overtones through its support of capitalism and reminiscent themes of remembering Vietnam before communism. The MC's for *Paris by Night*, Nguyễn Ngọc Ngạn (male) and Nguyễn Cao Kỳ Duyên (female), are common household names and are as recognizable as Pat Sajak and Vanna White's *Wheel of Fortune* to Vietnamese people. Nguyễn Cao Kỳ Duyên in particular, needs to be emphasized because she is the daughter of Nguyễn Cao Kỳ, who was a notable military leader under the Republic of Vietnam. This seemingly minor detail has gained the show much viewership in its earlier years since most Vietnamese immigrants, came from South Vietnam and fought against the communist overtake.

*Paris By Night* Entertainment was able to produce a propaganda-laden series that glorified images of the previous Republic of Vietnam in order to target the refugee elites from the first wave of immigrants.<sup>3</sup> Episode 77, titled "30 Năm Viễn Xứ" ("30 Years Away from the Motherland") was particularly guilty of this as it was extremely critical

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<sup>2</sup> Nhi T. Lieu, 2007. "Performing Culture in Diaspora: Assimilation and Hybridity in *Paris by Night* Videos and Vietnamese American Niche Media", *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*, Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu, Mimi Thi Nguyen. 206

<sup>3</sup> Lieu, 200.

of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) in the performance which was dedicated to remembering the 30-year anniversary of the fall of Saigon. The episode included songs explicitly condemning Vietnamese communist rule while incorporating graphic archival footages of the Vietnam war and the final phases of the Ho Chi Minh Campaign. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, for minorities, everything is about the political. For the Vietnamese diaspora particularly, politics plays a very large role in their lives since Vietnamese refugees were directly impacted by the national war caused by political unrest and disagreement. Due to the blunt political trauma, Vietnamese abroad cannot help but be affected by political standing, especially when it comes to their homeland. The episode also exalted US support of the South and presented awards to Vietnamese humanitarians as well as political US and Canadian officials who aided Vietnamese refugees in their resettlement. Finally, the producers included documentary clips showing the growth and progress of Vietnamese immigrant communities around the world. While not all episodes have such firm political tones, this episode was considered one of the most memorable and highest grossing for Thúy Nga Entertainment primarily because it was so evocative to older overseas Vietnamese people.

To attract viewership from early Vietnamese immigrants, in the 80s and 90s these performances had to heavily exert themes of homeland, wartime struggle, and the fight against communism. For these first-generation immigrants, music was an integral part in shaping and connecting the community. Music for this group was not only

sentimental but also produced nationalistic pride, therefore, the “nostalgic, lost home” feeling is closely linked with constructing an imagined nation.<sup>4</sup> Episode 32 of *Paris by Night* released in 1995 was titled, “20 Năm Nhìn Lại,” meaning 20 Years Looking Back, refers to the end of the Vietnam War. Episode 88 “Đường Về Quê Hương” (“The Road Back to my Homeland”) focused on songs depicting more peaceful times of the homeland. These themes of prewar happiness and postwar tragedy have been circulated so many times through the years yet still have a great appeal, signifying that these topics are still very meaningful and significant, especially to those that have memories and experiences from this time. Diaspora consciousness is quite evident in the cases of these shows because producers are purposefully juxtaposing songs that elicit feelings of bitterness but also showing love and commemoration for their homeland. This is because displacement on the one hand produces trauma and resentment but also yearning and nostalgia. Much of these songs then, connect the older Vietnamese community abroad by remaking and transforming old tunes in current shows and therefore always circulating shared memory and experiences. These shows also pay homage to wartime songwriters namely Đức Huy and Lâm Phương, two very notable songwriters who are considered the pioneers of Vietnamese music. Lâm Phương especially has been honored in multiple *Paris by Night* episodes for his hardship and

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<sup>4</sup> Hyunjoon, Shin, and Ho Tung-hung. "Translation of 'America' during the Early Cold War Period: A Comparative Study on the History of Popular Music in South Korea and Taiwan." *Null*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2009, pp. 83-102, 89-90.

service in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. Though not all the performances have such sentimental themes, many shows incorporate at least a couple of songs that are reminiscent as to keep older viewers hooked.

In contrast to such nostalgic themes, the producers from Thúy Nga and Van Son entertainment have made large efforts to promote and feature younger bilingual singers who dance and perform songs ‘borrowed’ from American pop radio.<sup>5</sup> In an interview for VAOHP, Amy Huyen Le commented, “With Vietnamese culture, we don’t assimilate a lot to the American culture, but we have adapted to American culture by taking from their culture.”<sup>6</sup> Through this approach of adopting American pop styles into Vietnamese music, entertainment producers such as Thúy Nga and Van Son can leverage this kind of trendy music as a way of establishing a market for Vietnamese American youths and also reterritorialize western trends of music into a new and improved Vietnamese pop. Younger artists such as Cat Tien, Trish Thuy Trang, and Nguyễn Thắng, have dominated Vietnamese pop using *Van Son* and *Paris by Night* as their platforms. Often these artists are made up in flashy costumes, followed by an entourage of back up dancers, as they lip-synch their choreographed performance on stage. Many pop songs have even sampled American and Chinese pop. In *Van Son 29* titled, “In Tokyo,” Nguyễn Thắng’s performance of the song *Vẫn Yêu* (“Still Love You”)

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<sup>5</sup> Lieu, 204.

<sup>6</sup> Le, VAOHP, 2012.

is a direct Vietnamese remake of Maroon 5's "This Love." At the height of Chinese pop music in the early 2000's these two companies were having their artists use these C-pop melodies with Vietnamese translated lyrics. Andy Quách's performance of "Nụ Hôn Biệt Ly" ("Kiss Goodbye") and "Ước Chi Có Em" ("I Wish I Had You") by Nguyễn Thăng are remakes of Wang Lee Hom's "Kiss You Goodbye" and "Wei Yi" ("Only One".)

While sampling is a common feature for these Vietnamese pop songs, whether it attracts younger generations of overseas Vietnamese is another question. Lan Duong, a specialist in media and cultural studies at the University of California, Riverside notes that "younger Vietnamese Americans, especially the ones born here, 'tend to reject [the show] and see it as really kitschy and campy.'"<sup>7</sup> Not only is there pressure to attract a younger audience but these companies must compete with genres like Japanese pop and Korean pop in captivating attention from this newer generation. In an interview with Thúy Nga's CEO, Marie To, stated that while the company has made further adaptations to gain viewership, "we kind of want to create our own image. The singer[s] we produce, we want to create their image – not imitating K-pop or anything."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "For Vietnamese, 'Paris By Night' is a mix of Vegas, nostalgia and pre-war culture." *PRI's The World*, February 10, 2014. *Gale Academic OneFile*

<sup>8</sup> Nguyen, Michael D. "A Decades-Old Vietnamese Variety Show Goes Digital." *NBC*, 12 Nov. 2015, *A Decades-Old Vietnamese Variety Show Goes Digital*.

One tactic to gain viewership and attention intergenerationally is through the use of fashion shows, especially for the *ao dai* (Vietnamese traditional gown). A reoccurring homage within the *Paris by Night* series is the *ao dai* fashion show. The *ao dai* not only embodies Vietnamese ethnicity but for *Paris By Night* audiences, evokes an image of beauty that arouses nostalgia for the beauty of their homeland in Vietnam.<sup>9</sup> Like pageantry mentioned in chapter one, the *ao dai* fashion show is a way for viewers to connect with and enjoy the cultural performances set on a stage. In the early episodes such as Episode 24 (*Paris By Night* 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary) and 29 (*Paris By Night: In Las Vegas*), they would have female singers model these traditional gowns made by luxury fashion brands such as Christian Dior and Yves Saint Laurent. It seems in the 90's, having a traditional Vietnamese gown produced by a designer brand meant the Vietnamese gown was recognized by luxury French couture brands. This recognition by Western powers symbolized class, elite, power, all things that people were stripped of during the Vietnam War.

In the later episodes starting at 62, titled, “Âm Nhạc Không Biên Giới” (Music Without Borders) and on, these gowns were designed and made by Vietnamese American designers such as Calvin Hiep and Thai Nguyen. Showing traditional gowns made by Vietnamese designers meant something entirely different to Vietnamese

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<sup>9</sup> Lieu, 210.

Americans. It meant solidarity, originality, and pride. It supported local fashion designers which paved the path for new Vietnamese American designers such as Jacky Tai to grow. Advertising *ao dai* from these Vietnamese designers is also positive publicity for their business. Both Jacky Tai and Calvin Hiep own bridal shops emphasizing the *ao dai* which is a strictly observed dress code in the Vietnamese tea ceremony. These local designers then help put meaning into these gowns and add to the construction of Little Saigon by making Vietnamese culture come to life in the community. The new designs incorporate new styles and fabrics while retaining the original *ao dai* outline. Many audience members look forward to the fashion show as Americans await the Victoria's Secret fashion show. This blend of traditional culture and modernity have piqued much interest from the younger generations who like to see the new styles.

For *Paris by Night*, the master of ceremonies (MCs) responsibility is not only to introduce the acts but set the tone for the show as well. For Nguyễn Ngọc Ngạn and Nguyễn Cao Kỳ Duyên their relationship is not just professional. Sometimes the producers have them act in short skits where they pose as lovers, but they are mostly known for their playful on-stage banter. Nguyễn Ngọc Ngạn is a straight-edge man who typically wears dark colored suits and is representative of older-generation males. Nguyễn Cao Kỳ Duyên seems to serve as his polar opposite as she can be seen sporting extravagant gowns, with multiple outfit changes per show, big hair and accessories, and

is representative of new modern females. This juxtaposed dynamic is then very engaging for audience members who not only come to see performances from musical artists or comedians but to also engage in the MCs banter. The repartee between the MCs not only entertains but also enables the audience to reflect on other, unsettled dissimilarities between Vietnamese American women and men since their exchanges are rife with humorous intelligent to raunchy content.<sup>10</sup> In the *Van Son* series, while Việt Thảo is seen as the only MC, he often invites fellow comedians and singers next to him on the podium to engage them in silly stunts or interview them. His fun, easy going friendship with entertainment owner Vân Sơn, and comedian Bảo Liêm displayed in the performances has made their relationship known as the three troublemakers, which has given their show a more humorous and relaxed atmosphere. Viewers also become very interested and involved in these celebrity's lives. Everyone knows everything about everyone; gossip and drama therefore also serves as a discussion points and connection for those in the community.

### ***3.2 Stitching the Local and the Global***

These music programs have played a big role in uniting Vietnamese American communities from around the globe as they typically travel to perform on a live stage. International fan bases helped in uniting Vietnamese audiences globally in order to

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<sup>10</sup> Lieu, 210.

reimagine Vietnamese culture through authentic song and dance numbers as well as celebrate ethnic pride.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, traveling across different Little Saigon communities to build and maintain culture through music and performance is a way to celebrate the larger community of Vietnamese abroad. In doing this, Vietnamese culture is further reinforced through the multi-layered connection each community makes with another. Places with denser Vietnamese populations such as Dallas, Toronto, Melbourne and so forth have been chosen as past performance locations with of course Little Saigon as a repeated city. By identifying dense Vietnamese demographics, these programs provide knowledge to the Vietnamese population of the location of other Vietnamese people. This serves as a connection point for Little Saigons all over the world. By jumping from community to community, more interrelations and interactions are created by local members to international members, thus increasing the mobility of Vietnamese community globally.

Shows like *Paris By Night* and *Van Son* are not only a representation of Vietnamese music but its involvement with community and audience members makes the audience members and viewers active participants. They become key players in “doing” and making meanings by traveling, attending these shows, and purchasing them to watch with their families and friends. These music programs have been a

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<sup>11</sup> Lieu, 198.

productive way to round up Vietnamese Americans by uniting them through their communal bond thus continuing to producing a larger sense of brotherhood and community by celebrating their common love for Vietnamese musical culture. These shows are so often talked about, commonplace, and present in Vietnamese lives abroad that they have become a part of daily culture and consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

*Paris by Night* Episode 95 “Cám Ơn Cuộc Đời” (Thank you, Life) is particularly interesting because it strayed from its usual format of performing live stage performance by giving the audience a sneak peek to the behind the scenes. In this episode, a third MC, Trinh Hoi, maneuvered backstage to show the audience what happens backstage. This was a fascinating attempt at inclusion because now the audience could be a cast member and see what it’s like to be in hair and makeup, or to meet the backup dancers, as well as see how the audio producers direct the sound in the auditorium. The audience then is no longer a spectator but participating in these processes as well. For the audience member, this almost walks on the line of forbidden fantasy or fetish because it reveals something viewers were originally never a part of. For the audience member, this voyeuristic act is somewhat enticing because they have never participated in this way before, so this experience is both new and different. This episode not only celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Thúy Nga entertainment but the 15<sup>th</sup> year of

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<sup>12</sup> Yoshimi, Shunya, and David Buist. “‘America’ as Desire and Violence: Americanization in Postwar Japan and Asia during the Cold War.” *Null*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2003, pp. 433-450, 433

Vietnamese filmmaking. The MCs (Nguyen Cao Ky Duyen and Nguyen Ngoc Ngan) invited Vietnamese American directors on stage to talk about the growth of Vietnamese cinema and the strides they have been able to make within the year.

Most of these shows involve singing, dancing, and performing comedic skits, through song intermissions and epilogues, the audience is able to learn more about that specific community by inviting local community members on stage as public advertising for their local businesses and restaurants. In Episode 131 titled, “Xuân Hy Vọng” (“Spring Hope”) of *Paris by Night*, due to the Covid-19 pandemic they could not have a live audience. Even though the performance was filmed in a studio, the program MCs still announced local businesses, most likely those that pay to be advertised on the show or are sponsors of the show. This type of endorsement are not only publicity and productive forms of marketing for these businesses within the community but also allows the audience to see if these companies pique their interest. Many times, the MCS will invite community leaders and other Vietnamese people in local office to come on stage to talk a little about what they do and how they are thankful to the community and to these entertainment organizations. Many of these local leaders give speeches revolving around giving thanks to the community for support and makes promises on what they can do in order to give back to the people in the community. The attention given to local businesses, companies, and leaders thus help the viewer construct Little Saigon because it identifies the major players and addresses why these places and

people are significant. Again, these interactions signify the kind of effort diaspora communities will take in order to preserve social and cultural bonds to each other. The larger Vietnamese population abroad is an extremely dynamic and multilayered community constructed through numerous meaningful and purposeful connections.

In the *Van Son* programs, they offer a look into the community as an epilogue to their shows. In Edmonton, Canada, they show a clip where the MCS (Viet Thao and Van Son) travel a highly populated Vietnamese street, in order to promote the fresh fruit and produce marts, interviewing local food stall owners along the way. This kind of interaction allows the audience to keep these places in mind if they were to ever visit Edmonton to potentially offer these shop owners their patronage and serves as a positive publicity since famous members in the Vietnamese American community are advocating for their business. It is also a showcase of the transposition of Vietnamese culture; a reminder that Vietnamese culture can be found all over the world. Furthermore, it supports this idea of living vicariously through the camera. As a viewer, they are able to come along with the MCs and share this experience which promotes travel and adventure to these other Little Saigons. As the viewers, they become drawn to the sites, food, and get an opportunity to learn about other Vietnamese communities they might have never gotten a chance to know about.

The audience members and the live shows then are able to stitch together the local and global since the majority of attendees are from the particular city where the

performances are held but also those who traveled from different places attend as well. Thus, these shows are able to bring together people from all over the world under the foundation of being Vietnamese but still emphasize the growth and adaption of these people in forming diasporic communities. It emphasizes that *Paris By Night* and *Van Son* are not only sources of nostalgia and entertainment, but also reflects the reality that overseas Vietnamese communities have to take “root” locally. Many times, the shows will recognize and promote audience members or guests that have really made a difference in these communities. Some examples include the Vietnamese Student Association (VSA), Vietnamese politicians, local philanthropists, and humanitarians to show examples of spreading advocacy for the locality of their town and the globality for Vietnamese populations.

These shows are about bringing people within these communities together. People often make plans to purchase tickets in groups with their friends or relatives. Going in larger groups was incentivized since tickets were usually able to be purchased at a discount for those buying many tickets. So even before going to the live performance, planning to buy the tickets is already eventful. When people attend the shows, ladies will often put on make-up, wear nice dresses, and make their husbands and children wear their Sunday best. It is as if the audience was getting ready to put on a show themselves. While the shows used to be held in large theaters, they are now held

in casinos which is also tactically advantageous to attract Vietnamese gamblers.<sup>13</sup> In this aspect, the shows are trying to profit from viewership as much as possible, but the audience willingly plays into these tactics because they keep coming back to purchase the tickets and visit the casinos. However, while for many of the older generations, being able to attend these live performances makes them eligible for bragging rights, many children to these first-generation people often feel brought along. In an interview with an audience member, Crystalyn Le who with her husband and two children traveled over 80 miles for the show stated, “we like to keep their Vietnamese culture, that’s why we bring them.”<sup>14</sup> For younger audiences who may not fully understand all of the content, sitting still in one spot for close to four hours, which is typically the run time of one show, can be quite difficult. I know when I was young, all I looked forward to, were the skits and typically a performance only had one or two skits per the entire show.

### ***3.3 Participation and Distribution***

While the performance is considered “live,” much of the content is actually lip-synched, and the only “live” qualities are the actual existence of the singers and dancers on the stage, and the music performed by the on-stage band. However, Kim Suk Young notes the “temporal-spatial coincidence of performer and spectator” creates this

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<sup>13</sup> Roosevelt, 2015

<sup>14</sup> PRI’s The World, 2014.

“rapport [that] emerges among community members who occupy the same space with a shared purpose”<sup>15</sup> While in her topic, Kim is focused on the “liveness” of Korean pop concerts, I believe the same type of explanation can be used to view the live qualities of *Paris by Night* and *Van Son*. Even when people are unable to physically attend the shows, they are still an “audience” when they watch it in front of a TV. With *Paris by Night* and *Van Son*, the liveness is not just momentary but forever memorialized in the filming and taping of the series episodes. The ability to view this content directly from home allows people to feel as if they were attending the show at the theater. Despite the inherently mediatized format, music shows such as *Paris By Night* endeavor to generate a semblance of live performance by using television’s power as a vicarious form of live theater.<sup>16</sup> This way, viewers can experience “liveness” in both the physical way of actually being at the auditoriums in the same space as the performer and by being present in watching at home with family and friends.

What sets these performances apart from other television broadcasting is there is this dual aspect of participation. One can either engage by physically attending the performance or purchasing the content to watch at home. Although both ways of watching the show presents the same content, these two experiences are completely

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<sup>15</sup> Kim, Suk-Young. *K-pop live: Fans, idols, and multimedia performance*. Stanford University Press, 2018. 176

<sup>16</sup> Kim, 54.

different. At the live performance, the audience members become a part of the show. The cameras will pan over certain areas in the audience and film them clapping, laughing, or even crying after the performances. They are then permanently memorialized in film, again serving as active participants. The at-home viewers are participants in another sort of way. They participate in purchasing the content and creating get-togethers with friends and family to watch the latest release. This sort of activity also is critical in community building because it keeps the conversations about the performances continually flowing. Therefore, cultural media production and performance is another way of demonstrating, maintaining, and appreciating communities that uphold a cultural heritage together.

Even for those who do not physically attend the live performance, *Paris by Night* and *Van Son* also functions as a pastime tradition for those viewing for those watching at home. “Vietnamese Americans celebrate by getting together, maybe eating Vietnamese food, and popping in a *Paris by Night* DVD.”<sup>17</sup> The first mode of dissemination for entertainment companies such as *Van Son* and Thúy Nga however is the VHS tape. To many younger generations, VHS and VCR seem to be ancient relics of the past however, for recent immigrant groups, the VCR not only granted access to a world of entertainment and recreation but also served as a mechanism to strengthen nationalism,

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<sup>17</sup> PRI's The World, 2014.

preserve ethnicity, and secure ties with the home country.<sup>18</sup> Not only was the VCR a completely revolutionary technology at the time but allowed for people to watch these shows whenever they wanted, however many times they wanted. It represented a big change in home entertainment for overseas Vietnamese who did not have culturally relevant content streaming on television. The VCR changed immigrant lives because it allowed immigrants to globally connect to their homelands through reproduceable and portable means.<sup>19</sup> This was especially significant for South Vietnamese who were displaced and unable to travel back home to firsthand experience their culture. Thus, the VCR increases the mobility of culture for the refugees who at one point were left immobile.

After the VHS, came the DVD. The DVD similar to the VHS was revolutionary technology at its time. Information and data were able to be made smaller and smaller, providing more options such as subtitling, scene skipping, behind the scenes footages, and more. This DVD, however, is often not an original but a bootleg production often “burned” from an original disk. A production manager from Thúy Nga entertainment shared that the illegal underground market for these bootleg versions has been “hurting us as company.”<sup>20</sup> This “copycat” version becomes the new norm and “downgrade(s)

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<sup>18</sup> Lieu, 197.

<sup>19</sup> Lieu, 197.

<sup>20</sup> PRI's The World, 2014.

the original to a wannabe.”<sup>21</sup> Copycat versions have become so mundane and abundant that sales were reported to have dropped over 50,000 in 2005.<sup>22</sup> This tradition of watching these music shows bootleg or not, involves family members of all generations, allowing younger generations to learn cultural content and the country’s history by older generations, whether the younger generations want it or not.<sup>23</sup> Phat Van Tran, a participant of VAOHP shares “it’s good to make young kid, second generation Vietnamese understand the culture, and the music, and I think it part of Vietnamese social life.”<sup>24</sup>

Since the content from these shows carry such staunch anticommunist sentiment, these shows are not able to be sold in Vietnam so there is this double piracy occurring for overseas Vietnamese and for those living in Vietnam. Within days of release, DVDs and CDs are downloaded and posted onto numerous websites allowing for millions in Vietnam and those across the global diaspora to watch for free.<sup>25</sup> What is so interesting is that even though the communist regime in Vietnam officially bans the sale of these kinds of content, they are unwilling to shut down the illegal websites that natives use in order to watch *Paris by Night* and *Van Son*. It is understandable for those in Vietnam to

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<sup>21</sup> Yu, Hua, 1960-. *China in Ten Words*. 2011, 7

<sup>22</sup> Roosevelt, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> PRI’s *The World*, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Tran, VAOHP, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Roosevelt, Margot. “Sold-out Shows and Thousands of DVDs Sold: So Why Is Little Saigon’s Popular ‘Paris by Night’ Fighting to Survive? .” *The Orange County Register*, 29 July 2015

have to pursue illegal means. However, for those overseas where these taped live performances are easily found and can be ordered online, the pursuit of illegal means needs to be called into question. To Yu Hua, “copycat culture epitomizes the confusion of people’s values;” I believe this is also the case for the bootleg DVD.<sup>26</sup> This reveals more about overseas Vietnamese culture than we think because on the one hand these viewers want to watch these shows and feel a connection to the motherland but on the other hand, they want to do this but at a cheaper price. Even after filing multiple lawsuits, Thúy Nga Entertainment Ceo, Marie Tô, gave up fighting after she realized there were hundreds of illegal streaming sites.<sup>27</sup> While these companies do struggle in competition with the pirates, it is hard to deny that piracy promotes consumption, especially in Vietnam where the material is not so available.

Due to this piracy, many several of these entertainment industries have been forced to shut down because they were not able to financially make up for their losses from the DVD burning and illegal websites. *Van Son* entertainment is one company in a list of those who had been struggling for years and have now closed shop. *Paris by Night* has relied heavily on community support and advertising from radio stations and local shops to be able to keep business afloat. Tô has heavily increased advertising in businesses abroad and in Orange County, California. Some of the big spenders include

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<sup>26</sup> Hui, Calvin. "Decaffeinated England: Thames Town and its Discontents." *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*, vol. 2, 2016, pp. 76+. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Roosevelt, OC Register, 2015.

herbal supplement makers, plastic surgeons, cosmetic firms, car dealerships, and clothing brands.<sup>28</sup> This way, both players, the entertainment companies and the local businesses, can benefit from each other's advertising. This dual promotion of one another also works to promote the locality of these businesses and also the globality of these shows. We see the way in which these transnational communities are able to rise and unite to help one another.

To combat the immense amount of piracy, these companies had to adopt new business strategies to gain viewership. In recent years, Thuy Nga has joined social media and one of its YouTube channels has received over 17 million views. By airing several small clips from live shows, watchers can be lured to by the complete DVDs.<sup>29</sup> This move to social media platforms such as YouTube and online streaming services not only made these performances available to a wider global audience but also a step toward gaining viewership from younger audiences. A majority of people are subscribers to online viewing platforms and so to make this content available on the internet where it is easily accessible has become an attractive feature, especially for many younger audiences who are so technologically apt. Since some second and third generation households do not own DVD players and are making conscious effort own less physical digital media, adopting a more technologically advanced strategy of dissemination

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<sup>28</sup> Roosevelt, OC Register, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Roosevelt, 2015.

seemed to have been very beneficial for these companies. Not only has viewership gone up, but Thúy Nga has been working with YouTube to include ads on *Paris by Night* content to increase profit through generated ad sales.<sup>30</sup> This means that companies like Thúy Nga are able to gain steady revenue as long as people are willing to watch the ads, which is likely since they can avoid paying the full cost of a DVD. Including ads also gives a chance for Vietnamese vendors to endorse their goods and services on a platform already catered to Vietnamese audiences and increases that business's mobility to reach even international audiences.

To younger generations, this shift to internet streaming platforms has been well received. Now even many first-generation diasporic audiences have been able to learn to adapt to these changes. All modes of dissemination, whether it be through VHS, DVD, or YouTube have emphasized one crucial factor. By producing these shows into tapes or making it available on the internet, entertainment companies like Thúy Nga have been able to make the content mobile and accessible. This means that cultural products could be carried around and its content easily spreadable. Especially through online platforms, these shows have become more accessible everywhere which further highlights the idea of this transnational Vietnamese community. Having access to online cultural resources like *Paris By Night* or *Van Son* through YouTube increases Vietnamese cultural mobility

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<sup>30</sup> Nguyen, NBC, 2015.

because it allows viewers to watch the content and connect to each other no matter their location thus retaining their social and cultural bonds. These viewers create a global community that is not static but instead emphasizes the mobility that members have enabling them to move place to place, taking in root in wherever they go yet still able to retain that connection to the motherland. The transnational Vietnamese community becomes strengthened and more dynamic through active participation and meaningful interactions between community members from around the globe.

Shows such as Paris by Night and Van Son has left such an impact on Vietnamese diaspora all over the globe. Whether it be forms of nostalgia for older generations or forms of education for younger generations, these live performances have left a deep mark on these transnational Vietnamese communities. While in the earlier stages, the content had to be strongly anticommunist to attract first wave immigrants from Vietnam, over the years, the shows have increasingly become more and more modern, adapting to the tastes of younger generations. The traveling aspect of these performances provides opportunities to promote the local within the global, highlighting that while these communities have attachments to the homeland, they still have to adapt and grow in each of these geographical locations whether it be in Toronto, Houston, or Little Saigon. Lastly, over the years, these entertainment companies have acclimated to the growing technological needs of its viewers. In order to make these performances accessible and mobile, Paris by Night and Van Son have disseminated

their content in forms such as VHS, DVD, CD, and lastly through online streaming platforms such as YouTube. By combating illegal pirating websites, YouTube has not only allowed for the content to be enjoyed worldwide but have almost made these live variety shows re-trending. Paris by Night and Van Son do not only serve as propagandic tools to confront the communist regime in Vietnam but also serve as forms of memory and nostalgia for those who had to abandon the homeland. While this sentiment pertains more to first-generation immigrants, it does not mean that second or third-generation immigrants do not feel nostalgia as well. For these younger generations, it can be argued that they feel a sort of inherited nostalgia and while the content may not mean the same to them, it provides them with opportunities to learn about the experiences of their family and friends whether they want to or not.

## **4. McNailing the Road to Success**

### **4.1 Background Context**

When viewing Little Saigon as a complex, multi-layered, and interconnected community, we cannot leave out the nail salon as a major role player in impacting the growth of the community. The nail salon industry has undergone significant growth in the last thirty years and is now a multibillion-dollar industry thanks to Vietnamese American business innovations. Retrospectively, the nail industry has greatly impacted Vietnamese communities by providing countless immigrants with jobs, opportunities for independent ownership, and favorable circumstances to achieve the Vietnamese American dream. I argue that the Vietnamese American community has benefitted economically, commercially, and socially by using minor methods to create a niche market for nail care services. I discuss the impact nail services have had on Vietnamese women in reversing their traditional familial roles by becoming breadwinners in their families. Lastly the nail industry allows Vietnamese Americans to interreact with Vietnamese diasporas abroad in helping them start their own successful businesses, thus creating a larger transnational community that is deeply interconnected.

To give some contextual background, getting one's nails done were not commonplace in the 1940's-1970's. Brightly painted red nails on actresses such as Rita Hayworth and Marilyn Monroe became iconic symbols of Hollywood glamour. During that era, getting one's nails done were a symbol of wealth and luxury; only few wealthy

members of the population could afford that kind of professional beauty service. This essentially meant that only wealthy white women were getting their nails manicured at the time. Moreover, it was also primarily white women that served as nail technicians for these clients since other ethnic races were performing more laborious blue-collar work. There was also no such thing as a stand-alone or individual nail salon shops. Most places that offered nail services such as manicures and pedicures were done in conjunction with other luxury beauty services such as hair styling and facials. This primarily white dominated supply and demand for nail services made it very difficult for other races to penetrate the market and create room for change since whites did not offer this kind of training to minority races nor did they perform these services on non-whites.

It was not until the 1970's when *The Bird's* actress Tippi Hedren created the opportunity for a group of female Vietnamese refugees to learn the art of the manicure. Tippi, who is an avid humanitarian, stated, "I loved these women so much that I wanted something good to happen to them after losing literally everything."<sup>1</sup> She originally tried to help the women at Hope Valley refugee camp find vocations by showing them jobs such as seamstresses and typists but when they saw her nails, they fell in love. Soon after receiving the women's admiration for her nails, Tippi flew in her own personal

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<sup>1</sup> Morris, Regan. "How Tippi Hedren made Vietnamese refugees into nail salon magnates." *BBC News*, May 3, 2015

manicurist and recruited a local beauty school to educate the ladies on how to do nails. These women were one of the first people to graduate with only nail technician licenses since previously these beauty licenses were for both hair and nail. With her help, many of these women became successful manicurists who opened their own individual nail salons. For this reason, Tippi Hedren is known as the godmother of the nail salon industry for her influence in introducing manicuring to Vietnamese.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the other formal governmental support programs mentioned in Chapter One, this help from the American entertainment mainstream provided a wholly different yet equally important form support to the Vietnamese American community by catalyzing Vietnamese commercial businesses in the nail care sector of beauty services.

Out of the twenty women aided by Tippi, one refugee Thuan Le, inspired her friend Kien Nguyen to also pursue obtaining a manicuring license. She was very successful and together, Kien and her husband Minh opened their own beauty salon called Tam's Beauty Salon, in Little Saigon. With the success and growth of beauty salons at that time, the couple became proud owners of several shops in the area and sought other growth opportunities. They realized that they wanted to make an impact to the growing Vietnamese American community by shifting their goals to help support Vietnamese immigrants like them. Minh and Kien opened their very own beauty

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<sup>2</sup> Morris, BBC, 2015.

college, Advanced Beauty College (ABC) to provide new refugees with opportunities to learn the trade and establish quick careers. Through Advanced Beauty College, over 40,000 people have graduated the program and have gone on to become manicurists or nail salon owners themselves.<sup>3</sup> Many immigrants even attend beauty colleges in California and move elsewhere to pursue their own career and business ventures. Today, ABC has two locations, one in Garden Grove and the other in Laguna Hills, and is one of the biggest beauty schools in Southern California

During this time frame from the 80's – 90's there is a slight shift from a White dominated industry to a transitionally more racially inclusive labor service. The arrival of immigrant groups has allowed for labor specific niches in the United States such as Vietnamese in the nail industry. This is because immigrant groups are either one, “offering goods and services previously unavailable, for which there is a demand or for which they created demand,” two, “displacing native-born, when more skilled, disciplined or willing to labor for less many” and three, “filling jobs native-born vacated upon accessing preferred jobs.”<sup>4</sup> This of course highlights the negative reality of immigrant labor but also shows the resilience and hardworking effort provided by such groups. Thus, the labor migration of predominantly White women in the nail care

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<sup>3</sup> Advanced Beauty College, 2021

<sup>4</sup> Eckstein, Susan, and Thanh-Nghi Nguyen. "The making and transnationalization of an ethnic niche: Vietnamese manicurists." *International Migration Review* 45, no. 3 (2011): 639-674. 641.

industry to more professional career settings, opened an enormous door of opportunity for Vietnamese women.

Despite the negatives, doing nails and other sorts of service jobs were desirable for minorities especially new Vietnamese immigrants because the education and training period was short, meaning they could quickly find a job after their certification. Out of the beauty professions, manicuring has the lowest tuition and material costs as well as requires the least amount of hours in training.<sup>5</sup> Maria Nga Chau stated her family friend had “found a nail school and dropped [her] there to learn. [She] only paid 20 dollars and bought a tool kit of 175 dollars, total of 195 dollars.”<sup>6</sup> While those prices were an example of the costs of materials and tuition in the 1990’s, manicuring tuition and hours required still remain the lowest out of the other beauty professions. This reason and hearing success stories such as Minh and Kien’s was especially convincing for new immigrants since the couple became a prime example of the achievability of the Vietnamese American dream. Fulfilling this dream was significant as resettling in America gave many impoverished Vietnamese an opportunity at restarting their lives over and it gave them a chance they would have never seen in Vietnam. With the educational and training material costs as well as time requirement for manicuring

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<sup>5</sup> Eckstein and Nguyen, 656.

<sup>6</sup> Maria Nga Chau, interview by Thuy Vo Dang, March 5, 2013. Vietnamese Oral History Project. University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA.

being the lowest of all the beauty professions, it became the most sought profession for Vietnamese immigrants as they needed a way to make a living easy and quick. Affordability and accessibility were the main reasons that created an allure for professions like this. Thus Affordability and accessibility as mentioned here and the past chapters is part and parcel of the Vietnamese community identity during these periods. Soon, new immigrants would make their way over to the US and immediately enroll in beauty school for manicuring.

As more and more Vietnamese immigrants were learning the art of the manicure, many got hired in already existing shops, and some even dared to open their own independent salons. Vietnamese Americans became the first to open stand-alone nail salons in the US. Shortly after, hundreds of immigrants were replicating this process and joined the bandwagon. With so many people learning and opening their own shops, the industry quickly expanded in Southern California. Independent nail salons increased quickly in the 1980s, with their numbers exponentially growing in the 1990s and 2000s. By 2008 self-standing nail salons made up 29 percent of all beauty sector shops.<sup>7</sup> So many new immigrants were starting to learn how to do nails that within one single family, there could have been multiple people doing nails. Mary Hoang Long shares “if my mom ever needs someone to work or if she has free time, then my sister will come to

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<sup>7</sup> Eckstein and Nguyen, 645.

my mom's shop to help. That's why in my family there are a lot of people that do nails. I have cousins and aunts that work at nail shops too. My family has a lot of people with nail licenses."<sup>8</sup> This was very typical in Little Saigon, and it became quite common for someone to know not only one person but multiple people who knew how to do nails in the community. Some of the first nail salon entrepreneurs opened their shops in Little Saigon and hired other ethnics to work for them to provide a more comfortable working environment since a majority of workers did not speak English well.

Since the first immigrants lacked the ability to speak English, they were too afraid to apply to work in white owned salons and interact with white clients. Many were afraid of the racial degradation they would suffer and the expectations for "talking services", a type of therapeutic session commonly seen within the beauty industry.<sup>9</sup> Thus some of the first nail salon businesses openers opted for something more in their comfort zone and opened stores directly in Little Saigon to comfortably interact with community members. However, considering most new immigrants could not afford lavish beauty services, these salon prices had to be dramatically lowered to cater to their crowd. Since so many immigrants were now getting their manicurist licenses, they had so much supply but not enough demand. They figured that if they were able to offer

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Hoang Long, interview by Nina Mai Thi Long, November 13, 2012. Vietnamese Oral History Project. University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA

<sup>9</sup> Hoang, Kimberly Kay. "Nailing race and labor relations: Vietnamese nail salons in majority-minority neighborhoods." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 18, no. 2 (2015): 113-139. 122

these professional services at a fraction of the price, they would be able to attract more customers. This tactic was extremely successful. As prices were lowered, more and more people were able to afford this beauty service, and on top of that come back regularly. These salon owners were able to develop a reliable clientele who would go and advertise the prices and designs of their newly polished nails to their friends.

## ***4.2 Advancements and Growth***

New nail technology also helped attract new interest in getting nails done since it had raised the bar from the standard manicure. Women were not only coming in to get their nails cleaned and painted but manicures started to include hand massages, hot rock treatments, and paraffin wax services to soften the skin. Spa chairs, also called as pedicure thrones, reclined with water basins that provided jacuzzi style foot baths and transformed the pedicure service as it made work easier for technicians and created a whole other realm of relaxation.<sup>10</sup> Since most of these chairs included built in massage mechanisms, women could come in for a spa treatment without paying the extreme price of going to a massage parlor. Nail enhancements such as acrylic extensions revolutionized the industry as clients no longer needed to grow out their natural nails to have the appearance of long nails. Gel polish and ultraviolet curing eliminated the careful drying process required by regular at home nail polish. These techniques also

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<sup>10</sup> Eckstein and Nguyen, 654.

lasted longer on the nail which was a high point of attraction for people who could not regularly come in. The invention of the electric nail file also made the service easier and faster for technicians since the tool can file precisely and quickly. The combination of all this growth in supply and technology offered many more choices than the regular manicure.

With such advancements, both nail techs were using less time to produce their work and clients were spending less time in the salon. With such speedy and affordable service, this process came to be coined as “mcnailing’ as a play on word for combining nails and McDonalds since nail salons now could be a quick stop service where people could go in fast and leave happy. It was a brilliant business idea that revolutionized the nail industry by turning nail care into a mass service.<sup>11</sup> Being able to provide faster labor meant that manicurists could service more clients a day and thus make more money. Therefore, many salons started to adopt these quick in-and-out services that did not require customers to make appointments. Not needing to make appointments made it easier for clients who spontaneously wants to drop in without having pressure to come to any proposed time. This new standardized process made getting one’s nails done easier and smoother for both the client and the manicurist.

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<sup>11</sup> Eckstein and Nguyen, 653.

With such rapid growth of nail salons, other immigrants who were looking for business opportunities looked into other nail related careers such as suppliers and retailers of nail salon materials. Many of these businesses offered supplies to Vietnamese salons at wholesale prices in comparison to other shops. In all, it turned into a Vietnamese-helping-Vietnamese operation. The salons would continue to purchase from these Vietnamese retailers and suppliers who would offer Vietnamese buyers' lower prices. Supporting local within the community played a tremendous factor in expanding the nail industry. Through this support and growth, the nail salon business evolved into a billion-dollar industry

Essentially McNailing revolutionized the nail industry because it lowered the affordability bracket of professional services. Even non-wealthy people of color could now dream of getting their nails done and had plenty of access to it since so many shops started to appear in underserved minority communities. McNailing not only made it possible for so many Vietnamese to establish stable working jobs but also allowed them to pursue entrepreneurship in ways they could not have ever imagined being able to do. Self-employment was a big goal for many Vietnamese immigrants to achieve quick upward social mobility since the skills, certifications, and licenses they had in Vietnam were not accepted in the US.<sup>12</sup> Though the Vietnamese did not develop these new nail

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<sup>12</sup> Hoang, 115.

technologies, they were able to leverage their knowledge and come up with ways to make the nail industry more approachable, accessible, and affordable to both owners and clients. These improvements greatly added to the success of new nail business owners but also added to helped new Vietnamese immigrants as more nail salons meant more available jobs.

Learning how to do nails was quick, easy, and rather inexpensive to make decent money fast. Most importantly, since many did not have the English language abilities to work typical office jobs in America, owning a nail business and hiring other Vietnamese manicurists meant that one could bypass the language requirement for living and working in America. Language then, becomes a very important tool within the nail salon/nail technician start up framework. Due to the influx of Vietnamese immigrants coming to America to learn how to do nails, many beauty schools in California started to offer the training in Vietnamese. Vietnamese entry into the profession was further facilitated by some state governments by allowing exam-takers to use translators and by offering the licensing exam in Vietnamese.<sup>13</sup> This new change motivated even more Vietnamese immigrants to learn how to do nails and meant that manicurists could focus more on the technical portion rather than the language factor, which had frightened many away from pursuing a nail career prior to this change. Knowing Vietnamese was

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<sup>13</sup> Eckstein and Nguyen, 657.

no longer a disadvantage, but it was a source of power for those in the community that wanted to pursue going into nails.

First, all the resources needed to enter the nail industry are accessible in Vietnamese. Second, there had been plenty of examples of Vietnamese friends or relatives who had done nails or were successful in opening their own independent shops. This meant that through family and friend relations and word of mouth, people had found jobs quite simply through discussion. This is even more applicable to women who have been found to be more reliant on job-attainment through personal ties.<sup>14</sup> Third, even advertisements for nail jobs were broadcasted in Vietnamese through news channels, radio stations, and on newspaper. Anyone who had access to any of these medias and knew how to read or speak Vietnamese could find occupations relatively easily. Fourth, people already in the business were more likely to hire someone that was Vietnamese. Lastly, it was easier to establish connections and communicate with suppliers since most in community are Vietnamese. This means that from start to finish, just being Vietnamese and knowing the language gave opportunities to so many connections. This networking set systems in place to facilitate the process of learning nails, doing nails, and owning nail salons. By using this minor approach of knowing and speaking Vietnamese, community members can quickly educate themselves and

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<sup>14</sup> Eckstein and Nguyen, 643.

establish good careers. Networking and interacting allows for people to develop deeper relationships that is necessary when it comes to community building and maintaining. It is also part and parcel of economic mobility because it allows those with less resources to leverage their connections in order to build stronger foundations or even create safety nets for their businesses. These connections also reveal that entrepreneurship and skill-building is both an individual and collective process.

### **4.3 Interrelations**

The relational aspect of the nail network is quite interesting. If one was to go to Little Saigon and ask a stranger if that person knew anyone doing nails, they could probably list a handful of people or more. This is because networks like these found in the Vietnamese nail salon community allow ethnic minority entrepreneurs to use social capital and specific cultural resources that are not generally available to the mainstream.<sup>15</sup> Since so many people have connections to those already in the nail industry, it was easy for new immigrants to pursue doing nails as a career choice since they have so many examples to follow. Beauty colleges like Advanced Beauty College makes it easy for new immigrants from the moment they enroll by setting students up with connections to nail salon owners, suppliers, land renters, and more so by the time

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<sup>15</sup> Bagwell, Susan. "Transnational family networks and ethnic minority business development: The case of Vietnamese nail-shops in the UK." *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research* (2008). 380

they graduate they have a plethora of people they can reach out to. It is also easy for families to hire manicurists that are either distant family or friends. Of course, it was also incredibly resourceful to use family and friends if one hoped to start their own store. Knowing many people in the industry is very helpful because one could learn from their mistakes or could get recommended insightful advice that could have incredibly benefitted their business. In this sense, these minor methods or connections were even more advantageous than majority approaches since Vietnamese contribution to the growth to the nail salon industry has been exponential and the profits yielded have been exceedingly well. These connections also highlight the community's ability to grow, adapt, and support each other through mutual interest and unity.

While working under friends and family may seem convenient, as many times, there is no such requirement to apply for the job, however, this may lead towards other complications such as employee exploitation. In "Nailing Race and Labor Relations," Kimberly Kay Hoang, touches on these sorts of issues when specifically discussing the relationship and interactions between the owner, the workers, and the clients. Together, the interaction between these three parties form the three legs of a triangle. The interactions across owner, workers, and clients establish a system of class-based and racialized labor relationships.<sup>16</sup> What sets these relationships at the nail salon apart from

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<sup>16</sup> Hoang, 114.

a typical workspace is the direct contact effect each party has to each other and direct effect each have on each other. In such a small given workplace, this system has to work efficiently in order to help the business run smoothly or else there may be cases of direct conflict, which is typical in the nail salon setting.

At the apex of the triangle sits the owner who has power relations over both workers and clients. This person is typically already an experienced nail technician who can usually speak both English and Vietnamese. Mostly, their duty is to oversee or delegate the services that the worker performs and serve as an intermediary between the worker and client. In this role, the owner can choose to delegate less desirable tasks to workers while they perform “easier” or less time consuming tasks such as painting nail designs or booking appointments for clients. Furthermore, since they are delegating, they can also choose to work with clients who are paying for more expensive services while giving the lower paying services to their workers. As an owner, they have the right to refuse service to any client. As an intermediary, the owner is typically communicating and translating between client and worker while also protecting their workers from potential backlash. In an interview between Hoang and a shop owner, Jennifer, the owner explains; “we have to stick together. I have to support them. [Why?] Because if not, they will leave and I will have no workers.”<sup>17</sup> Since there are so many

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<sup>17</sup> Hoang, 130.

Vietnamese owned shops now, if the owner does not take care of their workers, there are still so many job opportunities. Even in the nail salon, relationships must be upheld in order to create a sense of belonging and community. In this sense, the nail salon is a microcosm of the larger Vietnamese American community where representatives such as the owner, acts as cultural intermediaries between the community, or the workers, and the world outside.

The workers are paid in an *an chia*, or split profit system, where the owners take 40% of the total sale. Through the *an chia* system, the workers can feel as if they are their own bosses because they are essentially in contracted positions in which they are renting a stall within a larger shop.<sup>18</sup> While this split-profit system may seem unfair, working in a salon where there is no base income except on the clients they serve, provide a time flexibility that most other jobs don't have. For example, many nail techs will leave the salon in the middle of the day to pick up their children and drop them off home before coming back to the salon. Some workers can also work seasonal hours and come back the following season. Also, working in a Vietnamese salon allows them to have a culturally accommodating work environment that they would not have in other employment situations. Some owners even provide ride services for the workers that do not have cars since they all usually work the same hours. Working alongside other

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<sup>18</sup> Hoang, 126.

coethnic women who shared very similar stories also was a positive factor as to why these manicurists preferred to work under Vietnamese nail salons. A worker tells Hoang, "I don't speak English, so there are very few jobs that would pay me as much as Jennifer [owner] does. When I work here, I can talk to someone in Vietnamese and eat Vietnamese foods... I can't imagine an American boss doing the same for me."<sup>19</sup> While this kind of work place environment does provide comfort, it does not motivate one to take the opportunity to better acclimate to American life since everyone is enabling one another to communicate, work, and behave in their own cultural comfort.

The workers and the clients seemingly have power relations over each other. Since the workers are paid only for the services they provide, they cannot pick and choose the clients they want to work on. However, clients can request for any particular nail technician they feel an affinity with. Sometimes there is a power asymmetry because of the language barrier. At times, clients feel as if the workers, who are mostly speaking in Vietnamese, are speaking ill of them. Of course, this situation is often reversed where the worker feels discriminated against. Other times, clients will complain in English about the quality of their nails. This usually leads to the owner having to personally fix any disagreement between the worker and the client. Other times, instead of expressing this discontent in the moment, customers will leave a bad review on the salon's google

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<sup>19</sup> Hoang, 129.

or yelp page and cause the shop to receive bad publicity. This power is most fearsome for new shops as all new businesses wish to be marketed in the best light possible. However, clients also feel the need to stick to Vietnamese salons as other salons can charge much more for the same services. This triangulation of racialized labor aptly describes the types of interaction and environment the salon provides for these three people.

The power asymmetry noted in this line of work is also apparent in other foreign born niche labor markets such as Hispanics in domestic cleaning and home care, Asian-Indians in motel management and information technology (IT), Koreans in grocery businesses, and Filipinos in nursing <sup>20</sup> However, it is in these checks and balances kind of system that makes these niche-markets so successful. The kind of triangular relation between the three parties signals that if power was unevenly distributed, that the business would be very difficult to sustain. However, since all parties are working in unison to affordably pay for a service and in return get paid for said service, the power management of each group works well and is conducive to the success of the shop. While other immigrant groups have provided successful samples for this triangular relationship, Vietnamese Americans have maintained this relationship incredibly well

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<sup>20</sup> Eckstein and Nguyen, 641.

within the last thirty years since prosperous nail salons have proliferated all across the country and are continuing to expand.

#### ***4.4 Gender and Affective Labor***

What makes the salon different from other working environments is that it is a highly gendered space of occupation. It is a space in which the workers and customers are typically both women. In traditional Vietnamese society, women-led businesses were not very common. Thus, the nail salon has provided a space for these women to reverse this gender norm. The salon has transformed the workplace into one that is women-led, women-owned, and women-inspired. Not only this, but it contains mostly woman-labor. In this sense, new immigrants who arrived in America could look towards other stories of successful Vietnamese businesswomen and pursue this endeavor themselves. Moving to a new country necessitates adjustment and usually requires both partners in a domestic relationship to work and provide income for the family. There was no such thing as a domestic, stay-at-home mom for Vietnamese American woman because a one salary income was not enough for their immediate family, let alone make enough money to send back home to their families in Vietnam. Through the nail salon, Vietnamese women were able to become financial providers and even breadwinners for their households. Their diligence in learning these skills for initially cheap labor, over time, developed into more entrepreneurial goals as independent business owners. This allowed women to take over the traditional role once

held by their husbands as financial providers and gave Vietnamese women a larger role not only in the family but also in the task force and the community. It gave means for the community to support these women owned businesses because some profits would go towards adding to the value of the city by generating more jobs and attracting nonlocals to visit these shops, thus increasing revenues.

On top of being a highly gendered space, it is also incredibly racialized. Most workers are Vietnamese while their customers are typically other races, White, Black, Latino. In this space, there are very different power asymmetries especially between Vietnamese and Whites, Vietnamese and Vietnamese, and Vietnamese and other people of color. Racial triangulation describes these relations in which is that multiracial working environments can be difficult to manage when there are clear power hierarchies between the servicer and customer.<sup>21</sup> As Vietnamese are minorities themselves, working for White clients poses discomfort and since the customer is not only the person of dominance in the labor and salon context but also the racial context. While performing these services on other Vietnamese clients though does put the worker in a more comfortable environment, it also pressures the worker to have conversations with the client and provide the best nail work, which becomes difficult to manage multitasking in a high paced work environment. This does not mean that the

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<sup>21</sup> Hoang, 120.

worker is slacking in quality for other customers but when working with Vietnamese in particular, who most likely knows other nail technicians, they don't want their work to be judged or critiqued as harshly. Working for other minority races was also daunting for Vietnamese women who had never met a person of color in their lifetime. Shop owner Jennifer admits, "If you told me ten years ago that I would own a nail salon in a black neighborhood, I would have laughed at you and told you that I've never even held a black person's hand."<sup>22</sup> Although there is a slight reluctance for providing services to other races, Vietnamese nail salon owners understand that they have to put economic opportunity above all even if it means that they are uncomfortable. In fact, Vietnamese nail establishments were more willing to work for minorities that don't speak English because it lessened the pressure of the workers to speak to the customers and let the manicurists focus more on the quality of work they could provide instead of the service. This initial discomfort of working for other people of color, is often replaced by an ease of working with less demanding clients who typically don't require talking services from the nail technicians.

Of course, nail salon services are a form of affective labor, which denotes work performed that is aims to generate or change emotional experiences in people. This is contrast from emotional labor which refers to the control and management of one's own

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<sup>22</sup> Hoang, 124.

emotions required by certain jobs. From when the customer walks in to when they leave, the salon workers are trying to win over the customers and them to come back. So even though most nail technicians do not speak English all that well, they can still emotionally invest in the client by listening. These workers also perform these services in a very close range to the customer and are touching them in intimate ways that are not typically seen in service type jobs. In this sense, working in this environment, listening to clients, massaging them, and more is a labor of love. It is therapeutic for the clients in a way and is a service they must provide to every customer. Even though some workers have limited language abilities, others throughout the years have picked up the language and have learned to correspond to their clients well despite the limitation. This kind of affective labor is uncommon for Vietnamese who are not typically emotional. Touchy labor specifically, was strange for the first wave of Vietnamese immigrants. They did not let their personal values get in the way of economic opportunity despite defying their cultural disdain for handling people's feet when performing pedicures.<sup>23</sup> Over time, the Vietnamese have worked on their ability to provide this affective labor and it has shown great success in working for an owning independent nail salons. Since 2007, Vietnamese accounted for 40 percent of manicurists despite comprising less than 1 percent of the United States population.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Eckstein and Nguyen 654.

<sup>24</sup> Eckstein and Nguyen, 657.

## **4.5 Mobility**

While this success initially started in specifically Little Saigon, California, the Vietnamese have gathered their resources to make this business successful in places that do not have a high Vietnamese population. The mobility of not only the nail salon but it's workers as well is necessary in understanding its growth. These Vietnamese nail shops have "broken-out" and branched to other areas to seek profits in white and other minority neighborhoods, not just in America but transnationally for profit and economic gain. The term "break-out is interpreted as being the process of successfully being able to move out of business areas or marketplaces which are crowded out by other ethnic minority entrepreneurs into more high value areas of business."<sup>25</sup> This is very apparent in the case of the Vietnamese nail salon because competition within Little Saigon is fierce. While this was not the case in the late 80's when independent shops were newly emerging, opening a store in Little Saigon would be incredibly difficult to profit from since several shops already exists in every major plaza.

Of course, overcrowding was natural since so many new immigrants first resettled in Orange County and so many of them dove straight into doing nails. With so much competition in Little Saigon, the salon had to become mobile and so did its people.

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<sup>25</sup> Bagwell, 382.

Shop owner Linda stated, "I live in Little Saigon, but I came out here [Inland Empire] to open a business because I did not want to work for Vietnamese people. The competition is so high that it drops the prices down very low, but then the people there expect high-class services."<sup>26</sup> Linda specifically works in a primarily Latino neighborhood and travels over an hour to get to work every day. This process of mobilizing in non-traditional areas has been widespread and success in these non-local areas has even helped some owners to open multiple locations in other neighborhoods and communities that have little to no Vietnamese people in the area.

This mobility in discussion not only surrounds the physical location of the nail salon but is emphasized through its workers and clients as well. Vietnamese nail salon workers are also incredibly willing to travel further to not deal with the competition in Little Saigon but also to seek better economic profits. By working in less competitive areas, workers have the ability to price their services higher in comparison to working in Little Saigon, where prices are driven down in order to attract patrons. This gives workers an opportunity to make more money just by traveling outside of competitive areas. A bonus to the "breaking-out" of nail salons to more diverse areas is that clients now do not have to make the trouble to drive into Little Saigon or other highly populated Vietnamese areas to find reasonably priced salons. Although some customers

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<sup>26</sup> Hoang, 121.

are willing to drive further to visit their trusted nail tech, the opening of new stores in these less crowded areas means that salons are exposing the business to new clientele. This is also significant for clients who do not have means of transportation to these further spots. Moving outside of Little Saigon range does not just mean moving a city away, some have seen great success diversifying in other states as well. In an interview for the VAOHP, Alexander Duong describes his brother Calvin who “dropped himself out of college to help the family business so he traveled around the states trying to get a good spot to open a nail salon. And somehow, he ended up in North Dakota... He’s been owning nail salons forever, as far as I can remember.”<sup>27</sup>

There are transnational networks in place to help individuals starting fresh in other countries as well. New nail salons locations in these new places help provide local Vietnamese residents with familiar jobs. Sometimes, if enough people migrate to that area, that area can be populated with new migrants, thus establishing new ethnic enclaves. Networks to manicurists, suppliers, and shops in the US have made it possible for a niche Vietnamese nail salon market in the United Kingdom. In an interview with a UK nail shop supplier, he stated he “had worked for suppliers in the USA before setting up his own business, first in Seattle and then in London... He was also in the process of establishing a French market and had assisted about 20 members of the Vietnamese

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<sup>27</sup> Alexander Linh Van Duong, interview by Sheryll-Ihna Canare Buhain, February 15/26, 2013. Vietnamese Oral History Project. University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA.

community in Paris to come to London to learn nail-care techniques.”<sup>28</sup> The openness for back-and-forth mobility between trained individuals in the US and new owners abroad has been pertinent for business startup. Success for these shops in other countries has allowed for “breaking-out” to bypass national boundaries and adopt new transnational meanings for niche ethnic businesses.

It is apparent that Vietnamese Americans have found abundant success in this niche market for doing nails. Though initially coming to the United States with little English language abilities or technical skills, first generation Vietnamese Americans were incredible in using their resources to become successful entrepreneurs. This success served as great inspiration for second and third generations who perfected the nail salon worker system for new immigrants. The minor methods they have developed to help new immigrants acquire nail skills and jobs have greatly impacted the lives of many. By facilitating this process to be affordable and accessible, the nail salon road to success becomes streamlined and easily adopted by those who wish to become their own business owners. Vietnamese Americans have truly revolutionized the nail industry. From including more advanced nail care systems to creating faster nail techniques and increasing affordability, this group of people have revolutionized the nail industry to become incredibly versatile and inclusive. What once was a luxury

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<sup>28</sup> Bagwell, 385.

beauty service for wealthy whites can now be afforded by all and it was Vietnamese Americans that made this possible by providing cheap immigrant labor. This exponential growth of the industry has been very helpful to Vietnamese immigrants who needed quick ways to make money and support their families. Mary Hoang Long states, "I think nails is a perfect career. With the Vietnamese community in America, I know a lot of people that make a lot of money. After they do nails, they can take care of their kids very good. Nails helped the Vietnamese community a lot."<sup>29</sup> The profits nail salons have generated are now reaching the billions and it is apparent that this growth was made possible through the work of Vietnamese American women in the community. Thus, the nail industry has benefited this community largely in economic and commercial ways but has also reached the transnational Vietnamese community who is using their connections to successful businesses in the States to start their own niche markets abroad. This growth not only shows the impact of women from the community but also highlights the resilience of the Vietnamese spirit to pursue success through any means possible.

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<sup>29</sup> Long, VAOHP, 2012.

## 5. Conclusion

As this study shows, the community of Little Saigon is extremely complex and multilayered. From the evolution of the physical space in Westminster to the culture-rich productions provided by *Paris By Night*, and the economic powerhouses in the nail salon industry, Little Saigon is comprised of various intricate spatial, social, cultural, and occupational infrastructures that all work together to help the community succeed and thrive. It is in these purposeful and cooperative interrelations and interactions between community members that have allowed for the community to be so carefully constructed. This study has revealed how the community members of Little Saigon has been able to leverage minor methods to establish and maintain a subjective identity in America following the Vietnam War. In this way, they resisted the typical process of absolute assimilation and, instead, mobilized their cultural heritage in ways that recast the “American Dream” in their own terms. Furthermore, the community has been able to productively maintain Little Saigon by constantly changing the existing space to cater to new trends as well as answering the popular demand to retain cultural and heritage values of the Vietnamese.

Spatial transformation through reterritorializing was critical for this process of identity-making. Places like Phuoc Loc Tho and nail salons were imperative developments to the community members of little Saigon because it provided a sense of belonging by constructing spaces that allowed them to maintain their social and cultural

bond while allowing them to economically benefit. With deterritorialization, community members have been able to avoid the dominant notions of assimilating to and adopting American culture to be recognized as Americans to live the American dream. Instead, they have put their efforts into reterritorializing by making use of the resources and connections around them to recode their lives to complete their own version of the Vietnamese American Dream. By leveraging their culture, language, and connections to friends and family, they were able to build successful business that catered to and gave back to their community. In their agency, they are able to pave and decide their own route instead of following the one they are accepted to take. Not only were they able to take these methods and alter the space around them to become a cohesive community but they were able create ways to reproduce their culture abroad for other Vietnamese abroad like them.

Likewise, live entertainment shows like *Paris By Night* and *Van Son* reterritorialized the little Saigon community at a national and global level by stitching together the local and global. They have incredibly increased the mobility of Vietnamese culture from the way the shows are produced, recorded, and distributed. In a way, the shows have a dual aspect of mobility because on the one hand, live shows are only offered once in a certain location, meaning people who want to come to the live performance must travel to that destination whether it be California, Texas, Toronto and so forth. This also speaks to the upward social mobility of the Vietnamese abroad

because it costs money to buy things for leisure and to travel. On the other hand, the DVDs created and sold are distributed throughout the country and to other places that have large Vietnamese diaspora. In this sense, culture and community is maintained through the participation and circulation of these shows. Again, we see the utilization of minor methods since the producers are not adopting of a major form of entertainment broadcasting such as hosting the show on television. Instead, they use a method of record and distribute to earn dual income through the tickets purchased for the live show and the profit made from the sold DVDs. With the twofold method, Vietnamese culture becomes dynamic and gains the ability to go from place to place, allowing for more viewership and participation.

Lastly, Vietnamese nail salons show how Vietnamese immigrants have completely reterritorialized their communities into spaces that are not only easily accessible through the affordable education and start up buy-in but that is a process is easily reproduceable. With the success seen through the “mcnailing” method, many Vietnamese have taken it upon themselves to choose that route to become successful business owners. The Vietnamese have taken advantage of the mobility of the nail salon and have moved it outside California to seek higher profit margins. Many Vietnamese owned nail shops pop up in new areas within the United States and abroad every year. Other than just being high-profit businesses, nail salons have more importantly given Vietnamese women the confidence to change the dominant narrative of males being the

bread winner within a family system. Vietnamese women suffer being a double minority; as women, they are a minority with regard to men, and yet, as Vietnamese, they are the minority in America. The accomplishment that Vietnamese have made by creating a niche market for nail and spa treatments has been exponential and has allowed them to gain success by leveraging their knowledge of the Vietnamese language to achieve higher goals. Instead, they have used their own minor methods, resources, and connections around them to establish their own version of the Vietnamese American Dream.

Similar to the women described above, the current generation of Vietnamese American youth endure a double identity. Having spent more time in the United States and having greater command over the English language, they tend to fall under more pressure to assimilate according to American standards. At the same time, given the fact that they are so far from their motherland, there is also an expectation to maintain Vietnamese culture and heritage values. I realize in this thesis that I place more emphasis on the experiences of first- and second-generation Vietnamese group instead of the current group of Vietnamese American youths. It was only because of my personal experience as a first-generation Vietnamese immigrant that made me lean toward those experiences however, I think the problems and ways of reterritorialization for the current youths are much different. They exist in this middle ground of not knowing what side to choose and who to identify with. I think this is a dilemma that

many youths face when they are raised in a land that is not their parent's homeland. The issues facing the current generation of Vietnamese go hand-in-hand with the preliminary conclusions arrived in this study, especially with regard to identity and cultural production, and warrant further investigation. These examples reveal a distinct mobilization of culture and the negotiation of social and physical spaces in Southern California for many Vietnamese Americans during the second half of the twentieth century.

Closely researching and analyzing these three facets of Little Saigon has allowed me to learn a lot about this community. However, community development, live entertainment shows, and nail salons are only three parts that make up this group of people. There are many more areas of research that I did not and could not get into such as the Vietnamese gang affiliations in the 1980s to early 2000s and the evolution of Vietnamese fusion food in the United States. Learning more about the growth of small communities like Little Saigon can help us understand more about minority communities and communities that have been displaced, especially those from Southeast Asia. It is worthy that we study and research these communities because each have their own unique and diverse experiences of diaspora that deserve to be explored. The Hmong diaspora and other ethnic minorities such as those in Singapore and Burma would provide equally rich sites for studying the "minor" identity. While there is much more to investigate with regard to minority community, diaspora, and mobility, this

study provides a rich point of departure for better understanding the role of Vietnamese Americans within their own enclaves and within American culture, more broadly.

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