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Asian Greek Sisterhoods: Archives, Affects, and Belongings in Asian American  
Sororities, 1929-2015

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Information Studies

by

Vivian L. Wong

2015

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201

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Asian Greek Sisterhoods: Archives, Affects, and Belongings in Asian American  
Sororities, 1929-2015

by

Vivian L. Wong

Doctor of Philosophy in Information Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Anne Gilliland, Chair

The dissertation, *Asian Greek Sisterhoods: Archives, Affects, and Belongings in Asian American Sororities, 1929-2015*, examines the kinds of archives produced by Asian American women in single-gender social organizations or Asian Greek-letter sororities, reconceiving them as transformative acts of affects: embodied memory-keeping practices that transmit knowledge, traditions, cultural practices, and social customs as collective identities and communal histories across time and space, among different, diverse groups of ethnic-Asian women from one generation to the next. The archives reconceived as the transformative acts of affects and participatory memory-keeping practices in Asian American women sororities demonstrate collective and individual identities in complex, crafted social communities.

The affective archives of the Asian American sisterhoods of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi complicate the conventional understandings of the archives and memory-keeping projects in minority, marginalized, and disenfranchised communities of color in the United States. These sororities' archives of affects and affections not only revise remembering as recuperative practices motivated by the anxieties of personal and collective community forgetting and loss, but also serve as the embodied performances of communal memories that celebrate identities, social cultures, and shared histories and experiences.

The dissertation is a multi-method study that includes thirty-three in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in 2013, as well as ethnographic observations of and archival research on Active members and alumnae of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi, the two historically Asian American sororities established at the University of California, Los Angeles: Chi Alpha Delta, founded in 1929 and Theta Kappa Phi, founded in 1959.

The dissertation of Vivian L. Wong is approved.

Johanna Drucker

Jonathan Furner

Valerie Matsumoto

Sharon Traweek

Anne Gilliland, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

For Katrin Burlin -  
*the first of a few, in memory*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	vii
List of Tables.....	ix
Glossary of Terms.....	x
Acknowledgements.....	xii
Biographical Sketch.....	xiv
Chapter 1 Asian American Greek Sisterhoods: An Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2 The Makings of Sisterhoods: Chis and Thetas.....	42
Chapter 3 Crafting Sisterhood.....	85
Chapter 4 Serving Up Sisterhood: Contemporary Chi Cooking .....	124
Chapter 5 Succeeding Archives, Exceeding Belongings: A Conclusion.....	160
Bibliography.....	194



## List of Figures

Figure 1-1 Theta Kappa Phi sorority, 2014 Theta Kappa Phi Annual Battle of the Pledge Dances (Theta Kappa Phi Facebook)	40
Figure 1-2 Chi Alpha Delta sorority with the first place trophy, 2011 Theta Kappa Phi Annual Battle of the Pledge Dances (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)	41
Figure 2-1 Chi Alpha Delta Charter Class (dated 1929) (Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles)	51
Figure 2-2 Chi Alpha Delta Sorority (dated 1931) 1930 Pledge Class (top row), Charter Class (center row), 1931 Pledge Class (bottom row) (Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles)	51
Figure 2.3 Theta Kappa Phi Charter Class (dated 1959) (Theta Kappa Phi Alumnae Website)	52
Figure 2-4 D.L.D. Family Line Shirts (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)	78
Figure 2-5 Chi Alpha Delta Sorority “letters” (center) (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)	79
Figure 2-6 Young and Dangerous Family Line Jackets (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)	79
Figure 3-1 Chi Alpha Rush Nametags, yr. 2010 (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)	99
Figure 3-2 Chi Alpha Delta Rush Nametags, yr. 2011 (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)	100
Figure 3-3 Chi Alpha Delta Rush Nametags, yr. 2013 (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)	102
Figure 3-4 Alligator pillows, yr. 2013 (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook Page)	107
Figure 3-5 Big and Little Sisters at the Chi Alpha Delta Formals, yr. 2012 (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)	111
Figure 3-6 Formals Bin (Photograph by Vivian Wong, 2013)	113

Figure 3-7 Toast Pillow (Photograph by Vivian Wong, 2013)	123
Figure 4-1 Buffet Table, Social Night, Rush Week 2013 (Photograph by Vivian Wong)	131
Figure 4-2 Home-cooked Food prepared for Social Night, Rush Week 2013 (Photograph by Vivian Wong)	131
Figure 4-3 Buffet table, Information Night, Rush Week 2013 (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)	137
Figure 4-4 Decorated plastic containers, Chi Thanksgiving Dinner, yr. 2010 (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)	147
Figure 4-5 Turkey, Chi Thanksgiving Dinner, 2012 (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)	154
Figure 4-6 Turkey, Chi Thanksgiving Dinner, 2013 (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)	155
Figure 5-1 Chi Alpha Delta Charter Members, 50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner, yr. 1979 (Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles)	180
Figure 5-2 Chi Alpha Delta Charter Members (Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles; Donated by Aiko (Mary) Misue Sugita)	180
Figure 5-3 Chi Alpha Delta Charter Members (Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles; Donated by Aiko (Mary) Misue Sugita)	181
Figure 5-4 Theta Kappa Phi 2013 Rush publicity (Theta Kappa Phi Facebook)	185
Figure 5-5 Chi Alpha Delta 2013 Rush publicity (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)	185

## List of Tables

Table 1-1 Time periods when the interviewees were undergraduate students at the University of California, Los Angeles and Active members of the sororities, Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi	25
Table 1-2 Kinds of data collected and the time periods they covered	26
Table 1-3 Data gathered from different kinds of archives during the course of my ethnographic study: the sources and time periods the sources covered	27
Table 5-1 Asian Greek “Kinship” at UCLA	183

## **Glossary of Terms**

<u>Actives</u>	Actives are dues-paying members of a sorority; they have completed the sorority's pledge program, and are enrolled in a college or university as undergraduate students.
<u>Bid</u>	An invitation the sorority gives out to women for them to pledge to its organization; young women are "extended bids" to pledge to a sorority.
<u>Charter Class</u>	The group of women who founded the sorority is its Charter Class, also called the Founding Class
<u>Charter Members</u>	Women who founded the sorority, also called Founding Mothers.
<u>Cross</u>	When Pledges successfully complete a sorority's pledge program they "cross" and are full-fledged Active members of the sorority.
<u>De-pledge</u>	Dropping out of the sorority's pledge program before completing it, also called DP-ing or de-pledging.
<u>Exchanges</u>	Parties between a sorority and fraternity.
<u>Formals</u>	The occasion/event when the sorority introduces its newest or youngest members, its recently crossed Pledge Class, to the other sororities and fraternities in its social network.
<u>House</u>	Term used to refer to the sorority and its members collectively; a variation of the term is the Active House. House can also refer to a sorority's physical place of residence on a college or university campus. The sororities' residences (i.e., Houses) on campus are collectively referred to as Sorority Row.
<u>Informals</u>	The occasion/event when the sorority introduces its newest or youngest Pledge Class to other sororities and fraternities in its social network.
<u>Neophyte</u>	Neophytes are women who have successfully completed their pledge-ship in the current academic. Recently crossed Pledges are often called Neophytes until they begin their first full year as Actives in the sorority.

<u>Pledge</u>	Pledges are women who have accepted bids from a sorority. They are attempting to complete the sorority's pledge-ship (or pledge program) successfully and become members of the sorority, i.e., sorority Actives.
<u>Pledge Class</u>	The group of women who pledge the sorority together; these women compose a sorority's pledge class.
<u>Pledge Mom</u>	The Pledge Mom (sometimes called the Pledge Mistress) mentors the current group of Pledges in the sorority's newest Pledge Class through its pledging process. She acts as a facilitator between the young Pledges and the senior members of the Active House.
<u>Pledge Sister</u>	Sorority sisters in the same pledge class refer to each other as their Pledge sisters.
<u>Rush</u>	Also referred to as Rush Week, Recruitment, or Recruitment Week. A sorority accepts women to join its organization during Rush and women rush a sorority.
<u>Rushee</u>	Rushees are women who are rushing a sorority in order to become members of the sorority.
<u>Sorority Sister</u>	Members of a sorority are called sorority sisters.

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## Biographical Sketch

Vivian Wong is a Ph.D candidate at the University of California, Los Angeles in the Information Studies Department. Prior to returning to graduate school, she was the Assistant Director of the Center for EthnoCommunications at the UCLA Asian American Studies Center where she developed, produced, and promoted media about and by Asian Americans and their communities.

She is also an award-winning filmmaker who received her M.F.A. in Directing from the UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television. Her documentary, *Homecoming* (2005), is an intimate look at the effects of transnational migration and displacement on a personal scale through longing and loss across cultures and multi-generational relationships. It is about her relationship as a second-generation Malaysian Chinese American with her ethnic-Chinese grandmother from Malaysia. Her most recent film, *A Community of Friends* (2011) documents the early history of the public library in Los Angeles Chinatown. Her work has been screened in film festivals, academic conferences, art galleries, public libraries, and on PBS—locally, nationally, and internationally in Europe and Asia.

She originally hails from the East Coast, growing up in Maryland. She attended Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania and has a B.A. in East Asian Studies, graduating *cum laude*.



## Chapter 1

### Asian American Greek Sisterhoods: An Introduction

My salad days,  
When I was green in judgment, cold in blood,  
To say as I said then!

— William Shakespeare, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, Act I, Scene V

You better lose yourself in the music, the moment  
You own it, you better never let it go  
You only get one shot, do not miss your chance to blow

— *Lose Yourself*, Eminem (rapper)

*Carpe diem*; or as the contemporary generation of American youth say in the new millennium, “YOLO.” You Only Live Once—time runs away, seize the day; “lose yourself in the music, the moment, you own it...do not miss your chance to blow.”

Nineteen young women struck poses onstage, while the audience in the university’s grand ballroom watched and waited in anticipation for the act to begin. The women cut the suspense with a cheer: Chi-Alpha-Delta P-A-N-T-H-E-R-S.<sup>1</sup> “Stepping” to the rhythmic clapping, slapping, and stomping of their hands and feet, they called out the name of their sorority and pledge class.<sup>2</sup> Then the first notes of “Dark Horse” blasted

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<sup>1</sup> “Panthers” is a pseudonym. Chi Alpha Delta names their pledge classes after animals. Naming practices of Asian American Greek sororities are discussed in detail in chapter two of my dissertation. The Chi Alpha Delta sorority is also known by its abbreviation CAD and the nickname, Chi or Chis, which is used to refer to both the sorority and sorority members. I will refer to the sorority and its members in all these ways in this dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> “Stepping” or “step-dancing” is a percussive dance where the human body is used as a rhythmic instrument. Historically African American Greek organizations began “stepping” as a tradition in their fraternities and sororities in the mid 1900s; and it is most commonly associated with these organizations. Since then other Greek organizations

from the speakers.<sup>3</sup> Its thumping bass beat filled the cavernous room with reverberating sound. The crowd erupted, adding noise to the music. The Chi Alpha Delta Panthers, Neophytes of the oldest Asian American sorority in the nation (est. 1929) strutted across the stage and launched themselves in a short dance routine that they had choreographed and practiced in the weeks leading up to the event: the Battle of the Pledge Dances hosted by the other Asian Greek-letter sorority at the university, Theta Kappa Phi, founded in 1959. The “Battle” is Theta Kappa Phi’s annual philanthropic event that raises money for breast cancer research; now in its ninetieth year.

Remember to smile; it boosts your energy: advice that the Chi Neophytes received from their sorority sisters when the Active members checked-in on them during their late-night rehearsals. If any “Panther” was nervous with all eyes on her, it did not show. The corps carried themselves like a well-organized dance team, although many of them were first-time performers in front of a large audience. The young women were self-possessed or they feigned their confidence like professionals. Beaming grins from start to finish, they teased and toyed with the crowd of over a hundred college-age, Asian American young people: the members of Asian Greek-letter organizations in Southern California and other friends and supporters.

The young women wore black leggings, white t-shirts, and combat boots and copped brazen attitudes and brass swagger. The bright plaid shirts tied around their waists

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have adopted it into their traditional practices, sometimes adding their own artistic flairs and interpretations to the dance form. The stepping performed in historically Latino/a Greek organizations includes the influences of Latin dance and music. Step-dancing has also crossed into popular culture and been featured on television and in motion pictures, probably one of the most well-known is in Spike Lee’s film, *School Daze* (1988).

<sup>3</sup> “Dark Horse” was a popular dance song sung by Katy Perry, featuring Rapper Juicy J, during the time (circ. 2013) when I conducted my ethnography.

swished and swirled as they swiveled their hips, pivot turned, and sashayed. They donned and doffed baseball caps during the routine, wearing the brims forward, backward, and jauntily askew. They toyed with tomboy-looks, juxtaposing them with coy come-hither dance moves. They exited and entered the stage, transitioning from one formation to another as their lines crossed, merged, and spread into a series of geometric shapes. Their moods and movements matched the song's lyrical chorus, "So you wanna play with magic / Boy, you should know what you're falling for / Baby do you dare to do this? / Cause I'm coming at you like a dark horse."

They danced with unflagging youthful vigor fueled by the adrenaline of the occasion and fed by the exuberance of the audience whose collective sound peaked at ear ringing decibels. The Chi Actives shouted cheers that intermittently broke through the din: "Yay Little Sis! Come on ladies! Go Chis, Woo-who!" While I sat close enough behind two young men to hear one voice a laddish appraisal of the spectacle to his friend, "There's a whole lot of steamy going on up there." As the music crescendoed to its end, the "Panthers" bunched at center stage and struck a final group pose on the last note, freezing in place. They cheered when they broke the formation, many of them throwing their arms over their heads in "victory signs" and pumping their fists in the air as they walked off the stage.

Eighteen other local, collegiate dance teams were featured in the program, including the Theta Kappa Phi's Thunderbolt Pledge Class, but Chi Alpha Delta was one of the three Asian Greek organizations from Southern California competing in the

competition.<sup>4</sup> Chi Alpha Delta Pledge Classes have won the “Battle” multiple times and they were perennial favorites to do well; although a few years have passed since they took home the trophy. The women of Chi Alpha Delta set high standards for themselves and take this annual event seriously. They not only give it their “best effort”—the good old college try—but also compete to win. (Or at least felt that their dance routine was better than their brother Asian Greek fraternity, Omega Sigma Tau, Pledge Class’ that also took part in competition.) The Chi Pledge Classes that have won the dance battle enjoy bragging rights in the sorority beyond their university Active years. A Pledge Class from recent years felt it was “robbed” of first place and still begrudged its second place finish when I spoke with a few of the sisters in that class. Whether the “Panthers” took first place was for the three guest judges to decide, but they walked away satisfied—they took the stage, grabbed their opportunity to shine, and owned the moment.

Chi Alpha Delta (CAD and Chi/s) and Theta Kappa Phi (TKP and Theta/s) are the two historically Asian American sororities at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Along with their brother fraternities on campus, Omega Sigma Tau and Lambda Phi Epsilon, they form the Asian Greek Council (AGC or AGCLA) that represents the four official Asian American Greek-letter organizations at the university—they *are* Asian Greek life on campus and a social circle unto themselves as Asian American Greek sorority sisters and fraternity brothers. They are established Greek-letter organizations and one of the six Greek councils that encompass UCLA Greek life at the university. However, Chis and Thetas were founded because young women of color

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<sup>4</sup> “Thunderbolts” is a pseudonym. Theta Kappa Phi names its pledge classes after inanimate objects, see: Chapter 2 for the discussion of this naming practice in the sorority.

were routinely excluded from the traditional white Greek-letter sororities (i.e., the Panhellenic sororities) on campus in the early to mid 1900s. This was the case for undergraduate students of color at colleges and universities across the United States until the last half of the twentieth century. The racial discrimination against and marginalization of minority populations were overt practices entrenched in higher educational institutions and American society. These injustices and inequities systematically disenfranchised people of color in civil and social society.

Founded in 1928 and chartered by the university in 1929, Chi Alpha Delta is the first Asian American sorority in the nation, established at UCLA where it remains today as the single and only chapter of the sorority. While the organization's founding members were women of Japanese ancestry, the sorority's membership now reflects the diversity of ethnic Asian groups and changing Asian American populations in California and the United States.<sup>5</sup> Theta Kappa Phi was established in 1959, thirty years after Chi Alpha Delta; however, the organization self-identifies as the "first officially recognized Asian American sorority" at UCLA. Its founding members were also young women of Japanese descent. Its membership has diversified and grown in the similar patterns of their sister sorority, Chi Alpha Delta, through the twentieth century. One does not have to identify racially as Asian American or be of Asian descent to join either of these student social

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<sup>5</sup> There are many demographical studies and statistical report regarding the population growth and shifts of the various racial and ethnic Asian groups that compose the Asian American population through the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries. These facts, figures, and interpretive analyses of these demographic and how they compose and impact the Asian Americans politically and socially in the United States are readily available and easily accessible. It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to analyze Asian Americans statistically, please see the bibliography for references to such research.

groups, although they are both historically Asian American Greek-letter organizations and primarily appeal to the Asian American female students on campus.

### **Asian American Sororities: Archives, Affects, and Belongings**

I introduced myself to the Actives and alumnae of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi several months prior to the first Battle of the Pledge Dances I attended during my ethnographic study of these two sororities. I met with the sorority presidents and completed five of the eventually thirty-three interviews I would conduct during the project. However, the Pledge classes' dance competition was my initial opportunity to see the sororities together and among the local area Asian Greek-letter organizations that formed the larger social network of these Asian American sororities and fraternities in Southern California. It was also the first time I attended a Greek-letter organization sponsored event, as well as the first Asian Greek-letter organization event hosted by either the Chi or Theta sororities. On the occasions when I discuss my dissertation research, I am often assumed a member of an Asian American sorority or a Chi or Theta myself. Perhaps this is because my ethnicity and gender align with theirs, but other people have also asked me. I will address this here, since it has been a matter of discussion. I am not a member of a sorority, Asian American or otherwise; nor did I rush any sororities when I was an undergraduate. I attended a small liberal arts college, and it did not have a Greek system on campus, so "Greek life" was not part of my undergraduate experience.

A twelve-dollar ticket bought admission to the Theta's Annual Battle of the Pledge Dances: I showed it at the door, had my hand stamped, and entered. The ballroom

was cavernous and half lit where the folding chairs had been setup in front of the stage, far left from the entrance. Most of the audience, the Asian American Greek organizations participating in the “Battle” and other dance teams featured in the program, was already inside; they were mingling and milling around with their friends while waiting for the event to start. I wandered vaguely towards the sections of seats that were not taped off and reserved for the Theta Kappa Phi and Chi Alpha Delta sororities and Lambda Phi Epsilon and Omega Sigma Tau fraternities. I waited for my eyes to adjust to the dim lights and watched for the performance to begin.

In addition to the assault on my ears for the afternoon, I was exposed to the breadth of the social circle and depth of social culture that “Asian Greeks” have claimed to and cultivated for themselves since the first Asian American sorority was established at UCLA and a second one followed it thirty years later. “Asian Greek life” expanded rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s as the number of Asian American sororities and fraternities (and their chapters) grew exponentially to meet the rise of their popularity and the increase in Asian Americans entering college.<sup>6</sup> Asian Greek-letter organizations continued to be established in the 2000s, but at a more moderate pace. There are forty-

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<sup>6</sup> The one-and-a-half and second-generation Asian American children of Asians who immigrated to the United States after the federal government’s immigration reform in 1965 were beginning to come-of-age in the 1980s and 1990s. Their significant numbers caused demographic shifts in Asian American populations and socio-cultural “change” (difference and diversities) of Asian American representation and identities. There is much scholarship—and more studies continue to be produced—about these matters in Asian American studies across many disciplines. Please see the following for further review of Asian American youth culture: Min Zhou and Jennifer Lee, editors, *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity* (New York: Routledge, 2004) and Edith Chen, “Asian Americans in Sororities and Fraternities: In Search of a Home and Place.” In *Brothers and Sisters: Diversity in College Fraternities and Sororities*, edited by Craig L. Torbenson and Gregory S. Park (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009).

three Asian American sororities and fraternities nationwide. (This numbers does not include an organization's multiple chapters that also expand a sorority or fraternity's membership). Now established and accepted student organizations in American colleges and universities and a part of undergraduate student social life, "Asian Greeks" coexist with African American, Latina/o, historically white Panhellenic and Interfraternity, and Multicultural and Multi-interest Greek-letter organizations on campus, and continue to foster belonging—social solidarity, camaraderie, and fellowship—for the new generations of Asian American undergraduate students in the twentieth-first century.<sup>7</sup>

*Asian Greek Sisterhoods: Archives, Affects, and Belongings in Asian American Sororities, 1929-2015* is a multi-method, multi-sited study of the archives of the Asian Greek-letter sororities, Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi, at the University of California, Los Angeles. It explores the following question:

What constitutes the Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi archives? (a) what archival materials and cultural artifacts populate the archives? (b) where and how are their archives "kept and stored," i.e., how are their archives archived: documented, collected, and preserved etc. and (c) how are the archives used and accessed, by whom, when, and for what purposes?

Based upon my ethnographic study, I argue that Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi have rich archival traditions embedded in their sororities. Although the archives of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi do not conform to traditional archival

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<sup>7</sup> Vivian Wong, "Asian American Greek Life." in *Asian American Society: An Encyclopedia* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2013).



institutions and professional archival practices, or even use an archival repository in many cases for routine record-keeping and preservation, these organizations maintain enduring archives to document, collect, preserve, remember, and recall their collective histories and communal cultures. While the archives of Chis and Thetas are inherently heterogeneous and habitually dispersed, they are also simultaneously protected from disappearance and loss, deterioration and decay because of these diversities and the distribution of the archives. Moreover, the significance and value of the archives are demonstrated on an ongoing basis because Chis and Thetas routinely and repeatedly use them to access the knowledge they (their archives) contain. The sororities have robust archival practices, because the women of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi, past and present, know where the archives are kept; how to access them, and do so regularly; and know how to create the records for the archives and deposit them in ways that guarantee security and safekeeping.

I contend that Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi create their archives through transformative acts of affects: memory-keeping practices that transmit knowledge and traditions, cultural practices and social customs, as collective identities and experiences that span time and space, connecting different, diverse groups of ethnic-Asian women with ties that bind one generation to the next. Furthermore, I suggest that the ways in which these women's groups document, preserve, access, and disseminate the archives through participatory memory-keeping and archival practices offer a potential alternative framework to understanding the archives, archiving practices, and archival functions in social and kinship groups. I propose that the archives is constituted from the creative practices of belonging, which communities employ to form “community:” a space called

“home” to dwell together in body and spirit. And as such, I rethink (re-conceptualize and reimagine) the archives to succeed its functional practices of documentation, collection, and preservation and exceed its recuperative practices, recovering the lacunas of peoples, their histories, identities, experiences, and the places they live/d.

In my configuration of the transformative archives of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi, “the archives” is reformed as the culture of solidarity and sisterhood. Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi sorority archives embody and perform the communal cultures and group belongings the women share as members of their organizations. For Chis and Thetas sorority sisters, their archives are concurrently processes and practices that produce the social kinships of the sororities as the effects and affects of the cultures of care and belonging of these uniquely profound Asian American sisterhoods—the archives endures in bodies and spirit when Chis and Thetas are in the (archives) House.

By conceiving the transformative archives of Asian American sororities as affective memory-keeping practices, I am foregrounding the embodied performances of knowledge(s) and the experiential ways of knowing/know-how in the everyday practices of the social lives of Chis and Thetas sorority women and social cultures of Asian Greek life. These archives are the embodied memories that reform and conform affective processes to physical, kinetic practices that produce the material effects and intangible affects of Asian American sisterhood. They make and remake collective and individual identities into sentiment and sentimental objects that display and demonstrate the emotional lives of Chis and Thetas and evoke the social kinships of their groups.

In this dissertation project, I reconsider the personal politics and sentimental practices that produce and perform sympathetic social communities for Asian American

women in their “college years” through their extracurricular activities on campus. Archives become the efforts, effects, and affects of carving a space for themselves—an enclosure for the corps and corpus to inhabit and entwine. As such, I complicate the conventional understandings of the archives and memory-keeping projects in minority, marginalized, and disenfranchised communities and revise remembering as not only the recuperative practices motivated by the anxieties of personal and collective forgetting and loss, but also as the celebratory practices that affirm personal identities and public cultures, shared social experiences, and common knowledge, know-how and skills of the group corpus.

### **Asian Americans, Asian American Identities, and Asian American Studies**

Asians have been in America for over one hundred and fifty years and remain one of the fastest growing ethnic populations in the country. However, “Asian Americans” as a group was not conceived until the late 1960s, during the Asian American Movement. The “Movement” was a “consciousness-raising” historical moment for peoples of Asian ethnicities, heritages, and descent in the United State. It happened simultaneously and in solidarity with other social movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s and other socio-political movements of people of color in the Third World and oppressed minority populations, nationally and internationally.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Asian American Movement is a significant topic of study and research in Asian American studies; and there is a wealth of scholarly literature in this area. William Wei conducted the first major survey of the Asian American Movement on both coasts (the West Coast and East Coast) in his book, *The Asian American Movement*. Since his book was published in 1993, numerous articles, books, and other resources have been written and produced about the Movement. The Movement has been addressed from multiple perspectives from within and outside of its historical moment. Participants, those

Asian American activist and professor Yuji Ichioka coined the term, “Asian Americans,” amid the student-led protests at the University of California, Los Angeles that resulted in the establishment of the four ethnic studies and women studies research centers at the university.<sup>9</sup> These ethnic studies centers were both educational and community resource centers for the students of color who were marginalized, underserved, and under-represented minority groups on campus. The UCLA Asian American Studies Center (AASC) offered some of the first Asian American studies courses at U.S. universities, nationwide. Many of these earliest Asian American studies classes were study groups, collectively led by students who learned about their own histories and shared that knowledge with each other. The Center was also a “safe space” where Asian American students at the university could gather and meet in groups that fostered social support and mobilized political and social justice actions (protests, sit-ins,

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involved in the Movement, its political actions, strikes, and protests, have written their own accounts, interpretations, and assessments of the Movement and what the Movement accomplished (and did not accomplish) for the Asian American community.

Asian Americans studies as a field of study is thought (and *taught*) to have emerged from the Movement through programs that began in Asian American studies centers that were forming nationwide. As these programs and centers become evermore institutionalized in the 1990s, the programs were organized into Asian American studies department in the early 2000s. In addition, Asian Americans studies scholars have offered their own understanding and interpretation to the Movement that also in essence created the field where they practice and perform their intellectual scholarship.

More recent monographs included: Daryl Maeda’s *Reframing the Movement* (2012), which itself offers a rich bibliography of the scholarship about the Movement and a comprehensive literature review of it; Maeda’s other book, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian American* (2009); and Michael Liu, Kim Geron, and Tracy Lai’s *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Community, Vision, and Power* (2008), just to name a few. The UCLA Asian American Studies Center published its own book about the Asian American Movement and other Asian American activism through to 2000: Steve Louie and Glenn K. Omatsu, eds, *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> The four ethnic studies centers are: the Asian American Studies Center, African American Studies Center (later renamed the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies), Chicano/a Studies Center, and American Indian Studies Center.

and strikes) on campus and in the Asian American community. It was also a creative space that facilitated student projects that expressed and explored Asian American identities and community formations. An example of one such project is *Gidra*, an Asian American student newspaper published from an office at the Center from 1969 to 1974. It was a radical political newspaper that the five student founders dubbed the “Voice of the Asian American Movement.”<sup>10</sup>

The field that began with a series of class offerings in educational research and resource centers that were established from student political actions and radical racial politics grew over time in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 2000s, Asian American studies classes and programs were institutionalized in academia: Asian American studies departments were organized from Asian American studies programs and founded in universities as separate entities. Asian American studies departments administered the academic programs: They hired designated faculty to teach the classes structured in an Asian American studies curriculum that offered Bachelor of Arts degrees in the field, as well as advanced graduate degrees. The UCLA Department of Asian American Studies celebrated its tenth year anniversary in 2015; it was established thirty-five years after the Asian American Studies Center was founded in the 1969-1970 academic year.<sup>11</sup>

With the term “Asian Americans” came an identity that continues to be discussed, debated, and negotiated in Asian American studies as it simultaneously produces knowledge about that identity—what constitutes “Asian American identity;” how do Asian Americans express and represent their “identities” etc. When “Asian Americans”

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<sup>10</sup> *Gidra*. (1969). Los Angeles, Calif: Gidra, Inc.

<sup>11</sup> UCLA Asian American Studies Center: <http://www.aasc.ucla.edu>; UCLA Department of Asian American Studies: <http://www.asianam.ucla.edu>

emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s, the term was conceived as a political identity that rallied Asian ethnic groups that saw themselves as discrete ethnic groups (i.e., Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans etc.) into a collective, cohesive racial group to advocate for political representation and social justice in American civil society. Claiming an Asian American identity meant one's socio-political consciousness was raised and informed by the struggles of all people of color and their progressive political agendas for social equalities in their societies.<sup>12</sup>

Since that time Asian Americans have strained against, struggled with, even outgrown, and perhaps rejected a politicized Asian American identity, especially one that claimed radical political and progressive social agendas. Nevertheless, Asian American studies will continue to recognize its “roots” in “the struggle” of the Movement; its discourses derived from that “source,” which was a specific historical moment, as well as a political moment. Their histories are so closely related: The history of Asian American studies becoming a field of study and academic discourse are concurrent and parallel to the history of the Asian American Movement and the legacy of the Movement in Asian American history. In addition, Asian American scholars continue to produce intellectual scholarship and theoretical discourses that negotiate and mediate “Asian American identity,” inclusive of many identities, instead of coalescing or reducing “Asian American identity” into a singular “ideal identity” or essentialist representation of Asian Americans (—in theories and practices).

Asian American studies’ “political project” of defining and creating an irreducible complex Asian American identity that includes and embraces the differences and

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<sup>12</sup> Chris Iijima, “Introduction,” *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2001).

diversities of “Asian Americans” as a nonconforming group took a “cultural turn” in the late 1990s/early 2000s from which Asian American studies has not looked back. Asian American culture continues to be an arena of knowledge production, theorizing identities and exploring Asian American communities. Asian American cultural theorist Lisa Lowe discusses culture as the medium through which Asian Americans mediate their histories, experiences, and identities to disrupt a national culture that represents them (their histories, experience, and identities) as the Other, alien-immigrants, and perpetual foreigners. Asian Americans produce their “culture” as different, apart and distinct, from mainstream American culture: “...sites of minority cultural production are at different distances from the canonical nationalist project of resolution....”<sup>13</sup> Thusly, Asian American culture articulates alternate narratives and practices, while simultaneously confirming and validating these narratives (with the histories, identities, and experiences that they express and represent) when these cultures are produced, acted, and performed. It is through their own “Asian American culture” that Asian Americans create the differences and diversities of their identities that represent themselves and present themselves to others in society and mainstream culture; or what Lowe describes as the heterogeneity, multiplicity, hybridity of Asian American difference in its diversities:

Rather than considering “Asian American identity” as a fixed, established “given,” perhaps we can consider instead “Asian American cultural practices” that produce identity; the processes that produce such identity

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<sup>13</sup> Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 31.

are incomplete and are always situated in relation to historical and material differences.<sup>14</sup>

It is in this realm of Asian American culture that produces Asian American identities, histories, and experiences in productions and processes where I situate my ethnographic study about the sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi and the archives they embody and perform to create their collective and individual identities. The women of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi express and manifest their Asian Greek sorority cultures and identities in nuanced and negotiated relationships with Asian American cultures and identities that they concurrently embody and possess. This ethnography joins the discourses that persist in the knowledge(s) to define Asian American communities in their diversities and differences, recognizing and respecting the heterogeneities, multiplicities, and hybridities as the parts of groups.

### **Archives: Repositories, Bodies, and Affects**

Traditional thinking in American archival science commonly describes and discusses the archives as physical storehouses and repositories of records, which can be many “things,” but are understood usually as textual documents and material objects, fixed in their form, that are collected, described, and preserved. Archives as institutions are typically custodial in nature; the archivist acts as the guardian of the archival record, resisting the impositions of her subjectivities when accounting for the records. Archival theories associate the records with evidentiary and informational values of some kind that make them worth preserving. The (professional) archival work of maintaining the

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<sup>14</sup> Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 64.



trustworthiness of the record is achieved through an archival practice that expects neutrality and objectivity in the dispassionate appraisal, description, arrangement, and preservation performed by the archivist. This is not to say that these are the only ways in which the archives and archival practices are defined, but they continue to be the most prevalent and prevailing understandings of archives and archival work as nation-building projects and bureaucratic record-keeping and management practices that legitimate the nation-state and its national institutions of civil governance in society. However, more recent archival scholarship has begun to address other aspects of archives, archiving, and archivalization as processes and practices in social society. These discourses and debates question the power of archives, its sources, employment, deployment in record-keeping and with regard to archival users and the role of archives and recordkeeping in communities of peoples who have been historically and traditionally marginalized and disenfranchised in social society because of their class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, abilities and disabilities, politics, religion, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation. Subfields in archival studies have coalesced around such areas as community-based archives, ethnic archives, LGBTQ archives, human rights archives, social justice archives, and indigenous archives just to name a few sites of inquiry.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The critiques of traditional archival theories and contemporary archival scholarship are beyond the scope of my dissertation, and are outside the realm of the discursive strategies I employ to construct and conceptualize “the archives” in my project, i.e., research study, ethnography, and dissertation. While a partial list, please see the following as references to the note above: Hilary Jenkinson, “Reflection of an Archivist,” *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice*, ed. Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1984); Terry Cook, “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and Future Paradigm Shift,” *Archivaria* 42 (Spring 1997); Luciana Duranti, *Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998); Heather McNeil, “Contemporary Archival Diplomats as a Method of Inquiry: Lessons Learned from

Other intellectual arenas, disciplines and discourses, are also interested in the archives as sources of knowledge and sites of inquiry. Cultural studies as broad interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary discourses that conceive of “culture” as their field of study employ discursive strategies to critique that “culture” in its many manifestations (i.e., products, productions, and socio-political and economic systems). It examines the archives and its cultural confines, critiquing the archives in its (cultural) terminology. Cultural theories destabilize privileges and power, remedy loss, and recover absences “found” in the archives—i.e., their cultural constructions and conceptualization of the archives. Theories that disrupt the notion of the institutional archives as national (and nationalistic) projects of the nation-state and dismantle their institutionalized knowledge

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Two Research Projects,” *Archival Science* 4 (2004); Frank Upward, “Structuring the Records Continuum - Part One: Postcustodial Principles and Properties,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 2 (1996): 258-285; Frank Upward, “Structuring the Records Continuum - Part Two: Structuration Theory and Recordkeeping,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 25 (1997): 10-35; Anne Gilliland, “Setting the Stage,” in *Introduction to Metadata, Online version 3.0*, ed. Murtha Baca (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Institute, 2008); Luciana Duranti, “Archives as a Place,” *Archives and Manuscript* 2 (1996), 243; Eric Ketelaar, “The Panoptical Archive,” in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*, eds. Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Eric Ketelaar, “Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 221-38; Sue McKemmish, Anne Gilliland-Swetland, and Eric Ketelaar, “‘Communities of Memory’: Pluralising Archival Research and Education Agendas,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 5 (2005): 146-175; Andrew Flinn and Mary Stevens, “It is noh mistri, wi mekin histri”, Telling Our Own Story: Independent and Community Archives in the UK, Challenging and Subverting the Mainstream,” in *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory*, ed. Jeannette Bastian and Ben Alexander (London: Facet Publishing, 2009): 3-27; Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shephard, “Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream,” *Archival Science* 9 (2009): 71-86; Kelvin L. White, “*Meztizaje* and Remembering in Afro-Mexican Communities of Costa Chica: Implications for Archival Education in Mexico.” *Archival Science* 9 (2009): 43-55; Michelle Caswell, “Khmer Rouge Archives: Accountability, Truth, and Memory in Cambodia,” *Archival Science* 10 (2010): 25-44; and Vivian Wong, Tom Ikeda, Ellen-Rae Cachola, and Florante Ibanez. “Archives (Re)imagined Elsewhere: Asian American Community-Based Archival Organizations,” in *Through the Archival Looking Glass*, eds. Mary Caldera and Kathi Neal (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 2014).

systems, i.e., archival information as mechanisms that regulate, control, and surveil through its record-keeping functions. Postcolonial studies take such a turn on the archives. The colonial archives produced by Western European and American imperialist powers during their periods of empire-building that expanded their nations-states beyond physical borders are re-conceptualized in postcolonial theories, i.e., postcolonial archives.

Theoretically, the postcolonial archives mediates its colonial subject, her oppression and subaltern state with (postcolonial) narratives that excavate the marginalization and subjugation of her colonialized status (or non-status, as was the case). The colonial archives subaltern is mitigated through visibility (and hyper-visibility) with postcolonial theories that deconstruct the archival structures of oppressions, dismantling her oppressors and exposing oppressions in the process.<sup>16</sup> The archives is read “against the grain” for historical omissions and alternate narratives to counteract the colonial narrative—what is omitted becomes that which is highlighted. In her postcolonial status, the colonial subject is recuperated from the edges and margins of her absences with an “absent presence” that ameliorates her erasures.<sup>17</sup>

The migrant archives is a “continuous and conscious work of the imagination,” writes cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, and it is a “guide to the uncertainties of identity-building under adverse conditions.”<sup>18</sup> Longings of home and homeland are

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<sup>16</sup> For “subaltern,” see: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> For archives “against the grain” and postcolonial archives, see: Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009) and *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Archives as Aspiration,” in *Information Is Alive*, ed. Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder (Rotterdam: V2 Publishing/NAI Publishers, 2003), 23.

inscribed in the archival imaginaries of dislocated, displaced peoples and populations. Migrant communities in the diaspora reimagine and recreate their archives as “political project,” according to Appadurai, that mediate their material losses, as well as immaterial sense of loss.<sup>19</sup> The community-building projects that conceive and create these archives are also designed to ease the psychological conditions of displacement and dislocation (in their ranges of suffering, trauma, and strife). Collective histories and memories are archived—documented, collected, and preserved—to insure the community does not forget or is not forgotten; and the community recuperates its communal knowledge from its historical materials, artifacts, and oral history projects.

Theories derived from performance studies rupture the materiality and fixity of the archives. An archives’ material state is reimagining as corporeal physicalities and embodiment: embodied memories and embodied performance. The archives is remembered and expressed with movements, “reiterative acts” that perform the “archive as repertoire.”<sup>20</sup> Archival knowledge exists as embodied knowledge that is recalled through performance and processional acts; and as such, the archives is an experiential process of knowledge production. In this manner of existence, the archives is transmitted and transferred through participatory experiences when the group amasses to perform its repertoire of embodied knowledge(s), animating its archives *en masse* to enact its collective knowledge.

Sociologist Avery Gordon describes the affects of experiential knowledge as a “haunting” presence that stirs our knowledge into recognition and realization of

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<sup>19</sup> Appadurai, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> For “embodied memories,” “reiterative acts,” and “archives as repertoire,” see: Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

ourselves; or as she says, our “complex personhood.”<sup>21</sup> Affective experiential knowledge (i.e., knowledge as the feeling of knowing) is potentially transformative: “Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, in the structure of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as transformative recognition.”<sup>22</sup> “Negative affects” such as shame, pain, and trauma are discussed in queer theories of affects in the context of mobilizing community solidarity, sentiment, and action responsively to these negative affects. Queer theorist Ann Cvetkovich explores the formation of public culture in lesbian communities from traumatic events, describing “an archive of feelings,” that these communities share through the affects of trauma and the ways in which those affects were used to create solidarities.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Gordon uses the phrase “complex personhood” in conjunction with the statement that “life is complicated” to attune to the contradictions in ourselves and others: “Complex personhood means that even those who haunt our dominant institutions and their systems of value are haunted too by things they sometimes have names for and sometimes do not. At the very least, complex personhood is about conferring the respect of others that comes from the presuming that life and people’s lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meanings.” Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 5-6.

<sup>22</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). For more queer theories of “negative affects” affects in queer communities, affects and public culture, see (partial list): Silvan Tomkins, *Shame and its Sister: A Silvan Tomkin Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995). Please also see, partial list: Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Heather Love, *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Lauren Berlant, “The Subject of True Feelings: Pain, Privacy and Politics,” in *Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism*, ed. Sara Ahmed, Jane Kilby, Celia Lury, Maureen McNeil and Beverly Skeggs (London, Routledge, 1997), 33-47; and Elspeth Probyn, *Blush: Faces of Shame* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). Affect and Public Culture: Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008)

Objects have feelings too; feminist theorist Sara Ahmed examines objects for their affects. She describes affect as binding objects to values and ideas, thus creating an affective object—a thing that has feeling associated with it. “Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and object,” says Ahmed, using the stickiness of affects to examine “happy objects” in material culture.<sup>24</sup> Material production generates affects; the process makes the object’s affects, as well as the object as a source of affection or the feelings one has in response to that object, which constitutes its (the object’s) meaning and value. Happiness as affect is “made” through material objects, i.e., material goods, which make us happy.<sup>25</sup> Objects and affects are stuck together; affects adhere to meaning and value, which produce the feeling objects possess and the feelings a person experiences when she possesses the object.

In addition to sticking to things, affects are also transferable. They are transmitted from one person to others. The “transmission affect,” as feminist theorist Teresa Brennan calls it, configures affects as something people experience when they interact with each other in social spaces. Or in other words, affects move through the crowd and they circulate in rooms; and they are both material and immaterial according to Brennan: “The origin of transmitted affects is social in that these affects do not arise within a particular person but also come from without. They come via an interaction with other people and an environment.”<sup>26</sup> In constructing affects as such, Brennan turns affect into an evaluative term instead of a description; one can feel the effect of affects as they are

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<sup>24</sup> Sara Ahmed, “Happy Object,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 29.

<sup>25</sup> Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” 29.

<sup>26</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 3.

carried like waves of emotions, or what she describes as feeling “the atmosphere” when one walks into a room.<sup>27</sup>

Affects are ways of knowing; they are like remnants and residue after the fact of experiences. They are feelings that “linger;” and they make and leave impressions, even as they can accumulate and disperse. Affects make us feel (a statement of the obvious, perhaps), but they also make us *know* and even transform us and *our knowing* through the experiences of feeling those feelings or emotions such that personal transformation is possible in the *effects* of/in/with *affects* we possess through our life experiences. In my ethnographic study of the affective archives of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi, I consider the ways in which these organizations exist and persist through their participatory memory-keeping practices that demonstration and display the knowledge(s) of themselves as collective identities. Therefore, as such, I also rethink the personal politics and social practices of belonging for contemporary Asian American women as young adults in their college years, as they are coming into their own, negotiating their self-personhood and forging intimate connections through the extracurricular activities in their Asian Greek social lives. The sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi embody their sisterhoods as archives (i.e., an archival body) and perform its repertoire of affects, which are the sympathies and solidarities of their intimate associations when they assemble in kinship groups.

## **Research Methodology**

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<sup>27</sup> Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 1.

The research for my dissertation was conducted over a three-year period in the 2010s. It was a multi-sited ethnographic project that revolved around the West Los Angeles area of Southern California and Westwood campus of the University of California, Los Angeles. The study involved the two historically Asian American sororities established at the university, Chi Alpha Delta (est. 1929) and Theta Kappa Phi (est. 1959), although my fieldwork regularly took me across town to the neighborhoods and counties north, south, and east of the city. Reflective of the “car culture,” freeways, and traffic that Los Angeles is known for locally and infamously nationwide, I navigated local streets, across town, during rush hour traffic to get to a neighborhood nestled in the hills of the Griffith Park and drove down the coast to Palos Verdes. I crisscrossed freeways to Orange County and the Inland Empire, as well as walked across campus to meet students and attend sorority social events.

The research included thirty-three in-depth, semi-structured ethnographic interviews of the Active members and alumnae of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi: twenty-two Chi sorority sisters and eleven Theta sorority sisters. The majority of the sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta I interviewed were in their late-teens and twenties. A smaller group of women were ages in the thirties and forties and one individual in her fifties, but I did not interview any Chis who were above sixty years old. Nine of the eleven Theta sisters were sorority alumnae who were Active members of the organization and attended UCLA in the 1960s to early 1970s; one individual attended the university in the 1980s. Many of these women had retired from work now that they were in their sixties and early seventies, or they were contemplating retirement in the next few years when I interviewed them in the 2010s. I interviewed one Theta Active who the Active



House appointed as its representative to speak on behalf of the sorority’s active members; she was the Theta Kappa Phi President at the time.

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Chi Alpha Delta</b>	<b>Theta Kappa Phi</b>
1930s		
1940s		
1950s		
1960s		6 (early and late-60s)
1970s		3 (early-70s)
1980s	2 (early and mid-80s)	1 (early-80s)
1990s	3 (mid and late-90s)	
2000s	9 (early and late-00s)	
2010 – 2015	8	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>22 Chis</b>	<b>11 Thetas</b>

Table 1-1 Time periods when the interviewees were undergraduate students at the University of California, Los Angeles and Active members of their sororities

I employed snowball-sampling methods to recruit volunteers for the interviews, relying on the social networks of the sororities to distribute my contact information after I reached out to the sororities’ presidents and alumnae presidents whose contact information was posted on the organizations’ official websites. Both sororities have “healthy” online presences through various social media sites on the worldwide web and the young women individually keep their own personal social media accounts also; however, I made a conscious choice at the beginning of my research project not to search for them or contact them individually through social media even though I used the same

sites socially and have my own personal accounts. I used “official channels” and “public information” to establish contact, because the study consisted of these organizations as social groups and Greek-letter sororities on campus, and their archives and archiving practices foremost—not the personal lives of these women, although the personal and social are intertwined in one’s life. Likewise, I politely declined invitations to be “friended” on Facebook by the people I interviewed and became acquainted with during the course of the study.

The in-person interviews were one and one-half to four or more hours in length and tape recorded with the interviewees’ consent. The majority of interviews were conducted in the homes and apartments of the sororities’ Active members or alumnae. When I did not interview them in their homes we met in public places, most often local coffeehouses and restaurants near the interviewees’ residences. If the young woman lived on-campus, I met her at her undergraduate residence hall or dining hall.<sup>28</sup> The interviews were conversational in nature; and as such, I chose to reflect that style when quoting from them.<sup>29</sup>

<b>Data</b>	<b>Archives</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Fieldwork</b>
1928-1930s	X		
1940s	X		
1950s	X		
1960s	X	X	
1970s	X	X	
1980s	X	X	
1990s	X	X	
2000s	X	X	

<sup>28</sup> Two exceptions were made for individuals who lived out-of-state, but volunteered to be interviewed nevertheless. One interview was conducted using videophone technology and the other was done over the telephone.

<sup>29</sup> I used pseudonyms for the women of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa that I quoted from, unless otherwise noted. However, I used my own name when I am quoted.

2010s	X	X	X
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Table 1-2 Kinds of data collected and the time periods they cover.

	<b>Sorority Member Personal Archives</b>		<b>University Archives Record Collections</b>		<b>Ethnographer as Archives</b>
<b>Archives</b>	<b>Chis</b>	<b>Thetas</b>	<b>CAD</b>	<b>TKP</b>	<b>Vivian</b>
1928–1930s			X		X
1940s			X		X
1950s			X		X
1960s		X	X		X
1970s		X	X		X
1980s		X	X		X
1990s	X		X		X
2000s	X				X
2010–2015	X				X

Table 1-3 Data gathered from the archives during the course of my ethnographic study: the sources and time periods the sources covered.

In addition to semi-structured ethnographic interviews, I collected data from fieldwork using participant-observation ethnographic methods while in the field. During the course of my ethnographic study, I attended various social events hosted by the sororities and other special occasions on their social calendar. The most immersive fieldwork with multiple field sites over successive days was the Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi Rushes; they are weeklong affairs that both sororities hold annually at the beginning of the academic year, also called Rush week or Recruitment week. I also attended a few Chi Alpha Delta general meetings, as well as was invited to speak at two of them. I was able to observe both sororities and the Active members in a variety of social settings where the young women had different roles, were engaged in various

activities, and dressed in an assortment of clothes that ranged from casual shorts and t-shirts to formal gowns with long gloves, depending on the event. The other data I gathered during the study included primary source materials from the sororities' organizational archives, which were their official record collections housed by the university library. In addition, the personal archives of individual sorority Actives and alumnae, including personal effects, papers documents, photo albums, and scrapbooks were made available to me by the interviewees.

The university is home to almost 30,000 undergraduate students: international students composed nearly 4,000 of that number and domestic students from all 50 states in the United States make up the remaining approximately 26,000 undergraduates. Students who self-identify as Asian and Pacific Islanders (API) are 33.5 percent of that population; they are the majority on campus. White-Caucasians follow APIs at 27.1 percent. At 19.1 percent of the population, individuals categorized as Hispanic rank third. African Americans and American Indians are 4.0 percent and 0.5 percent, respectively, of UCLA's undergraduate student population.<sup>30</sup>

When I conceived my dissertation project the ethnographic study of the Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi sororities was to comprise a part of my research and one chapter in a larger intellectual project about the memory-keeping practices of Asian immigrants and Asian American women in the diaspora. However, the scope of my research, the subjects, and topics of my project were soon revised to an ethnography of Asian American Greek-letter sororities, their archives, and memory-keeping practices

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<sup>30</sup> The university also reports 3.1 percent of its undergraduates as "race/ethnicity unknown." These numbers and figure are from 2014. UCLA Undergraduate Admissions Office, [www.admission.ucla.edu](http://www.admission.ucla.edu).

after I approached the Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi sororities and gained more entrée in the groups and accessibility to their social culture, material cultural practices, and sorority traditions that motivate, imbue, and animate the lives of Chis and Thetas as Actives and alumnae of Asian Greek organizations. The Chis and Thetas took an interest in my work and engaged me in such ways that I found myself in the midst of spirited Asian American sisterhoods and the sympathetic communities they create that foster their social kinships—to full effects and affects of communal belonging.

An ethnographer is insignificant in the acts around her. She has no influence in the performances she attends, although she is a participatory presence when the actions unfold. When she is “in the field” conducting her fieldwork, she spends most of her time hovering on the sidelines of the playing field; an engrossed bystander in an immersive experience, but not a player, coach, or even ball girl in the game.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, she is not without effects and affects on the communities she interacts with during the course of her ethnography. Nor is she inoculated and immune to their effects and affects on her, her ethnographic encounters, and the experiences of her social interactions with the communities of her study, both collectively as groups and the individual members of the groups. And neither should she be a clueless and careless figure in their midst. Preferred, if not *de rigueur*, in the process and practice of ethnography (i.e., conducting the ethnography and writing the ethnographic account) are a high sensitivity to the environment and its people: the assiduous cultivation of awareness and a deliberate self-consciousness of herself among them. Feminist theorist Donna Haraway advocates for “situated knowledges” that recognize the limited nature of knowledge production,

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<sup>31</sup> A ball girl (or ball boy) collects balls that go out-of-play and supplies new balls during a game; sports such as baseball and tennis have ball girls and boys.

acknowledging such epistemic limitations and respecting (epistemic) difference and diversity, not insisting on universal understanding and the fixity of the produced knowledges—all knowledge is partial knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

I observed the Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi sororities' contemporary cultures and traditional cultural practices at “play,” including interplay, and in “performance.” I interviewed the alumnae and Actives of both organizations in-person. They invited me into their homes and apartments. I sat at their kitchen tables often with the snack foods and drinks they provided, on couches in their living rooms, and they showed me their bedrooms, photo albums, and other personal belongings from their closets and attics after we talked. They welcomed me in their presence, but I was their guest and they were my guides on this “ethnographic tour”—a researcher who was studying them or interested in their sorority was how they often introduced me to their pledge sisters and alumnae. Nevertheless, they knew my name and recognized me at a distance well before I learned most of theirs and could identify them immediately among the undergraduate students on campus.

In ethnography, cultures are perceived as constructed, determined and defined through participation and observation. Cultures are both products and processes in their productions, while mutable in their forms of expression (i.e., the ritualized practices and material cultures). An ethnographer and the communities of her study are equal partners in this “cultural production,” its act/ion/s and pre/scripted play, and the knowledge(s) that are produced from it and about it (the participatory observation of a group's cultural

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<sup>32</sup> For situated knowledges, see: Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988): 575-599.

practices and ethnographic study/ethnography of a group, its cultures, and cultural practices, respectively).<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, “culture” itself is contingent, subject to change and revisions in its material practices and corporeal performances, i.e., revised act/ion/s and re/un/scripted plays: culture is “contested, temporal, and emergent,” writes anthropologist James Clifford.”<sup>34</sup>

“Subjectivities,” the awareness of one’s subject positions and the sensitivities to the kinds of effects and affects those positions inform and facilitate, are concurrent and reciprocal from the interactions of the ethnographer and her “subjects,” the community and its people that she is “studying.” The social interactions that accompany ethnographies (e.g., participant observation, social interactions while “in the field” etc.) construct, define, and create subjectivities that inform personal identities or personhoods. Anthropologist Dorinne Kondo describes these social interactions as the creative process that “crafts selves” or “crafting selves.” Kondo explicates that individuals craft their identities: the crafting of one’s personal identities is a “life-long creative process” such that identities are concurrently “becoming”—being crafted—as they are actualized, existing individual identities. In addition, as such, Kondo says that personal identities and collective identities are not mutually exclusive; they can coexist as complex, crafted-selves.<sup>35</sup> Sociologist Avery Gordon contends complexity is inherent to life. She not only ascribes complexity as a description of the type of lives we lead; but she also maintains that our lives’ complexities, i.e., the declaration that “life is complex,” enable an

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<sup>33</sup> James Clifford, “Introduction,” in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1986)

<sup>34</sup> Clifford, 1986.

<sup>35</sup> Dorinne Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1990).

interpretative lens and theoretical framework to examine and explain the interrelated conditions that inform our lived experiences. Acts and actions are negotiated in our lives—the social interactions in our daily lives. Furthermore, they are also mediated by our experiences, which incorporate more complexity into our identities: who we are, claim, and aspire to be. Gordon describes our negotiations of ourselves/identities as informing and forming an individual’s “complex personhood;” moreover, she advocates that our complex personhood deserves “recognition and respect;” and likewise, we should recognize and respect the complex personhood of others.<sup>36</sup>

I saw it as a positive sign that the sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi were interested in me and engaged me personally, asking questions to elicit my biography and understand my interests in their sororities. While the Chi Actives demonstrated more curiosity, the Theta Active House exhibited more wariness. An ethnographer is also a person of interest to the groups she studies, as much as she is interested in them. As an Asian American woman I am not distinguished by “color” or gender when I move in their social circles or attend Asian Greek events, but I am not a part of “their crowd” either. My entrée into their world was not guaranteed because I shared those traits with the Chis and Thetas; nor did I assume it would be based on these shared physical features in the sense that “I look like them” or “we all look alike” (—and such assumptions reflect ignorance and arrogance, as they fail to recognize and respect others’ complex personhood, in my opinion).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> For “complex personhood,” see: Gordon, 1997.



However, my ethnicity and gender were helpful in other ways once we established mutual respect: I gained their trust and received access to them and their sororities. At Asian Greek events and social functions, I did not “stick out” if given a passing glance as most of the people who participate in “Asian Greek (social) life” are members of Asian Greek-letter organizations and are Asian and Asian American. Personally, I thought that my clothes, matronly and unfashionable when compared the casual hipness of their youthful attire, immediately telegraphed and exposed my mature age, but I was never denied admission to their events because of my dress and physical presentation. Nevertheless, the Chi and Theta Actives and alumnae always knew who I was and what I was “doing” at their events, i.e., “researching them.” However, they also began to expect me at their meetings and events, and eventually started inviting me to their social functions and seemed to appreciate my presence, during the course of my study. If some of the women were apathetic or shy about talking to me, they just ignored me, and allowed their more outgoing sorority sisters to entertain and occupy me.

After I attended the first two Chi Alpha Delta Rush events, Information Night and Social Night, my ubiquity was noted by a third-year Active at the Luau who remarked on my diligence and told me that I seemed as “dedicated to their Rush as they are,” because I kept “coming out” to everything. I also became their resident expert of sorts about “Chis” in the Actives’ eyes. “I heard that you probably know our history better than all—a lot of us (Laughs)” said Amanda, a third-year Active and graduating senior, when I interviewed her.<sup>38</sup> To which I replied with a genial laugh and said, “Okay, I probably know the history I can read, but I don’t have your experience....” The current Chi

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<sup>38</sup> Amanda Interview, 5/8/13.

President during the time of my fieldwork invited me to give a brief history of the sorority at an Active House general meeting, which I did with a show and tell of archival photographs, audio clips from oral history interviews, and Rush nametags from the early 1990s that an alumna let me borrow for the purposes of my research.

The young Chis were most excited when I passed around their sorority's older nametags and a couple sorority cookbooks from the early 1990s, which was the "history" I think they related to the most, because those material items were made by Chis who were undergraduates around the time when many of these young Chi Actives were born. I got the impression that the other stuff was "too old" for them to have a feel for, relate to and connect with, because they could not stop themselves from talking over me during those parts of the presentation as they urged their sorority sisters to "hurry up" and pass the nametags and cookbooks down their rows. Nevertheless, I was glad that they enjoyed the items I brought; I felt this alone made my presentation a success, more than anything I could tell the Chis about their past.<sup>39</sup> I was able to share something tangible with them, a historical cultural artifact from a traditional cultural practice that they continue to participate and perform in the present-day. The young Chis had much affection for those "old" nametags, and exclaimed how "cute" they were even though their simplicity cannot compare to the detailed designs of cuteness the nametags now exhibited.<sup>40</sup>

An ethnographer is an outsider; she would not be the ethnographer if she were not on the fringe of activities, watching from the wings of the stages or in the best seat in the house, front and center. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes an ethnographer's

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<sup>39</sup> The nametags and cookbooks were made available to me during the course of my study, for research purposes after I interviewed the alumnae who had them in their possessions.

<sup>40</sup> I discuss Chi nametags and sorority crafting practices in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

position in relationship to community she studies as someone who stands at the edges of communal events and activities, trying to “look over the shoulders” of those who have formed the circle and see what they are doing inside of it. Her look is the “observatory gaze:” a gaze of the spectator, regardless of the sharp and detailed focus of her field of view. However, as an ethnographer, I endeavored to employ my “gaze” with the recognition and respect in theory and practice that those who invited me into their social circles deserve and hope they would afford me in return.<sup>41</sup>

An ethnographer is also an identity, and a complex and embodied one at that. She crafts her identities through her interactions and the relationships she establishes during her study. In other words, my ethnographic presence and persona evolved as I spent more time with the young Actives and Pledges of the sororities; and our relationships developed over the course of my ethnographic fieldwork. The “ethnographer” or “researcher” was grafted and added to the myriad of other identities I embodied, presented, and performed in the different, diverse situations and surroundings in which I found myself. And over time, the Chis and Thetas came to know me—the different sides of me, or my other identities. The “different sides” that I learned about them and they of me were the serendipitous “discovery” of other connections we shared besides those of “researcher” and “research subject.”

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<sup>41</sup> “Gaze theory” is a discourse that came from film studies, theorizing the gaze of the camera and the gaze (of the camera) as a “male gaze” that often objectifies the female figure who the camera “gazes” in film/movies/motion pictures as an fetish object; although this theory is now applied to visual media and in media studies more generally, not just to films/movies. Intellectual scholarship and discourses about “the gaze” are widely available and easily accessible; it is beyond the scope of my dissertation to discuss it in detail. For the “the gaze” as the “male gaze,” see: Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen*, 16.3 Autumn 1975 pp. 6-18.

The women of Chi Alpha Delta are reputedly “good cooks,” so when they learned that baking was one of my hobbies it added a “personal twist” to a topic of our conversations.<sup>42</sup> I was asked for the recipes of some of my baked goods that I shared with them, and a few of them introduced me to their sorority sisters as a “good baker,” in addition to the “graduate student who’s researching us.” We “craft our selves:” an ethnographer is a crafted identity; if crafted with care, mutual respect, and reciprocity, the ethnographers’ selves as complex, affecting and effecting identities can connect with the “selves” of her ethnographic project, creating spaces where access is granted and complex personhoods recognized and afforded to all parties in the process.<sup>43</sup> The sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi allowed me to walk through the “private gates” of their communities, taking me on their own unique, personal “guided tour” of Asian American sisterhood—the social kinship and filial togetherness that they share as groups.

### **Outline of the Study**

The labors that produced my dissertation as ethnographic work were not only enabled and informed by the generousities of Chis and Thetas who allowed me into their presences, sorority communities, and engaged my interests in their social groups, but also by the scholars who came before me with their knowledge(s) of sororities and sisterhoods that they committed into intellectual works. Historian Shirley Lim’s monograph, *A Feeling of Belonging: Asian American Women’s Public Culture, 1930-1960*, attended to

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<sup>42</sup> I discuss Chi cooking in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>43</sup> For crafting selves and “craft our selves,” see: Kondo, 1990. For complex personhood, see: Gordon, 1997.

the historical moments that established Chi Alpha Delta, the first Asian American sorority in the country, and the changing socio-political times its members lived, struggled, and endured, which continued to challenge the organization and shape its public (social) culture in its first thirty years.<sup>44</sup> It afforded me the intellectual space to engage my interest in the contemporary social cultures and sorority practices of the Asian American women who comprise its membership in the present day. Sociologist Edith Chen's examination of race through the study of Greek-letter sororities illuminated the tension between racial representations and ethnic/racial identities that women of color mediated by associations with these organizations; her research included Asian American women who were members of the two historically Asian American sororities or who joined the historically white Panhellenic sororities at the university.<sup>45</sup>

Asian American women are not the only women of color who founded their own Greek-letter sororities in the midst of their exclusion from mainstream, white American social society. Scholars have written about the sisterhoods of Alpha Kappa Alpha and Delta Sigma Theta; the first two historically African American Greek-letter sororities founded in the United States in the decade before Chi Alpha Delta's establishment in

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<sup>44</sup> Shirley Jennifer Lim, *A Feeling of Belonging: Asian American Women's Public Culture, 1930-1960* (New York: New York University Press, 2005). Also, see: Shirley Jennifer Lim, "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun: The Politics of Asian American Women's Public Culture." PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1998.

<sup>45</sup> Edith Chen. "Asian Americans in Sororities and Fraternities: In Search of a Home and Place." In *Brothers and Sisters: Diversity in College Fraternities and Sororities*, ed. Craig L. Torbenson and Gregory S. Park (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009). Also, see: Chen, Edith. "The Continuing Significance of Race: A Case Study of Asian American Women in White, Asian American, and African American Sororities." PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1998.

1929.<sup>46</sup> Their scholarly books are reminders of the solidarities that women of color share when they struggle in the face of injustices and inequalities, forging social spaces where they can belong and enabling the sisterhood that is due to them.

While Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi are among the earliest of the Asian American Greek-letter sisterhoods in the country, Asian American youths were actively forming social clubs in their communities, also for mutual support, fellowship, and recreation. Historian Valerie Matsumoto taps into these youth groups, their public cultures, and social histories in the Japanese American community in Southern California, richly rendering them in her book, *City Girls: The Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950*.<sup>47</sup> Her ample study of the Asian American sisterhoods of young (second-generation) *Nisei* women in the first half of the twentieth century is the scholarly path I follow in my work.

Each chapter of this dissertation explores the ways in which the sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi evoke the archives and involve themselves in its practice. The archives are collective processes and participatory memory-keeping practices that produce and perform, transmit and transfer their sorority sisterhoods as social kinships in body and spirit through embodied knowledge(s) and experiential acts—embodied archival knowledge and experiential archival acts.

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<sup>46</sup> Deborah Elizabeth Whaley, *Disciplining Women: Alpha Kappa Alpha, Black Counterpublics, and the Cultural Politics of Black Sororities* (Albany, NY: State University of New Press, 2010) and Paula Giddings, *In the Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement* (New York: William Morrow, 1988)

<sup>47</sup> Valerie Matsumoto, *City Girls: The Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

In Chapter 2, I discuss the ways in which Chis and Thetas are “made” at the university. I examine the collective histories, identities, and experiences of the Chi Alpha Delta Phi and Theta Kappa Phi sororities on campus and explore the processes and products that reproduce their communal knowledge in an archives of affects and effects, creating the sisterhoods of these sororities: social kinship, support, and solidarity that these organizations provide for their members that span generations and bind different, diverse Asian American women together with each other as Chis and Thetas.

In Chapter 3, I consider the crafting culture of the Chi Alpha Delta: the significance of this cultural tradition in the sorority’s collective identities and its practices in the lives of contemporary Chis. It explores and examines the ways in which the young women of Chi Alpha Delta skillfully hand-make “Chi crafts” in an archives of cuteness—adorable effects and affects that get cuter with each passing year.

In Chapter 4, I prepare and serve sisterhood, offering a tour of contemporary Chi cooking. Cooking—preparing home-cooked food—is a tradition in the Chi Alpha Delta sorority. This chapter examines Chi cooking as a memory-keeping practice that is a source of pride and comfort, literally and figurative, for the sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta.

In Chapter 5, I conclude my ethnographic study of the archives of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi with introspective observations of the processes, products, and practices of embodying archival knowledge: performing its effects and experiencing its affects. Archives physically contain many things and represent many things; however, the archives exceeds and succeeds itself—its forms and formations—in perpetuity and permanence when it is valued as the inheritance of collective belonging for a community

and becomes the legacies in body and spirit and embodiments of the community. The affective archives of Chis and Thetas are not only personal belonging and sentimental objects, but they are also the affects of sisterhood—intimately moving and profoundly touching. The sorority archives of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi exist in the familiarity of sisters. The archives are palpable in their presence: mass/en masse/amass in body and spirit, forming social kin. They compose and contain the knowledge of sisterhood: its repertoires, inheritances and legacies as the gifts—giving and receiving—of belongings that form the rings of familial “homes.”



Figure 1-1 Theta Kappa Phi sorority, 2014 Theta Kappa Phi Annual Battle of the Pledge Dances. (Theta Kappa Phi Facebook)





Figure 1-2 Chi Alpha Delta sorority with the first place trophy, 2011 Theta Kappa Phi Annual Battle of the Pledge Dances. (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)

## Chapter 2

### The Makings of Sisterhood: Chis and Thetas

Little events, ordinary things, and smashed and reconstituted.  
Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached  
bones of a story.

- Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*

All the lines across my face  
Tell you the story of who I am  
So many stories of where I've been  
And who I got to where I am

- *The Story*, Brandi Carlile (singer), Phil Hanseroth  
(lyrics)

Chi Alpha Delta (CAD) and Theta Kappa Phi (TKP) play games during Rush. The games are used to help break the ice at social events—the purpose of a sorority's rush. The CAD and TKP Rushes are weeklong affairs packaged in a fixed set of meet-and-greet activities within a series of party events that consist of an Information Night, Luau, Social Night (dinner and a dance party), and a tea or brunch party in this order with the sororities taking turns on alternate days, hosting their events. For an incoming coed these events are opportunities to experience the Asian Greek “social scene” at UCLA while she decides whether or not she wants to join an Asian American-interest sorority in college, and the (Chi or Theta) “sisterhood for life.”

Chi Alpha Delta holds a mini-dance competition at its Luau that is judged by the sorority alumnae who are there to lend their support to the Active House during the only time of the academic year when the organization recruits and accepts new members. The

Rushees were divided into groups during the night as part of the planned program organized by the sorority. The Chi Actives who were not coordinating this friendly competition were thrown into the mix in teams with them.

Each team was given fifteen minutes to choreograph a one-minute routine that they would perform once they reassembled to watch each other's dances. Small groups of approximately ten to twelve women disappeared down hallways, outside on the lawn behind the building, or downstairs on the ground floor. When I came upon them around the different corners of the university's recreation center, they appeared spiritedly intent on the task. One group practiced a "hula;" the women were lined in two rows as they synchronized fluttering their arms and rocking their bodies side-to-side in unison. Meanwhile, another group rehearsed a "wave," the first person in the line sprang from a crouched position, throwing her arms up, over, and around her head that triggered the identical motion in the next person down the line.

The women returned to their seats when the allotted time expired, and one by one, the groups were called to the front by the sorority president to perform their routines to canned Hawaiian music. The audience, other Chi Actives and Rushees, cheered and roared their approval and encouragement as the performers went through their paces. The alumnae stood in the back of the room vocalizing their enjoyment as well, while they judged the teams and decided which one would win the prize of the night—handmade alligator-shaped pillows.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Eight to ten Chi alumnae were at Luau. At one point in the evening, the total attendees at this event exceeded 100 people because the number of chairs the sorority had set up in the room—10 circles of 10 chairs were all taken—and people were standing. However, Rush events are "casual events;" people continuously circulate, coming and going, and walking around.

However fun and games aside, Rushes are serious matters for the sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta (Chi/s) and Theta Kappa Phi (Theta/s). They serve a fundamental purpose for the organizations, and are a responsibility the Houses do not take lightly or for granted. A young alumnae and former Chi President explained that they (the Chis) want a “good Rush” because they want a “good pool of applicants” to choose from to determine the next and newest Pledge class.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Rush only happens once a year; therefore, it is both a “one shot” and “big deal” for the sorority, in regards to selecting the next group of women who will carry on the traditions of the organization, producing the future generations of sorority sisters for the group in perpetuity. Theta Kappa Phi’s Rush is also held annually.

This chapter charts the formation of the two Asian American-interest sororities at the University of California, Los Angeles. It explores the “archival success stories” of these single-gender Asian American social groups—archival stories that I argue are living histories of these women’s collective experiences reproduced as testaments of the affects of these organizations. The initiation and induction of the individual (-self) into the sorority corpus are ascribed through a series of ritualized practices of kinship that invoke and evoke familial ties of (sorority) sisterhood: the archival *esprit de corps* of different and diverse Asian American women attending the university, but sharing and creating their collective identities as Chis or Thetas through the communal experiences they embody, preserve, and pass on.

To form the framework of these affective archival stories—*in body and spirit*—that figure and configure “the sisterhood” as intimate belongings of social support and

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<sup>49</sup> Jessica Interview, 2/19/13.

personal care for the sisters of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi, I begin by describing the sororities' early histories as nascent organizations founded in response to the discrimination and racism that Asian American women faced at the university, prohibiting them from joining the traditionally white or Panhellenic sororities on campus: how they made a "home" for themselves amid the hostilities they confronted. "Home" is constructed from intimate feelings and sentimental attachments; it is immaterial, but tangible in affects when the sorority sisters gather together and come upon each other. It travels with them, unfixated in time or tied to a single place. It is made and remade by their effects and affect/ions: the material objects, acts of care, and affinities that they bring to bear among themselves when they gather as a community of their own.

Then I discuss the contemporary memory-keeping practices that "tell" their archival stories through instances of affect and the example of effects that the sorority sisters embody and animate to perform the acts, actions, and activities of kinship, making and manifesting their sisterhood as close ties of familiarity: fictive "sibling relationships" and "familial connections" or "families." The emotional investments that determine a new pledge class, and the "gut feeling" that assigns Pledges to different sorority families and pairs them with their Big Sisters who act as their guides and mentors through organization's pledge process. The practice of naming their pledge class that each sorority attributes to a particular historical moment, albeit speculative and suspect to lacunae. Finally, I explain the pride of "getting letters:" how the sorority sisters wear their (Greek) letters, sorority colors, and family colors.

## **“Greek” Women of Color: An Introductory History**

Women of color were routinely excluded from traditionally white Panhellenic Greek sororities for the better half of the twentieth century, and they formed their own Greek-letter organizations in response to the discrimination and racism they faced while attending college in small minority populations, challenging the status quo of the social segregation and white privilege these exclusive, elite Panhellenic fraternal societies upheld and perpetuated. For women who shared ethnicities and cultures outside and on the margins of the predisposed white Anglo-Saxon Protestant socio-cultural normativity that dominated American mainstream society, forming their own Greek-letter sororities gave them the opportunities to participate in the rites and rituals of “white America.” In addition to building networks in their ethnic communities and racial groups for social support, solidarity, and fellowship, these separate sororities gave women of color access to the experiences found in social settings and ceremonies that were commonly available to and usually reserved for the Establishment and realms of privilege and inclusion where people of color historically have been given short shrift on racial and social equality, marginalized or disenfranchised.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage in a debate of “white privilege,” the institutionalized racism of people of color, and historical exclusion of Asians and other immigrants in the United States, which continue to haunt and hinder an equitable society of equal opportunities and protection under the law in America. The scholarship that exists on these subjects is readily accessed elsewhere. Ethnic studies, gender studies, and intersectionality studies are examples in academe where the interrogations of power and privilege have emerge as theoretical discourses and topics of inquiry. Furthermore, recent events demonstrate that the struggle for equality and justice is ongoing in public society, communities, and segments of the population. Even communities on campus in the “ivory tower” of higher education are not immune as targets of hate, racism, and slander (racial slurs and epitaphs) that show intolerance, bias, and prejudice to racial, ethnic, and cultural-interest groups. I choose to cite an example of an anonymous racist and sexist

The first and second African American sororities, Alpha Kappa Alpha and Delta Sigma Theta, were both founded at a historically black college, Howard University in Washington D.C., in 1908 and 1913, respectively; a third sorority, Zeta Phi Beta, was founded at the same institution in 1920. Sigma Gamma Rho was the fourth major African American Greek-letter sorority founded in the early twentieth century at Butler University in Indiana in 1922. Although there are now over ten African American sororities (some established as recently as the 2000s), these four sororities are recognized as the historically African American sororities in the country. They are part of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), along with the five historically African American fraternities: Alpha Phi Alpha (est. 1906), Kappa Alpha Psi (est. 1911), Omega Psi Phi (est. 1911), Phi Beta Sigma (est. 1914), and Iota Phi Theta (est. 1963). The four historically African American sororities that began with a handful of women in their founding classes are now international Black Greek-letter organizations (BGLO) with chapters in countries around the world, global memberships of over 100,000 women, and sorority reunions that fill convention centers.<sup>51</sup>

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flyer that was sent to the UCLA Asian American Studies Center in 2014, which occurred during the course of my dissertation fieldwork.

Furthermore, formal and grand social events and occasions are no longer exclusively found in upper class, elite white-American society or represent the “bastions” of the elite white-American and Western European social strata. Furthermore, white Anglo-Saxon American, Western European societies are no the only societies and cultures with such events and occasions. In Latin America, a girl’s *Quinceañera* serves as her “coming out” as any debutante ball would for young women in the United States; and African Americans have their own history and tradition of debutante balls or cotillion balls which also serve as charity events in their communities. Increasingly these kinds of social occasions are associated with elaborate charity events.

<sup>51</sup> These nine historically African American Greek-letter sororities and fraternities are in a league of their own among other African American fraternal organizations, elite in their own rights with notable, famous alumni, and proud traditions. The tradition most associated with these sororities and fraternities, “stepping,” has crossed into popular

The first Latina sorority, Lambda Theta Alpha (LTA) was not founded until 1975 at Kean University in New Jersey. Now seventeen Latino/a Greek-letter fraternities and sororities are members of the umbrella Greek council, the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations. The first Latina sorority alone now has over a hundred chapters at colleges and universities nationwide. The LTAs at UCLA are the organization's Delta Rho Chapter or 104<sup>th</sup> chapter; they were established at the university in 2008.<sup>52</sup> The Latino/a Greek Council (LGC) at UCLA is composed of eight fraternities and sororities.<sup>53</sup> There are four Latina sororities on campus: Lambda Theta Nu, Sigma Lambda Gamma, Phi Lambda Rho, and LTA. Unlike the UCLA Asian Greek Council (AGCLA), the LGC

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culture and been feature on television and in motion pictures. Probably the most well known is Spike Lee's film, *School Daze* (1988). "Stepping" or "step-dancing" is a percussive dance where the human body is used a rhythmic instrument. Historically African American Greek organizations began "stepping" as a tradition in their fraternities and sororities in the mid-1900s. Since then other Greek organizations have adopted it into their traditional practices, sometimes adding their own artistic flairs and interpretations to the dance form. The stepping performed in historically Latino/a Greek organizations includes the influences of Latin dance and music.

Many journalism articles, popular books, and scholarly monographs have been written about these Black Greek-letter organizations (BGLO), also informally referred to as the "Divine Nine." It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to account for all that has been written, but here are three books that I think are representative of the research and scholarship produced about BGLOs: Paula Giddings, *In the Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement* (New York: William Morrow, 1988); Lawrence C. Ross, Jr. *The Divine Nine: The History of African American Fraternities and Sororities* (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp, 2000); and Deborah Elizabeth Whaley, *Disciplining Women: Alpha Kappa Alpha, Black Counterpublics, and the Cultural Politics of Black Sororities* (Albany, NY: State University of New Press, 2010). "Black Greek-letter organizations" is the term commonly used to refer to African American Greek organizations, fraternities and sororities, when speaking about them as a collective group; it is abbreviated "BGLO."

<sup>52</sup> Lambda Theta Alpha, UCLA Delta Rho Chapter website:

<http://www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/lta UCLA/>; Lambda Theta Alpha National website:

<http://lta.orgsync.com>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.bruinlgc.com/chapter-profiles>



has continued to add chapters of Latino/a Greek-letter organizations to its council. (LGC began with five member organizations.)

### **UCLA Greek Life by the Numbers**

In the ecosystem that is “Greek life” at UCLA, the Asian Greek Council (AGC) is one of six Greek Councils at the university that between them represent all the Greek organizations on campus. The Interfraternity Council (IFC) and Panhellenic Council (Panhell) are the umbrella organizations for the traditionally white fraternities and sororities, respectively, at the university; they are “the Greeks” that have fraternity and sorority houses along the perimeters of the campus, also known as Fraternity and Sorority Row, where their active members can live together while attending college. These UCLA fraternities and sororities are the largest fraternities and sororities both in size and numbers at the university: twenty-two fraternities and fourteen sororities with upwards of one hundred undergraduates in each of their Active Houses, and Pledge Classes of anywhere from twenty-five to fifty UCLA students. An active member of the Chi Omega sorority to whom I spoke while she was handing out flyers for her organization during (Panhell) Rush said her sorority expects to have a Pledge class of fifty young women and two-hundred total in the Active House. Chi Omega is the largest Greek-letter sorority in the country, and it was the first sorority to be established at UCLA in 1923. Before the establishment of Chi Omega, the university did not have Greek sororities on campus.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Chi Omega was founded in 1895 at the University of Arkansas. It is the largest women’s fraternal organization in the world. According to its website, the sorority has over 320,000 initiates, 178 collegiate chapters, and over 240 alumnae chapters. <http://www.chiomega.com/Home>

Fifteen percent of the university's undergraduate students are members of a Greek organization; it is the largest membership-based group on a campus where over 1,000 groups, clubs, and organizations exist for an individual to join at UCLA.<sup>55</sup> Undergraduate clubs, associations, and organizations continue to be established every year. These new groups include Greek-letter fraternal societies that fulfill the social needs of diverse communities on campus. The Multi-Interest Greek Council (MIGC) represents an array of Greek organizations that continue to be founded at the university: the first Persian sorority in the nation, Sigma Pi Sigma Psi, established in 2009; the first Arab sorority founded at an university in the United States, Epsilon Alpha Sigma, in 2012; and a chapter of the Jewish-interest sorority, Sigma Alpha Epsilon Pi, established in 2007.

### **Chis and Thetas: First Asian American sororities**

The first, and only, two official Asian American sororities at UCLA are sister sororities—and sibling rivals. Each considered itself the first Asian Greek-letter sorority on campus, although there is a thirty-year “age gap” between them. Chi Alpha Delta was founded in 1928 and chartered by the university in 1929; it is the first Asian American sorority established in the country and at UCLA where it remains today as the only chapter of the organization. Theta Kappa Phi was established in 1959, but the three-decades’ difference does not deter the organization from identifying itself as the “first officially recognized Asian American sorority” at UCLA. The charter classes, also called “founding mothers” or “charter members,” of both sororities are comprised of women of Japanese ancestry, although their memberships have become pan-Asian since then.

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<sup>55</sup> UCLA Greek Life official website: <http://www.greeklife.ucla.edu>.



Figure 2-1 Chi Alpha Delta Charter Class (dated 1929)  
(Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library,  
University of California, Los Angeles)



Figure 2-2 Chi Alpha Delta Sorority (dated 1931) 1930 Pledge Class  
(top row), Charter Class (center row), 1931 Pledge Class (bottom row).  
(Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library,  
University of California, Los Angeles)



Figure 2-3 Theta Kappa Phi Charter Class (dated 1959)  
(Theta Kappa Phi Alumnae Website)

Increasingly in the later half of the twentieth century, Chi alumnae and Actives are Asian American women with heritages from East Asia and Southeast Asia who are the second to fifth generations of their families in the United States, as well as Japanese American and mixed-racial and ethnic-Asian identities. Women with Vietnamese heritages whose families (their parents) were refugees and came to the United States during Vietnam's collapse into civil war and the aftermath of the Vietnam War are the most well represented ethnic-Asian group in the last decade, although Korean, Thai, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Filipina American women continue to populate the Pledge Classes as well. Few Caucasians and Pacific Islanders have joined the sorority, but those racial and ethnic groups are outliers in the organization's history. Theta's Actives in the most recent years are increasingly first or 1.5 generation Asian women who were born abroad, but came to this country as infants or children when their parents immigrated as young adults for further education or economic opportunities, or due to the political strife in their homelands. Overall, the demographics of Chis and Thetas reflect the diversity of

ethnic-Asian groups, the “waves” of Asian migration, and changing Asian American population in the U.S. and California in the twentieth century. As such, these sororities are an interesting lens through which to view “Asian America,” Asian American women, and Asian American youth culture in a microcosm of socio-cultural adaptation, adoption (or not), and assimilation in the United States.

Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi are the most popular sororities for Asian American women to rush if they want to join an Asian American Greek organization. While there are other sororities on campus with Active Houses of “all Asian women” and they could be described as “virtually” Asian American sororities, the size of their pledges classes and the numbers of Rushees attending their Rush events are half the size of CAD and TKP Pledge Classes. In addition, their Rush events are not as elaborate as the Chis or Thetas’ nor do they attract as many Rushees. In addition, history is not on their side; they cannot boast or accentuate being the oldest Asian American-interest sorority—in the nation or officially.

Theta Kappa Phi has inducted over 800 women into the sorority, and around 1,200 women are sisters of Chi Alpha Delta. While TKP and CAD have seen their pledge class sizes drop below ten during the “hard times” for all Greek-letter organizations, including traditionally white and historically African American Greek-letter associations, during the 1960s and 1970s when political and social movements were challenging the cultural norms of American society, neither Chis or Thetas have failed to recruit incoming UCLA undergraduates throughout their years at the university. This cannot be said about all the Asian American sororities nationwide, or the more recent Multi-interest Greek organizations found at UCLA in the last decade that are still

working to build the base of their interest groups and carve niches on campus for their constituencies.

Asian American Greek organizations have become a fixture in colleges and universities in the United States, spreading from the West coast to East coast of the country, since the late twentieth century. CAD and TKP are no longer fledgling women student groups in contemporary times; they existed in a spirited Asian Greek system at UCLA with their brother Asian Greek fraternities, Omega Sigma Tau (est. 1966) and Lambda Phi Epsilon (est. 1988) and also hold unrivaled status among the Asian American Greek-letter organizations in Southern California because of their long histories that they remember in their archival practices.

### **Chi Alpha Delta Home Beyond a House**

Homeownership is part of the immigrant's "American dream." It represents survival, daily work and everyday living, taking root as "success:" a kind of permanence that is more than physical shelter. Homeownership was denied to Asians in the United States along with systematic exclusion that denied them citizenship in this country and subjected them to quotas upon arrival on the mainland.<sup>56</sup> The state of California had alien land laws in effect specifically to discriminate against Asians and Asian Americans owning property, directly targeting Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Indian American farmers.<sup>57</sup> Also caught in the discrimination were the women of Japanese descent in the

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<sup>56</sup> I am referring to the Asian Immigration and Exclusion Acts in the late 1800's and through the twentieth century. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage in a discussion of these Acts, which are a part of America's history and extensively documented. The scholarship that exists on the subject is readily accessible.

<sup>57</sup> Please reference: the California Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920, specifically.

Founding class of Chi Alpha Delta. CAD does not have a sorority house, a physical abode where the sorority sisters can live together while attending UCLA, but they tried to buy one before World War II.

Two charter members tried to purchase a house for their sorority. With the financial backing and support of a Japanese American businessman in Little Tokyo, they went to the Janss Realty Corp. to explore their options. The Janss brothers, Edwin Sr. and Harold, “did not want to sell to Orientals.”<sup>58</sup> Denied the chance to be homeowners then, the sorority began diverting a percentage of its treasury into a home fund.<sup>59</sup> CAD is one of two Asian American sororities founded before World War II, but it is the only one to succeed after the wartime period when Japanese Americans on the West coast were incarcerated in prison camps in the United States.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Chi Alpha Delta Sorority. Alumnae Administrative files* (UCLA University Archives Record Series 651). Library Special Collections. Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>59</sup> The Janss Realty Corporation was a family-owned housing development in Southern California, and developed housing projects in Monterey Park, Boyle Heights, Sawtelle, and Westwood. The family donated the land in Westwood that is the University of California, Los Angeles. The Janss Steps on campus bears their name and one can see the name of the company stamped in the concrete of the sidewalks around Westwood. The family was featured in a *Los Angeles Times* article, January 8, 1987, which I referenced: [http://articles.latimes.com/1987-01-08/news/we-2966\\_1\\_west-los-angeles](http://articles.latimes.com/1987-01-08/news/we-2966_1_west-los-angeles)

<sup>60</sup> Another Asian American-interest sorority, Sigma Omicron Pi, was found one year after Chi Alpha Delta, in 1930 at San Francisco State University. This organization was also disbanded during and “inactive” because of World War II. But when it was re-established in 1946, it did not reform itself at San Francisco State University again—maybe a minor detail (at the time) perhaps, but that difference literally makes Chi Alpha Delta the only Asian American sorority to survive a war, along with being the oldest Asian American sorority in the nation. Sigma Omicron Pi was [re] established at the University of California, Berkeley in 1946 as the organization’s Alpha Chapter, which marks that year officially as the historically Asian American Greek organization founding in the way Greek-letter organization “count” their years in existence. The sorority now has eleven Active Chapters nationwide at universities in the United States. The chapter at San Francisco State University is the sorority’s Beta Chapter (i.e., 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter),

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese military bombed the U.S. Naval Base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, drawing the American government into a declaration of war on the empire of Japan and its allies, Germany and Italy. America was overrun with wartime hysteria. By early 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 9th, authorizing the removal of 120,000 Japanese immigrants and their American-born, Japanese American children from their homes, ravaging whole Japanese American communities in the wake. Two hundred and twenty-four Japanese American students were expelled from UCLA and those numbers included the members of Chi Alpha Delta. They disbanded the sorority in 1942, before being forcibly taken away with their families.<sup>61</sup> The money that the sorority was saving to buy a house was put into bonds at the Federal Bank of San Francisco with a note that instructed that the funds be

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established in 1988. The states with War Relocation Authority-run prison camps were California, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, and Arkansas.

<sup>61</sup> Chi Alpha Delta Records Collections at the University of California includes the oral history interviews of members of the sorority who discuss their experiences during World War II. Although the trauma of incarceration was a loud silence—unspoken, ignored, avoided, and in want of forgetting—in the Japanese American community for decades in its aftermath, the private feelings of shame and guilt started to be shared, documented, and preserved in the community stemming from the Asian American Movement that raised the political consciousness of Asians in the United States in the late 1960s/early 1970s. Oral history collections and Japanese American record collections (i.e., archives) that document, collect, and preserve the experiences of Japanese Americans and their individual and community histories have been and continue to be consciously gathered. In addition to the oral histories at UCLA, the Densho Digital Archives has oral histories of women from the Chi Alpha Delta sorority, although they are not identified and cataloged by the organization.

A wealth of work has been done in the areas of trauma and memory studies. It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to address all of this. The scholarship is readily available and accessible; also included is the work of Japanese American sociologists, historians, anthropologists, and psychologists on the impact of WW II incarceration in the Japanese American community. For example, Donna Nagata, a psychologist, has conducted extensive research; see: Donna Nagata. *Legacy of Injustice: Exploring the Cross-Generational Impact of the Japanese American Internment* (New York: Springer, 1993).



rolled into a university scholarship in the sorority's name if the organization did not reorganize after the War. Chi Alpha Delta was reinstated at UCLA in 1946 where it has remained ever since.<sup>62</sup> By the 1960s, the Chi Alpha Delta Active Cabinet members and Alumnae Board members questioned the feasibility of continuing to raise money for its house fund. The active members and alumnae debated whether or not their founding mothers' "dream" of owning a home was too much to ask from its membership in light of the changing socio-economic times in the United States and the rising property costs in the West Los Angeles neighborhoods around UCLA. A decade later the Chi Alpha Building Fund was deposited into the Chi Alpha Delta Trust Fund account and no further official discussions about the sorority purchasing a house were noted after the 1970s.<sup>63</sup>

Now the lack of a physical house is a non-issue: it is not viewed as a drawback for the sorority or even seen as an obstacle in maintaining group togetherness. The sorority uses its "homelessness" to its advantage; it is a recruiting tool when convincing undergraduates to join its sorority. The dues of Asian Greek sororities are less than their Panhellenic counterparts because they do not include the housing cost of living in a house

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<sup>62</sup> Historian Shirley Jennifer Lim writes about the history of Chi Alpha Delta from the 1928 to 1941, in the book, *A Feeling of Belonging: Asian American Women's Public Culture, 1930-1960*, including the events I mention in brief in this section of my dissertation. I consulted her book and the Chi Alpha Delta Alumnae Administrative Record Collective at UCLA Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library when conducting my dissertation research. I defer to her book for further review concerning the Chi Alpha Delta organization and the challenges the Japanese American members faced as an Asian American sorority during those initial years: their struggle for recognition as these women carved a place for themselves on campus.

<sup>63</sup> *Chi Alpha Delta Sorority. Alumnae Administrative files* (UCLA University Archives Record Series 651, box 1). Library Special Collections. Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles; and "Chi Alpha Delta Alumnae Board Meeting Minutes, Sep. 1961 – Nov. 1972." *Chi Alpha Delta Sorority Alumnae Administrative files* (UCLA University Archives Record Series 651, box 1). Library Special Collections. Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

on Sorority Row. This makes “Greek life” through an Asian American-interest sorority more affordable for young Asian women whose financial resources may be limited. Many of its members live together in apartment buildings surrounding campus, and those apartments where all the inhabitants are Chis becomes the de facto House when the sorority members need to hold Cabinet meetings and House social gatherings or “sisterhood events.”

Even in its early years, the sorority members roomed and boarded with each other. Such “communal living” provided social supportive values in those days when segregation and discrimination against racial minority groups and people of color in the United States were explicit. Minority students attending UCLA were subjected to racism and prejudicial inequities when they sought housing around the campus’ Westwood neighborhood—proprietors would not rent to them.<sup>64</sup> Many of the Founding mothers and members among the first Pledge classes lived together at the local Japanese Y.W.C.A and the sorority held most of its functions (sorority dinners, teas, and House meetings) at the Y.W.C.A.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Affects of Pledge Classes: Making a Class of Chis in Contemporary Times**

How does a sorority determine its pledge classes? It is not a simple “yes” or “no” vote where the majority rules, and a young women is “in” or “out” based on the “greater and less than balance” of those two numbers. Instead it is a more arcane process of

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<sup>64</sup> Marina Dundjerski, *UCLA The First Century* (London, UK: Third Millennium Publishing Limited, 2011).

<sup>65</sup> *Chi Alpha Delta Sorority. Alumnae Administrative files* (UCLA University Archives Record Series 651, box 1). Library Special Collections. Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

percentages: the “natural break” of an upper and lower percentile and the Active House desires for a larger or smaller pledge class that year. Taking the upper percentile yields a smaller number and the lower percentile a larger one. Discussions on who to accept are public conversations that get heated and emotional when members try to sway their sisters who might have reservations about a candidate, but the votes are by paper ballot and are anonymous and private. Two alumnae advisors count the votes while the Actives move on to the next application until they have discussed each applicant individually. The Chi Actives and alumnae explained their process, but I was not allowed in the meeting.

Julie, an undergraduate in the 1990s, said she only voted “no” once during the three years she was an Active member of the sorority, when someone wrote down “Theta Kappa Phi” on the Chi’s application form.<sup>66</sup> Otherwise, she was willing to give any woman a bid when she applied (providing she wrote the “right name”). She also encouraged her sorority sisters to be more generous with their bids. The selection process is a negotiation among the members and invariably there are hurt feelings and displeasure when the Rushees, who the Actives have personally invested in and rallied behind, fail to get bids. However, these personal disappointments have never dismantled the group as a whole, although a pledge class was voted on twice in the 2000s when a handful of Actives felt there was fraud in the vote counts. The small group was unhappy enough with the outcome to dig through the garbage for all the paper votes while the sorority was taking a dinner break. At the time, Heidi was more “grossed out” than her

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<sup>66</sup> Julie Interview, 3/24/13. Julie is a pseudonym. The names in this chapter are pseudonyms unless otherwise noted. I use my own name when quoting myself.

sorority sisters had climbed into the dumpster and gone through trash than annoyed to repeat the process—she also said the results were still the same.<sup>67</sup>

The President and Pledge Mom run this meeting, but they are not allowed to say anything or vote in this process. Or as one Pledge Mom said to me plainly: “Our two voices aren’t allowed to be heard.” However, they have the only and final say in the other most important relationship in the sorority: how the Big and Little Sisters are paired in the various sorority families.

### *Kinship: A Note on Family*

Kinship is central to anthropology and formed the basis of the field in the twentieth century, although the study now seems old-fashioned and its practice dated. The classic ethnographies that were required reading for previous generations of anthropologists are astute observations and representations of networks of belonging in a community (tribe, village, neighborhood etc.) to understand the community itself as a group (or groups of alliances): their associations, lineages, and descent through bloodlines and affinal unions.<sup>68</sup> The relationships of individuals to one another and everyone in their groups through consanguinity, marriage, or other social bonds are inherent in human social experiences when people decide to “belong together.” Fictive

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<sup>67</sup> Heidi Interview, 4/29/13.

<sup>68</sup> One could do worse than think kinship is anthropology in the main, and anthropology is the study of kinship in societies at the core of the discipline, as both are so connected one subject to the other. It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to cover kinship study and anthropology in this way; however, some of the ethnographies that anthropologists consider “classics,” among the first in their discipline, and fundamental to American and British-European kinship study include: B.R. Malinowski and the *Argonauts* (1922); A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and the Andaman Islanders (1922); E. Evans-Pritchard and the *Nuer* (1940, 1945, 1951); and Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969).

kinship, groups of people whose affiliations are formed other than through blood and marriage, consider these kinds of bonds in adopted families and single-gender groups (brotherhoods and sisterhoods in monastic, religious order; lesbian and gay communities, e.g.) as anthropologists encounter and account for different kinds of “family” in their ethnographies. Anthropology continues to shifted theoretically from distinguishing (blood relations) kinship and fictive kinship with discourses in “relatedness” that considers kinship in terms of “social relationships,” revising the predisposing of kinship incumbent foremost by blood ties.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to lines on charts and graphs that delineate social relationship, I contend that kinship can also be considered memory-keeping practices that contextualize a woman’s belonging in an Asian Greek sorority. Sorority kinship is a dynamic, complex structure of depth and width: multi-directional lineages with levels of association and diverse functional legacies that order and imbue the group’s corporal rank and file (the standing and status of its members) and collective spirit (the sorority pride and the women’ identities in sorority, its pledge classes and families). Kinship represents their affinities, and expresses those affinities; it is the corpus of the histories and experiences that effect and affect the sorority as a whole and at every level of its organization.

Moreover, in the case of Asian Greek sisterhoods, it fashions Chis and Thetas in the ties that bind—and it never goes out of style.

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<sup>69</sup> It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to describe and analyze the discursive strategies and scholarship that revised and reform notions of kinship in anthropology. References that inform and explain the evolution include, and that have influenced my understanding and the way I interpret kinship include: Carsten, Janet (ed). *Culture of Relatedness: Approaches to the Study of Kinship*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Strathern, Marilyn, *Kinship, Law and the Unexpected: Relatives are Always a Surprise*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Stone, Linda. *Kinship and Gender: An Introduction*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2006.

*Who's Who and Related to Whom: The Families of Chi Alpha Delta*

Once an undergraduate accepts her bid to join Chi Alpha Delta, she becomes a part of the Pledge Class for that year; but just as important, she is also placed in one of the “families” in the sorority and paired with a young woman in that family who will be her (the Pledge’s) Big Sister. While the recently minted Pledge can indicate who she would like to have as her Big Sister, it is not her decision ultimately. The President and Pledge Mom will consider her selection among the Actives she would like to be paired with, but they will not automatically confirm it. They look at the “bigger picture,” as a Pledge Mom explained the sorority’s thought process through her experience pairing “Bigs” and “Littles” in a Pledge class with the President.

Vivian: I hear it’s the President and Pledge Mom who decides who goes—

Danielle: Yeah, yeah, but every family kinda has its own personality too. You know how we say Chis and Thetas have their own personality?

Vivian: Aah, hmmm.

Danielle: Every family kinda has like a type also.

Vivian: Okay.

Danielle: I don’t know if we get molded into that type or like that type already existed, but like, for like Divines; they’re always really happy and peppy—it just, it just so happens that they are that way. I don’t know if we purposely put them there. Because even when the President and Pledge Mom are sorting who goes into what family, we don’t even really know the Pledges that well, you know I mean like—.

Vivian: Ahhaaa.

Danielle: It's just like what we think or who we think would get along well together.

Vivian: Right.

Danielle: Yeah, so like [President's Name] and I tried to do it this year like who would benefit the most from each other as Big and Little, and like what family they would like fit into.

Vivian: Okay.

Danielle: So like yeah—. Because my grand little, Brandy, is pretty quiet, so we gave her someone who is more outgoing or who we perceived as more outgoing during Rush. So like my great grand little, Emma (*i.e.*, *Brandy's Little Sister*), is very outgoing, like she talks a lot; she was able to breakdown Brandy's quiet barrier. And the same with Chloe, I think the reason Chloe got Brandy 'cuz she's so quiet and Chloe is able to carry a conversation really well, so like that's why they were paired, yeah.

Vivian: And so you decide—so this is like during the bid—

Danielle: Yeah, right after we give, like, vote; we see who gets a bid and then right after we give the bid and they accept the bid, then [President's Name] and I met with our alumnae advisors and we put them in Big and Little pairs.

Vivian: Ah, so you meet with your alumnae advisors?

Danielle: They don't really know the Pledges at all; they are kinda of there to just to facilitate and advise—like what kind of person do you think she is? What kind of person is she? Do you think they would go well

together? And they (*the Alumnae advisors*) speak from their own past experience of—. Normally, our alumnae advisors are past Presidents and Pledge Moms; so they kinda know what will work and won't work, so that's what they do.

Vivian: So that's what you guys do, the four of you—

Danielle: Yeah, yeah, we literally sit there and have everyone's name on a sheet of paper and we just match them up, and say, "Nah, I don't like that." (Laughs) Rematch them. It's really funny; it took like two hours.

(Laughs)

Vivian: So this year it took two hours?

Danielle: It took a long time, because we started out with sixteen pledges.

Vivian: Oh.

Danielle: But five of them de-pledged due to personal reasons. ... [She told me the reasons for those individuals: financial, academic, and medical for examples.] They were all personal reasons this year 'cuz normally our D.P. rate is low. Last year there was only one girl that D.P.-ed. This year it was five; Chloe's [year] it was six that D.P.-ed, I don't know why 'tho, a lot of it was personal reasons too.<sup>70</sup>

Vivian: And when someone de-pledges, they are just—

Danielle: No longer a pledge and they have to return anything that says 'Chi Alpha Delta' on it, because they can't really carry that you know.

Vivian: Yeah. Ah-haa-hmm. But so, you accepted sixteen?

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<sup>70</sup> D.P. is "de-pledge."



Danielle: Ah hmmm.

Vivian: Okay. Hmmm, so everyone applies—do they all get in?

Danielle: Ah-nah-hmm. Yeah, during Rush—our Rush process is pretty grueling in the sense that like, hmmm, like we'll meet the girls and they'll meet us, and then if they make an impression on us when we discuss, when we're giving out bids—. Like we discuss—people have to vouch for them, you know, in a sense that, “Oh, I know; I talked to her during Rush and she's like really ‘blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.’” What qualities she would have a Pledge, as a Chi, like, how would she contribute and stuff like that or what could she gain?

But in order to know all that, they have to have been able to talk to us, and, you know, we have had to had learn that from them somehow—we can't just assume—so that the girls that don't talk to Actives as much during Rush events, like they don't get to know each other as much. Then no one can really say anything about them. So when they (*Chis*) vote, they (*Chis*) don't really have an impression on them, so they (*Chis*) can't really vote on that, which is why we usually accept a smaller percentage of the girls.

Vivian: So there were more people hoping to be Chis?

Danielle: Yeah.

Danielle and I continued to discuss “the impression” that the sorority looks for in its potential members. While this was an equally long exchange, similar to our conversation about the sorority's process of extending bids to Rushees who apply to the organization

after a Chi Alpha Delta Rush week, Danielle said one thing that stood out to me as she spoke:

Danielle (cont.): We look for how they work with other girls; we even look at how they interact with other Rushees. ‘Cuz like a lot of my kids, they got bid ‘cuz they played really well with the other Rushees. So, if they were all pledge sisters, they get along well.

In addition, the other outstanding qualities which the sorority looks for are ideas and ideals in character and characteristics that embody, express, and represent what a *potential Chi* pledge sister could give, gain, and get from the sorority and vice versa in order to diversify the “mix of girls.” Or as Danielle says: “what they could bring to Chis that would vary up the mix of girls we already have; or like what can they contribute to us, and what they can gain from us.”<sup>71</sup>

A phrase that I heard repeated often by many Chis that conceptualized the “sorority experience” in shaping a young woman’s college experience or years at the university is that: “one gets as much as one gives to Chi” or “one gets out of Chis what one puts into Chis.” The sorority sisters’ affective, close relationships are formed in a process of reciprocity; a reciprocity that is exchanged and enabled through the ritualized

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<sup>71</sup> Danielle Interview, 3/15/13. It is not uncommon for Chi Pledge Moms to call the current year’s Pledges her “kids,” in so much as she’s the Mom or mother figure to these young babies Chis who are trying to grow up in the sorority, become Actives and Big Sisters themselves in their “next” years in college. In turn, some of the “kids” or Pledges will call their Pledge Mom, “Mom,” “Mommy,” or “P. Mom.” Such are the “terms of endearment” in the sorority: “Sis” or “Big Sis” is another one.

Chi Alpha Delta tried to trace its families and their lines of descent from the year it was founded in 1928. The family tree is online at <http://www.chialphadeltaalumnae.com/familytree-sisters.html>. It is partial and needs to be “filled in,” by the sorority’s admission.

practices of traditions embedded in the organization, its community structure and communal relationships. These traditional practices are the acts of care that demonstrate and display the deep social relationships that are their sisterhood; Chis are kin, they are sisters.

### **Made in the Families: Powerful, Royals, Divine, and Young and Dangerous**

The sorority is a “clan;” and like a clan, it has many families in the clan. The sorority’s family lines are the genealogies of the organization, generations upon generation, with successive Big and Little Sisters (pairs) that derive out of and descend from its Pledge Classes. A family is groups of sisters; and its generations are counted by the sibling relationships (Big Sisters and Little Sisters) it has “successful paired” consecutively year after year, when a Big Sister crosses her Little Sister. The family is viable as long as it “propagates” itself in this manner: Big Sister crossing at least one (her) Little Sister while she (the Big Sister) is an Active in the sorority. When a Big Sister fails to cross a Pledge who is her Little Sister before she (the Big Sister) graduates from UCLA, the family “dies” because there is no “offspring” to continue the (family) line. Families “divide” themselves when they get too large in size or numbers; a big family branches off into two (or more) families who start their own family lines.

The Birdie Family is a family that “died” in the early 2000s. The Ohana Family grew too big, until most of the sorority members were in the Ohana Family, so it was split into multiple families in the early 2000s. The Royal Family is one of the families that branched from the Ohana Family; it grew through the 2000s and is now one of the bigger families in the sorority. The Powerful Family was large in the early 2000s, but it

is smaller in the 2010s. Young and Dangerous (YnD) is a family formed in the 2000s, but most of the sorority's presidents have been from this family in the last decade. DVS (Devious), D.L.D., and B.B.A. (Baby Blue Augies) are also families formed in the 2000s. The other CAD families are Divine, Angelic, and Hustler.<sup>72</sup>

Families also have their own traditions that they keep among the members of the family, in addition to the traditions, rites, and rituals that the sorority practices as a whole. These family traditions are arbitrary and do not have the permanence of longstanding sorority traditions and ritual practices. A new tradition is easily made (up) or one is forgotten if one generation omits the practice, and the family does not remember to pick it up again; and if the eldest Active sister in the sorority the following year was not told about it or chooses not to practice it again. These traditions can be amended as well. A Divine family tradition is that the "family," all the great-, grand-, big, little sisters, builds a snowman together during the sorority's annual ski trip and takes a picture with it. Mallory, a young alumna and member of the Divine family, tried to gather her family together on the last trip, but she said that her little siblings were always off playing with their pledge sisters, so the Divines did not make a snowman that year.<sup>73</sup>

D.L.D. keeps some of their traditions secret from the sorority, including their name; D.L.D. stands for something that nobody knows but them. In addition, its youngest member is not told until she crosses in the sorority, so throughout her pledge-ship she does not know the full name of her family, which is revealed in another D.L.D. secret ceremony. An alumna and Chi Active in the 2010s explained that her family, D.L.D., has not been around for very long, so to make themselves special and give them

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<sup>72</sup> The Chi family names are not pseudonyms.

<sup>73</sup> Mallory Interview, 10/6/13.

prestige, the family started making all these secret traditions: she acknowledged it was silly and trivial of them, but she did not reveal any of those secrets either. Many families have traditions that involve blankets, quilts, and pillows. Big Sisters make their Little Sisters a body pillow in the Royal Family; the pillowcase is always cloth with a Hawaiian island theme—tropical flowers prints are popular. In the D.L.D. Family, the Big Sister sews her Little Sister a quilt, with emphasis on sewing as stitching; it cannot be a blanket or bedspread where one just sews up the edges of the fabric—D.L.D. does not keep this practice a secret, clearly.

### **Why there are “Rainbows:” How Theta Kappa Phi Pledge Classes Got Their Names**

Theta Kappa Phi also has families in its sorority, but the active members were reticent to talk to me about them or any internal practices. I interviewed nine Theta alumnae in the sorority in the 1960s and early 1970s who said their families did not have names, but they knew the sorority had started naming their families. However, one alumna found a sorority sister from the 1980s to tell me how the pledge classes got their names.

Traditionally Pledge Classes’ names are the Greek alphabet. The first pledge class is the first letter, Alpha, and every class that follows gets the next letter until the last, Omega. Then the sorority doubles back, so for example: after the Omega class is the Beta Alpha class, and so the names run until the end, Beta Omega; upon which it doubles back and repeats the alphabet in perpetuity.<sup>74</sup> However, Theta Kappa Phi names its Pledge Classes after inanimate objects. Seashells, Melodies, Sandcastles, and Snowflakes made

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<sup>74</sup> Lambda Phi Epsilon used this traditional Greek alphabet system for its Pledge Classes. Omega Sigma Tau, the other Asian American fraternity, does not and uses its own tradition of choosing names that in my opinion are reminiscent of comic-book teams of superheroes: Immortals, Renegades, Guardians, Allies, and Visionaries for example. The naming practices of Chi Alpha Delta are discussed in the body of this chapter

the 1990s classes; and more recently in the 2000s, there are Cascades, Embers, and Lunas.<sup>75</sup>

Rainbow is the first name given to a pledge class, the 1980-81 Pledge Class; but the Rainbows did not know they were Rainbows until after they graduated. The name was accidental and after-the-fact; however, a naming tradition began and was continued.

Andrea: I didn't know we were given a name; we didn't have a name.

Vivian: It was not part of—

Andrea: Noooo, I explained this to Hiroko because she wanted to understand this; and you have to understand a lot of time has passed and my memory isn't the best, but from my recollection, this is how it must have occurred [...].<sup>76</sup>

The Rainbows got their name from a “yucky locker” that the 1980-81 Pledge Class wanted to make look nicer; or as Andrea said, “make it look more cheerful.” Before mobile and digital forms of communication (smart phones, texting, and social media websites) were ubiquitous, the sorority had a locker in the undergraduate library that was the method the members used to communicate with each other.<sup>77</sup> It was the responsibility of the sorority sisters to check this locker everyday to keep abreast of any news related to the sorority. They would also leave notes, pass the notes they took in class, and sometimes leave treats such as candy.

The consumer market was flooded with all things that had rainbows on them: anything and everything had rainbows on them in the early 1980s, according to Andrea,

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<sup>75</sup> The names of the Theta Kappa Phi Pledge Classes are not pseudonyms.

<sup>76</sup> Andrea Interview, 8/22/13.

<sup>77</sup> The Chi Alpha Delta sorority also had a locker in the same library, and the TKP and CAD lockers were near each other.

just like smiley faces were popular in the 70s, the peace sign in the 60s, and Hello Kitty in the late '80s and early '90s. The pledges bought rainbow wrapping paper to decorate the inside of the locker, making the walls colorful and brightening up the space.

Andrea: You couldn't get away from it. There was nothing else to buy.

That was all in the student store, in the card shops. As a result, that's what we just—. We never called ourselves the Rainbows. It just happened, just evolved that way.

Nor does Andrea recall the pledge class after hers "having a name" or being "required to have a name," and she does not know the 1981-82 Pledge Class by a name. Nevertheless, they all had names that were inanimate objects. In 1981-82, the campus store must have sold a lot of items with hearts: that class was called the Hearts. After them came the Stars, Balloons, Sunshines, Ice Cream Castles, Popcorns, Gems, and Peppermints in the 1980s.

Andrea: Often that's how traditions are formulated: by happenstance or someone making something up. I don't know, it just happens. [...] That's how traditions occur, except for the things Margaret puts together because they all have purpose.<sup>78</sup>

Theta Kappa Phi Pledges are "things," inanimate objects that suggest sweetness, cheerfulness, and the femininity of the personal effects that women and girls traditionally like; their names remind me of bright shiny things—things that sparkle and glow.

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<sup>78</sup> "Margaret" is Margaret Ohara: one of the charter members of Theta Kappa Phi. More than any other women in the sorority, Thetas attribute their origins to her. She remained involved with the group until her death in 2000. I have been told that TKP is "her baby." She is the "epitome of a Theta," among other exemplary qualities that all Thetas try to follow her example. Chapter five of this dissertation speaks in more depth and detail about Ohara.

## **Lions, Tigers, and Teddy Bears: Chi Alpha Delta Pledge Class Naming Practices**

Chi Alpha Delta has totems; the sorority gives its Pledge Classes animal names:

Penguins, Scottie Dogs, Turtles, Bunnies, and Monkeys etc.<sup>79</sup> The first animal was a kangaroo; it is the animal name of the 1976-77 Pledge Class. Chi members told me that this naming practice has been in effect earlier, but I have not seen any sorority records that list class animal names before 1976, which I discussed with 2<sup>nd</sup> year Active Rebecca:

Rebecca: What I heard through the grapevine, or that the history we know that, hmmm, during World War II, like, when, like, the sorority had to disband, hmmm, our records got lost. 'Cuz usually fraternities and sororities are named by the alphabet, the Greek alphabet, so like, you know, that I have Pledge bros; their Pledge class is called Beta Gamma or something like that. But for us, like our records got lost, so like we don't know where to start from.

I don't know, for me, I guess the logically thing for me, if I was in that position, I would start with Alpha (Laughs), just 'cuz, you know, start from 'one.' But they decided since we don't know like where we ended the class let's just start with animal names. And that's like when it got started; and since then, it's just been animal names.

Vivian: So you're saying animal names started since after World War—

Rebecca: That's what I think, yeah. But sometime like after World War II.

Vivian: But World War II was like in the [19]40s.

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<sup>79</sup> The names of the Chi Alpha Delta Pledge Classes are not pseudonyms



Sarah: Yeah, it was actually a while ago. Yeah, that's what I heard. I'm not one hundred percent on that.

Vivian: You have, so you think there are animal names all the way back.

Rebecca: Yeah, yeah, so even like at our Charter Day when there are little grandmas that come; they actually, like, they have their own names too.

Vivian: Oh, their own animals.

Rebecca: Yeah.

Vivian: I didn't see that.

I continued to explain that I had only seen animal names documented from 1976 to the present-day in the course of my dissertation research, but I would not describe those alumnae as "little grandmas" today. In a general estimation of ages, women in the Kangaroo class of 1976 would not be over sixty in 2014. While a woman can certainly become a grandmother before her sixties, I would not imagine her as a "little grandma-type." However, I am not twenty years old anymore; although I remember a time when I thought that anyone over forty was "old."

Rebecca: Oh, yeah, I see—

Vivian: But there are little grandmas out there who were, like, you know,

Walruses—

Rebecca: Yeah, yeah, I think so—

Vivian: Or something—

Rebecca: (Laughs) Yeah, yeah. (Laughs)

Vivian: I pick that one 'cuz I don't ever think there's even been a wal—

Rebecca and Vivian (together): Walrus class. (Laughs)

Vivian: So yeah, you know, so there's a little grandma there, like—

Vivian and Rebecca (together): Yay, walrus! (Laughter)

Regardless of the precise year that Chi Alpha Delta began its naming practice, giving its pledge classes' different types of animals names, the act of naming these classes distinguishes and tracks them within the sorority. Each member since 1976 is associated with an animal, and she will refer to herself as this animal much like one refers to the year one graduates from high school and college as the "Class of 'x year'." When a Chi says to other Chi Actives or alumnae they are in the "Lynx class" or a "Lynx," the other sorority members will know the year she pledged in as much as they can remember all the animals names to their corresponding years, which members are made to memorize and are supposed to know by rote.<sup>80</sup>

Furthermore, many of the sorority members I interviewed believed that not only are these animal names used as identifiers to distinguish and delineate Pledges Classes in a historical order, but also the animals' behaviors and traits are indicators of the classes' nature or personality. One young Chi Alumnae used her pledge class' animal as an example: she described the Otter class as "just floating around all happy," which meant that she thought of herself and her pledge sisters as an easygoing, amicable bunch of young women. She continued to say that the members of the Dove class were "super-

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<sup>80</sup> Lynx is the Pledge class of 2013-14. Nineteen "lynxes" crossed in the sorority this year; they are one of the larger Pledge classes in the sorority, in the last five years. The class began the year with twenty-two Pledges, but three women de-pledged (for reasons I do not know nor did I ask.) The sorority extended bids to more than twenty-three UCLA coeds, and the number of women who submitted applications was larger than that list of names from which the President had called to offers bids. However, the sorority was "vague" in those numbers and no member would give me a precise number to those figures. The animal pledge classes I identify in this part of the chapter are the Chi Alpha Delta Pledge Classes; they are not pseudonyms.

girly,” inferring that those sorority sisters had the temperament and nature of doves: gentle, cooing birds. Whereas women in the Wolves Pledge Class were “very intensely aggressive” and divided themselves into small (wolf) packs or cliques, instead of bonding with everyone in their pledge class—or they were reputed to be, at least. Other sorority members also mentioned that the “Wolves” were a challenging group of young women and recalled the class having more strife and personality conflicts than other classes around them.

In addition, there is a “tradition” in the naming custom where Pledge Moms perpetuate the animal’s classification of their pledge class by choosing an animal of a similar type for the incoming pledge class. Therefore, for instance when a feline Pledge class of Chis are seniors who will graduate from the university in the current academic year, their pledge sister from that class who has been elected to the sorority’s Cabinet as the organization’s Pledge Mom will perpetuate its “name” in the sorority by replacing the Pledge class’ animal with another wildcat. There is a pattern of Lions, Tigers, Cougars, Jaguars, and Lynxes in the sorority, for example. Furthermore, there is also the same linear descent for birds: Phoenixes, Doves, Swans, and Ravens. The 2008-09 Dove Pledge Class “replaced” the 2005-06 Phoenix Pledge Class when most of the Phoenixes graduated from the university. The same goes for the 2010-11 Jaguar Pledge Class who are graduating seniors in 2014; the 2013-14 Pledge Class is Lynxes “replacing” the Jaguars, and the Jaguar Pledge Class “replaced” the 2007-08 Cougar Pledge Class. There is even a “run” of animals from the sea: Dolphins, Seals, Penguins, and Otters, but that was broken when the Pledge Mom from the Otter class chose to name her pledges, “Wolves.” This pattern has persisted over the last decade in the sorority beginning in

2005. I have not seen indications that this custom and practice will be discontinued, although the lines of similar or associated animals are intermittent in the historical line of animal names since 1976.

However, there is not a feeling of “kinship” among all the bird classes for example (nor any of those classifications, sea mammal, felines etc.); and as such, this particular sorority genealogy does not denote trans-generational kinship or identify belonging in the way that the sorority’s family-lines names express lineages of great-, grand-, big, and little sisters. I interviewed two Chi Alpha Delta women who were former Pledge Moms when they were Actives in the sorority. Both explained in-depth their thought processes and reasons for choosing the animal names they did for their respective pledge classes; the women gave more significance and value to the traits associated with the animals, i.e., what it symbolizes in a particular culture than the animal’s “cuteness,” (also an important and meaningful aesthetic of the sorority’s value system and pride).<sup>81</sup> For example, the Pledge Mom who was in the Wolf Pledge Class chose “Coyotes” as the “animal” for her incoming pledges, because she had read that coyotes inhabit areas where wolves have become extinct and that fact appealed to her for its symbolism: she was a Senior, and her Wolves’ class was leaving the sorority and graduating from the university at the end of the academic year. She also considered naming the Pledges “sheep,” because she thought they (sheep) would be cute animals/objects to craft; but then she realized that sheep are animals that are “easily led”

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<sup>81</sup> Chi Alpha Delta’s cute aesthetic is discussed in Chapter three of this dissertation.

and just “follow the herd,” and didn't want her "kids," i.e. the incoming Pledge Class, to be (as, like) “sheep.”<sup>82</sup>

While many things in the sorority need the approval or vote of the Active House to be acted upon as a group, the most significant of these are Rush week themes and crafted materials for Rush, the choice of the pledge class' animal name does not. This is solely the Pledge Mom's decision and her choice alone; she tells the sorority what the animal is as the organization is preparing for Rush in the summer. Moreover, as far as I have gathered from interviews, the Pledge Moms have always gotten their way, including one year when a Pledge Mom decided her pledges would be “Teddy Bears.” Technically a teddy bear is not an animal, but then are examples of Pledge classes that are named after mythical animals: Unicorns, Dragons, and Phoenixes.

### **Wearable Chi Sprit and Pride: Sorority Clothing**

Chis demonstrate and display “family pride,” along with the feelings and affections they have in regards to their sorority, or “Chi pride.” Both are “vital,” meaningful and expressively so, and both prides are imbedded in the lives of Chis, as the young women possess inclusively as individuals together in the sorority. Each is proudly embodied, deployed, and employed contemporaneously; and furthermore demonstratively visible as the clothes on their backs: their Greek-letter sweatshirts and jackets. In addition to the sorority colors that are purple/lavender and green, each family has their own colors, which are unique to and self-determined by the family. These colors and the style of clothing (i.e., crewneck or hoodie sweater, windbreaker-jackets, and baseball jerseys) are another tradition that is practiced in the sorority, albeit in smaller groups in the

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<sup>82</sup> Danielle Interview, 3/5/13.

organization. For example, when the Big Sister and her family reveal themselves to the “newest” Little Sister in the current year’s Pledge Class during the sorority’s revelation event, or “Big and Little Revelations” as it is called, the whole family wears a certain, particular article of clothing in colors and styles specific to that family. Then the Pledge receives the same piece of clothing from her Big Sister when she crosses in the sorority and becomes an Active member herself.

In addition, Pledges get “two sets of letters” as new Actives of the sorority who are also called Neophytes in the Greek system: clothing and other material objects (e.g., towels and duffle bags were the most frequent example I saw) with the sorority colors and family colors, which are mutually exclusive when the emblems are manifested on clothes: i.e., an item of clothing either has the sorority’s letter in the sorority’s two colors or another two colors of the sorority family, but not two sets of letter on the article of clothing making four different colors.<sup>83</sup>



Figure 2-4 D.L.D. Family Line Shirts (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)

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<sup>83</sup> Greek-letter sorority and fraternity life or “Greek life” can also be referred to the “Greek system.”



Figure 2-5 Chi Alpha Delta Sorority “letters” (center)  
(Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)



Figure 2-6 Young and Dangerous Family Line Jacket  
(Chi Alpha Delta Facebook Page)

### **Friends for Life**

Chis and Thetas are only made at UCLA. To be a Chi or Theta is to belong to and be a part of an “exclusive group,” even as the organizations themselves are inclusive in the sense that any female undergraduate attending UCLA can be a member of these organizations. They are historically Asian American Greek-letter organizations, but a young woman does not have to be Asian, ethnically, to join them. She just needs to be

enrolled in the university and be able to commit a minimum of two years to the sorority if she does apply to pledge to the group, meaning she cannot be “older” than a Junior in (the university’s) class rank to apply.

When I asked Danielle, a third-year Active, about her sorority; she described the organization and its members as such:<sup>84</sup>

Danielle: What I tell people I know or people during Rush is that we’re the first Asian American sorority. I usually give them a brief overview of the history, like that we started because, like, we weren’t able to be in Panhell, so we started, so, like, we decided to band together, like, as Asian American women. And that’s what we kind of still are: just a group of Asian American women. But, hmmm, all we’re really looking for is to like making good friends, long lasting, lifelong friends, and to make good relations with like other people from all over SoCal, like other sororities and frats, like stuff. Just like—[to] have people to depend on no matter where you are. You can always call them up; and when you’re bored, you can always talk to them. When you have nowhere to stay, you can always stay with them or like whatever. It’s just like a way of getting to know everything around you and like having people who you know will have your back whenever you need it.<sup>85</sup>

Vivian: Is this what someone told you?

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<sup>84</sup> Danielle Interview, 3/5/13.

<sup>85</sup> “Panhell” is short for Panhellenic. The Panhellenic sororities are the traditionally white-Greek sororities, in that they excluded non-White women when they were established and maintained such exclusionary practices during some of their history as Greek-letter sororities. “SoCal” is short for Southern California. “Frats” is short for fraternities.



Danielle: I think this is what I've experienced. (Pause) .... (Laughs) I think we're really fun; we always have a good time with Chis. Yeah, we cook and craft. And hmmm, ... I don't know, like—(Pause) I don't know how to describe it. (Laughs) It's is just what, what we are, hmm.... (Pause) think we're really caring, hmmm, I mean we really care about each other a lot.

Danielle paused again at this point. She might have been thinking if there was more she could say; or maybe she just “got lost” in that thought, because she did not speak again until I asked another question. Chis feel deeply the friendships they have made with each other through the sorority, and those relationships endure beyond their years at UCLA.

Thetas also experience the same lasting, lifelong friendship in a sisterhood of their own; and in fact, sisterhood in and of itself—that “bond and a sense of belonging”—is Theta Kappa Phi's *raison d'être* more than anything else the sorority does as a group: the gift-giving among Pledge class and families, and all the cooking they also do. As an older alumna from the 1980s, Andrea cautions the young women in TKP not to get caught up in materialism of their contemporary youth generations.

Andrea: The gift giving, the food, to me that part of the sorority kinda takes away the real purpose of why a sorority.

Vivian: Which is, what is that purpose?

Andrea: It's to provide sisterhood and friendship, a sense of community, a sense of women with a common goal and bond, and a sense of belonging. [... ] I think building the sisterhood is a priceless task. It doesn't mean buying gifts and cooking. I think being there for one another and sharing

experiences, hmmm, in a non-monetary, in a non-tangible item are what counts, and what the purpose of a sorority is.<sup>86</sup>

Sisterhood is a feeling; it is affective and affecting. It is shared and transcendent, yet also intimate and ephemeral.

Vivian: So clearly, Chi means a lot to you; it means a lot to so many Chis I talked to. The word sisterhood—I found friendship, sisterhood. Amidst all the other drama, the cattiness, whatever—

Susan: That’s part of the sisterhood—

Vivian: So what does that mean to you?

Susan: In the context of Chis?

Vivian: Yeah, yeah, what is that sisterhood? Chis. What did you get, you know?

Susan: [...] Hmmm, I think...I start to view friendships differently. Hmmm, I started to—. I didn’t realize you could have traditions with friends. You know, like, I understood it with family, but I didn’t understand it with groups. There’s something important with that for me. Hmmm, I think I’ve used this phrase before, but it’s almost like I’ve come home or that I could just relax ‘cuz these are my people, for better or worst. Right, you know? Whether they were the perfect—whether they would become my best friend or someone I would just say ‘hello’ to, but there’s just something about us as a collective. Even now when I run into Chis—. (Pause) When I was working with that woman in the kitchen [at

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<sup>86</sup> Andrea Interview, 8/22/13.

an Asian American social justice organization community event] and we're just working like clockwork and we're just having so much fun. And then she goes, 'Oh my god, I was a Chi.' How it came up—we both went to UCLA and, 'I was in an Asian American sorority.' And I go, 'Oh my gosh, I was a Chi!' 'And so was I!' And somehow like we just knew. That moment, that moment, just felt so—. Hmmm, I think whether I'm an Active or not, there's this connection to this group that is beyond me and that continues. And I do love that we're only one. We're it, right; so there's a part of that. And there's not really that many of us in the world.<sup>87</sup>

Hmmm, but I think that there's some basic sensibilities. Maybe it's the cute that all caught us—. There's just some bond that whether I was their advisor, like a Lindsey; or whether I was just friends with them and I had no experience with them as Chis. Like my two friends now, we didn't cross—our paths didn't cross. They were gone by the time I joined, but I'm good friends with them, like they're the people I see at Christmas or whatever or keep in touch with. Then, but, there's something; it's like a touchstone for me in my life. I don't think about it everyday or seek it out—I mean some people on Facebook who still do a lot of Chi stuff....

Yeah, I mean, I think, it, for me—I'm very, very, very, happy it's a part of my life and it definitely shaped me in my activism, my work; it

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<sup>87</sup> Referring to the fact that Chi Alpha Delta at UCLA is the one and only chapter of the sorority; or to say in Greek-letter organizations parlance: the sorority is its Alpha and Omega Chapter.

kinda helped define my leadership as I said, and it also grounded me in a lot of friendships, probably for the rest of my life. I don't have family ties or the Pledge class ties, but if I see or talk to them [Chis], like, I'm happy.<sup>88</sup>

More than just experiences in one's college career that occurred as single, isolated incidents or a series of events over a period of time, the Chi experience transcends beyond one's college years; it means lifelong friendship and belonging in a rare sisterhood, only made in LA—UCLA.

Chis and Thetas know it, they feel it: the sisterhood they share in their groups. In this chapter, I have endeavored to intimate how an Asian American sorority becomes an Asian American sisterhood through kinship, shared identities, and communal histories. Sisterhood is the process of making affective social relationship; the personal production of belonging animated and evidenced in the collective experiences sorority members embody, share, and perpetuate through histories and traditions, genealogies and legacies. Collective memory-keeping practices are transmitted through the sorority “archival bodies” with effects and affects, tending the corps and corpus: sorority sisters and sisterhood.

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<sup>88</sup> Susan Interview, 7/6/13.

## Chapter 3

### Crafting Sisterhood

Ah, lives of men! When prosperous they glitter –

- Aeschylus

There's a stranger in my bed,  
There's a pounding in my head  
Glitter all over the room  
Pink flamingos in the pool

- *Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)*, Katy Perry  
(singer)

Crafting is alive and well, active with meaning and purpose, for the sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta in the twenty-first century. It has persisted and prevailed as a resource rich in cultural value and steeped in organizational pride and tradition for modern-day Chis, undergraduates at one of the premiere public university systems in the United States.<sup>89</sup>

Chi crafting has a reputation and status, bar none, and befitting the student group's history as the oldest Asian American sorority in the nation. Young women must be accepted to UCLA before they can be Chis; the Chi Alpha Delta sorority is only organized at the institution where it was first established in 1928 and chartered the next year.

Chis are proud of their exclusivity to UCLA when compared to other Asian American-interest sororities founded after them that are more widely known because of their (the other Asian Greek sororities) many chapters across the United States. Or as one

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<sup>89</sup> Chi/s is the nickname of Chi Alpha Delta. It is used to refer to both the sorority and its members. It is pronounced "kai."

undergraduate from the 2010s who pledged CAD as a first-year student said: “I love, love, love for Chis to have a bigger network, like outside UCLA; but at the same time, I’m glad we’re not some f-up sorority because we’ve strayed too far from the traditions. I’m really impressed how we keep everything so—someone did this fifteen years ago and I just did it, you know, which is really nice.”<sup>90</sup> The bonds Chis share run deep, transcending time and space. They span different generations of Asian women in America, the diversity of their lived experiences and multi-Asian ethnicities. The sense of “connection to the girls” and the sorority’s extensive history were ideas and emotions that many of the women I interviewed talk intently about.

Julie: The longevity, I definitely think that one of the things that drew me to it was the history, you know; and I think that was the biggest selling point, I remember, especially at Mrs. Kato’s house. Like we’re you know the oldest Asian sorority. And then she talked about being in an internment camp. And you’re like, “Wow! This is like living history!” Hmm, even though I’m not of Japanese descent, but you can still relate as an Asian American. [...] ...[Y]ou saw just, “Wow!” It’s wasn’t, just wasn’t—It was very deep. It ran deeper than, you know—

Kimi: Partying and the social activities. It really was about the relationships and the connections they had.<sup>91</sup>

Besides its singular history and the depth of the sisterhood forged among the women, when I asked what made their sorority unique the refrain I heard from many young Chis

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<sup>90</sup> Amanda Interview, 5/18//13. This is a pseudonym; pseudonyms are used in this chapter unless otherwise noted.

<sup>91</sup> Kimi and Julie Interview, 3/24/13.

was, “Chis are classy, crafty, and can cook.” The lengths and ways these young women demonstrate and display their “craftiness” in the twenty-first century continues to identify and distinguish Chi Alpha Delta: the pride and prestige of being the first Asian American sisterhood in the country—crafting better than all the rest.

In this chapter I discuss the ways in which Chi crafts and the collective customs the sorority uses to make these handmade objects that display and discipline the sisterhood of Chi Alpha Delta—Asian American women who form enduring social relationships with their sorority sisters as Active members. The sorority’s crafted objects (small trinkets, name badges, pillows, quilts, and elaborately decorated, plastic containers) are quotidian things that decorate any college student’s room, but when made by Chis to give to Chis, these things become the sentimental objects that the sorority members keep around them as reminders of the sisterhood they share. They are the personal effects that populate their intimate archives and represent their affects and affections: the sentimental belongings to the community of women who call themselves Chis. I contend that Chi crafting is an ongoing “creative project,” a piece of work and work in progress, that keeps the sorority’s communal histories and memories “alive,” preserving and perpetuating the shared experiences and collective identities of Chi Alpha Delta Actives and alumnae across time and space. Crafting unites Chis in a common cultural practice and sorority tradition that is also an artful source of satisfaction, handcrafting sisterhood since 1929.

## **Crafting Identities, Crafting Chis**

Anthropologist Dorinne Kondo describes identity as a “creative process,” identity is a life-long process where the individual-self is “crafted” through her performance of “selves” in relationship to people (or other “selves”) in her everyday life and social relationships. Identity is processual, unfixed and mutable; and one can have multiple identities or many “selves” that act in concert with other peoples’ “selves” while maintaining her own “selves” identities. In other words, collective identities and individual identities are not mutually exclusive.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, it is the very multiplicity of identities that empower, engage, and animate one’s affinities and associations with different, diverse groups in society—racial, ethnic, community-based, professional/work, and kinship etc.

Chi Alpha Delta is not the only sorority that crafts; there is some amount of crafting to be done in many sororities, and those sorority sisters are required to do such tasks much like the Chis do when making their (Chi) crafts. For example, many sororities decorate paddles: wooden boards that the active members hand paint and adorn with ribbons, pretty baubles, and photographs to give to their Little Sisters.<sup>93</sup> Another activity that cuts across all the Greek-letter sororities is scrapbooking. Such “memory books” and photo albums typify the sentimental records that a sorority keeps to remember all the “good times” the sisters shared during the year. Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi have a long tradition of making scrapbooks in their organizations. Both

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<sup>92</sup> Dorinne Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1990).

<sup>93</sup> Paddles are very much associated with Greek-letter fraternities also. They are painted, but not extravagantly adorned or decorated. The two Asian Greek fraternities at UCLA have collections of paddles that commemorate their organizations.



sororities have a historian on their Executive Cabinets who makes the scrapbook for that year, which serves as the sororities' historical records. The older scrapbooks from the twentieth century are deposited in the university's Special Collection Department. Both sororities have "official archives," administrative and alumnae record collections housed by the university for archival preservation purposes, but Chis and Thetas keep their most current scrapbooks from 2000s circulating in the Active House and bring them out during Rush Week and Charter Day.<sup>94</sup> The various sororities at UCLA displayed scrapbooks at their tables during the student activities fair at the beginning of the school year. Sorority scrapbooks and photo albums are used to attract Rushees to the sorority by showing them all the "fun" and "friends" they would have if they joined the respective groups of sisters that the photographs document. I have flipped through the scrapbooks of Latina and Multicultural and Multi-interest sororities, as well as looked at the Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi scrapbooks during their sorority events.

Crafts and crafting in and of themselves do not differentiate Chi Alpha Delta from other Greek-letter organizations or even the other historically Asian American sorority at UCLA. These days Thetas craft as much as their sister sorority, but they are not known for their crafting in the same manner as Chis. Crafting does not have the same collective value and historical resonance in the Theta Kappa Phi sorority, although Thetas handcraft many of the same small craft items (name tags, small throw pillows, bins) similar to their

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<sup>94</sup> Charter Day, also called Founders Day, is an annual event that celebrates the establishment of the sorority. Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi celebrate their Charter Day in the Spring. Charter Day is one of several social events they have during the year that is a "sisterhood event." Sisterhood events are private events for Actives and Alumnae of the organization. They are most often closed to those who are not members of the sorority, unless otherwise invited by the sorority. Sisterhood events also require the full attendance of the sorority Active House during the year.

Chi sorority sisters. However, unlike their Chi sorority sisters, Thetas are not known as crafters historically or in the present-day. Although they craft well as a group, they do not possess the material cultural practice as part of their shared histories, traditions, and experiences. A few older Theta alumnae I interviewed expressed their personal preferences and desire to see the Active House do less crafting out of concern it takes time away from the young women's schoolwork and studies. However, the younger generations of Theta persist in producing crafts at the level of skill that keeps up with their contemporary Chi Alpha Delta sisters. The Chis are similarly aware of the crafting that their Theta sisters do during the year, but the Chi actives and alumnae I talked with spoke with confidence and pride that the finer quality of their crafts were instinctively and distinctly recognizable from their sister sorority's handiwork, especially if one looked at Chi and Theta nametags side by side, which Rebecca, a second-year Chi Active, and I did in her apartment after our interview.<sup>95</sup> She and her Theta roommate displayed their sorority's Rush nametags in the respective corners of their rooms.

Chi crafts are notable for the manner in which the Chis themselves use their crafts to actively produce their identities collectively and individually, which are like badges of skill level and quality handiwork in the organization. The young Actives and alumnae I spoke with were self-conscious of their crafting abilities, displaying modesty, chagrin, pleasure, and good humor about the adeptness they possessed or woefully lacked. Chis have their own craft titles and reputations that are assessed and ranked internally by the young women when large-scale crafting tasks are assigned in the House. Crafting standards are applied and policed in the sorority. On separate occasions, two different

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<sup>95</sup> Rebecca Interview, 5/13/13

young women told me they took paper cutting and gluing tests before being allowed on the production line to make the Rush nametags. Rebecca shared with me that she failed those tests much to the vexation of her pledge sisters and her chagrin, although she was able to redeem herself to her sorority sisters in other crafting means.<sup>96</sup>

Handicrafts are ways of “doing” and “knowing” housed in the sorority’s collective consciousness and conditioned in every Pledge. Chloe, a second-year Active, described crafting as bond in the sorority, literally: if one joins CAD, one agrees to craft. “Once you come in to our sorority, you just know,” said Chloe, “Chi’s have a tra—they’re just, we’re just known for being very ‘crafty;’ and so you don’t—you just kind of practice.”<sup>97</sup> Chis are “crafty” and Chis keenly care to continue their craftiness for generations to come. They are a group of crafting women in theory and practice, which makes them one-of-a-kind and a community of their own making.

Two Pledge Sisters who were Actives in the early 1990s could still recall the demands of crafting when I talked with them years later.

Julie: You had to be good with a glue gun, puffy paint, and those paint pens. And if you weren’t good, it wasn’t good for your little sister.

Kimi: No it wasn’t—I wasn’t. (Laughs) It was kinda of embarrassing, ‘cuz there were a lot of good crafty people—a lot of girls who could sew too.

Julie: Could sew, were crafty; and not only crafting, but the cute writing.

Kimi: Yeah. You were one of those, Julie. She was. (Laughs) I was not a crafty one.

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<sup>96</sup> Rebecca Interview, 5/13/13.

<sup>97</sup> Chloe Interview, 2/26/13.

Julie: I was a crafty one.

Vivian: There were some Chis who said they weren't crafty, but they still survived it.

Kimi: Yeah, I survived it, but it wasn't anything pleasant. (Laughs)<sup>98</sup>

The crafting spirit remains strong in the sorority, and some crafting memories and recollections are long lasting as well. The practice pervades the structure of the organization at every level; it is required of every woman in the sorority, from Pledges up to senior Actives. Moreover, it distinguishes a young woman's place and position, her status and rank, as a Pledge, Active, and Big or Little Sister in her sorority family.

Crafting is compulsory regardless of a young woman's personal preferences. The commitment to the "collective good" of these acts of domesticity (hand-making sentimental objects, cooking homemade dishes etc.) supersedes her willingness and natural abilities to make things with her hands. Some women who join the organization enjoy the time they spend doing such "domestic activities." They take on these "chores" on behalf of the sorority as hobbies in college that give them creative outlets to express themselves and a leisure activity to relieve the stress of school work. Danielle, a third-year Active, told me she finds it "relaxing," because the repetitive motions of the tasks are "mindless."<sup>99</sup> Cooking and crafting are prescribed acts in Chi Alpha Delta: the kinds of things one should craft and cook further identify a young woman's position in the sorority and her sorority family. For example, the more seniority she has in the sorority, the less she needs to cook for the Asian Greek social events with the local Asian

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<sup>98</sup> Kimi and Julie Interview, 3/24/13.

<sup>99</sup> Danielle Interview, 3/5/13.

American fraternities.<sup>100</sup> Pledges cook the most for these events: two main dishes or entrees. While third-year Actives only need to make an appetizer or dessert if they are going to the party.

Chi craft a repertory of sentimental objects. Sewing is a consistent skill exhibited in the many things that Chi craft. Jessica, a third-year Active, said: “I feel that you can’t really be a Chi and not have had an attempt at sewing or learning how to sew in some way, shape, or form. Like making pillows like as gift tokens whatever or like sewing quilts, whatever.”<sup>101</sup> In addition, other Chi alumnae have remarked that the first and only time they ever have sewed was when they were Actives in the sorority. However, some Chi knew how to sew—and skillfully so—before they pledged to the sorority. Furthermore, they continued sewing in Chi Alpha Delta much to the appreciation of their sorority sisters considering just how much sewing is involved in Chi crafting, and the ways the organization deploys and employs sewing to great effect and affect in the sisterhood.

Many of the young women make pillows and blankets for each other as gifts. Some sorority families have specifications for these items that need to be met when a Big Sister is making a craft object for her Little Sister, as well as a prescribed time of the year the gift is given. It is not uncommon to go to the women’s apartments and see pillows of all shapes and sizes thrown around their rooms and their beds covered in blankets that have their names and Chi’s Greek letters stitched on the corners or borders. Chloe

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<sup>100</sup> These social events are called “Exchanges” in the Asian American Greek System vernacular. They are with the Asian American fraternities in California that have a relationship with Chi Alpha Delta, either historically or through the Asian Greek Council (AGC).

<sup>101</sup> Jessica Interview, 2/19/13.

decorates her bed with a pillow in the shape of an apple: a gift from her Little Sister who Chloe affectionately calls her “little apple.” Mallory, a young Alumna, brought out a bundle of blankets that she had received over the years in the sorority from members of her (sorority) family to show me after we talked.<sup>102</sup>

Furthermore, Big Sisters customarily decorate plastic containers for their little sisters and brothers throughout the year. These containers, called “bins” in the sorority’s popular vernacular, when filled with snacks and treats act as care packages for their Asian Greek young siblings. Otherwise, they are made as gifts for special occasions on the sorority’s social calendar.<sup>103</sup> Large storage container size bins with elaborate designs and graphics on the side are traditionally given to Pledges at Informals and the newly crossed Pledges or Neophytes at Formals.<sup>104</sup> These bins take time to decorate because of

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<sup>102</sup> Mallory Interview, 10/16/13.

<sup>103</sup> What the sorority calls “bins” are plastic containers that can be of any size ranging from Tupperware containers to large banker-size boxes. A quick tour around The Container Store can provide an example of the variety of “bins” available for decorating. As late as the 1990s, Chis were decorating large wicker baskets with ribbon, lace, glitter, and paint for each other. However, somewhere in those intervening years and by the early 2000s, the sorority moved to decorating plastic storage containers/bins.

<sup>104</sup> Informals and Formals are the two biggest social events on the sorority’s social calendar. They hold much significance to the sorority sisters. There are ritualized practices performed at these two occasions that are solemn ceremonies in the sorority and symbolic of the sisterhood to which these sisters belong. These ceremonies are the private portions of the evening and the sorority goes into to a separate room to do them, while their escorts and guests wait in the room where dinner is served at these events. Customarily the young women bring dates, called “escorts,” for the evenings—most often young men from their brother fraternities around Southern California. Chis have described these events like prom night and I will add that they seem similar to a loud and boisterous wedding reception. They are usually held in hotel ballrooms and are all-day affairs of picture taking, dinner, and presentations of the sorority’s current group of Pledges or Neophytes (the Pledges that crossed during the year, if it is Formals). The attire is formal for both the women and men; Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi specify the color and length color of the dresses and certain accessories that must accompany their outfits (e.g., length and color of gloves, color and type of shoes, color of stockings etc.) The clothes the sorority sisters wear at Informals and Formals are one of

the techniques used to apply glitter to plastic, which is different from glittering paper with glue. Big Sisters start days before those events to prepare these bins for their little sisters—or they should. Chi alumnae mentioned in conversations that this was not always the case, and they have resorted to pulling all-night crafting sessions to complete the bins for events the next day. They used hairdryers to speed the drying time between the layers of glitter applied to the designs on the sides of the box, when better time management would allow for the layers to air dry.

### **Cuteness: The Aesthetics, Appeal, and Consumption of *Kawaii***

What is cute? Chis say they know “cute” when they see it in their crafts, but apart from a feeling, what makes something (or someone for that matter) cute—adorable, endearing, lovable etc.? Cute/ness is subjective; it is a personal judgment call, matter of individual tastes, and elicits an emotional response or reaction—ah, that’s so cute! Like beauty, cute is in the eye of the beholder: one person’s “cute” could be another person’s “ugly.” Likewise, a culture’s “cute,” differs from what another culture deems as “cute,” “sweet,” and “pretty.” Babies, for example, are cute and darling to some, but ugly and always crying to others, although babies are identified as having the traits of cuteness.

Ethnologist Konrad Lorenz associated cuteness with a set of features found in babies (human and other animals). He called it the “baby schema;” and according to Lorenz,

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the most enduring traditions of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi, although the clothes vary between the organizations. While women’s fashions change and one can see the latest styles of any particular decade in the historical photographs of both sororities, the color and length do not alter even if the fashion of the dresses do.

human beings feel affection toward animals that exhibit the following: big eyes, wide foreheads, and small chins—facial features typical of babies.<sup>105</sup>

“Cuteness” is also an aesthetic; and nowhere is cute more widely displayed, desired, and distributed than contemporary Japanese culture. Sociologist Soichi Masubuchi writes that “cute” and “neat” have supplanted “beautiful” and “refined” as Japanese aesthetics, and *kawaii* (Japanese for cute, adorable) is embraced as Japan’s national identity.<sup>106</sup> Japan produces many “cute things,” small goods designed with attributes of cuteness. The country has exported its brand of *kawaii* since the 1980s, flooding the global marketplace with cartoon characters such as Pikachu from the *Pokemon anime* series and Sanrio Corporation’s Hello Kitty and Friends.<sup>107</sup> *Kawaii* as a cultural phenomenon in Japan has become the country’s “national resource” by fueling and feeding an increasingly global consumer culture that wants Asian-made *kawaii* small goods.<sup>108</sup> Anthropologist Christine Yano discusses Japan’s exporting of *kawaii*, or what she calls “Japanese Cute-Cool,” through the globalization of Hello Kitty, the cat character with a red bow and no mouth that is the icon of cute for many people, regardless of their age or gender. Hello Kitty is a global cultural and consumer phenomenon (—whether

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<sup>105</sup> Konard Lorenz, *Studies of Animal and Human Behavior* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>106</sup> Souichi Masubuchi, *Kawaii Shokogun* [Cute treatise] (Tokyo: Nihon Hoso Shuppan Kyokai, 1994).

<sup>107</sup> Anne Allison, “Cuteness as Japan’s Millennial Project,” in *Pikachu’s Global Adventures: The Rise and Fall of Pokemon*, edited by Joseph Tobin, 34-39 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>108</sup> The consumer consumption, affects, and aesthetics of *kawaii* is well-studied in academia, and scholarship since the 1990s has explored and critiqued “cute” and “cuteness” across different cultures, populations, and mass media in Western-North American and Asian societies. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to account for and catalog all these discourses; this body of work is readily accessible and widely accessed: my bibliography includes the texts I referenced in my dissertation research.



you like her or not).<sup>109</sup> In addition, the Hello Kitty brand is used to sell beer and decorate planes.<sup>110</sup> The international air carrier, Eva Air, has several Hello Kitty themed planes that fly Asia flight routes. Scholars and business people realize that cute sells material things and creates the desire for something immaterial yet unmistakable; cuteness is effect and affect in one adorably attractive package. Chis understand cute intimately and they know how to make its effects and affects *en masse*.

### **Chi *Kawaii*: Rush Crafting**

Chi crafts are cute and the heights of cuteness they consistently achieve and regularly surpass are impressive. The sorority puts their abundance of cute on display during Rush Week and distributes cuteness in mass quantities to the Rushees as nametags, parting gifts for rushing the sorority, and prizes for the winners of ice-breaker games they play at their Rush events. Chloe was in charge of planning the CAD Rush Week when she was a first-year Active and explained the work of making the nametags.

Chloe: Chis, for Rush, is very intense. We basically make every single nametag. So it's just not, "Hello, my name is." It's literally a nametag based on the theme and each person will have a nametag. Rushees get a certain nametag; Actives get a certain nametag, like members of the House; and Alumni get a certain nametag. And there are four nights, so that's basically twelve—three different nametags times four nights is

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<sup>109</sup> Christine R. Yano, *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek Across the Pacific* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>110</sup> For more about the Hello Kitty phenomenon, see Christine R. Yano's *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek Across the Pacific*. This ethnography discusses in length and at detail the information I glossed. I referenced her scholarship, as well as the work of other "*kawaii*" scholars in my dissertation research.

twelve different nametags. But think mass production, think about mass-producing for Rushees seventy of those; for Social Night you're making 150; and for Actives you're making however many are in the House, so least forty in case you mess-up on someone's name. For Alumni you're making ten to fifteen just to see if they come [to] the event, each Rush event. So, it takes forever; everything is handmade. I don't know if you want to see them now.

Vivian: Oh sure, if you wanna. [*We walk to her bedroom*]

Chloe: Chis are very well known for their crafting skills—very, very, very known.

Vivian: Okay.

Chloe: I was Rush Chair my first-year Active and that's 'cuz I had such an amazing Rush experience myself. So, I'll show you, this was my rush theme....<sup>111</sup>

Chloe proceeded to give me a pleasant show and tell of her collection of nametags. Chloe had the only complete collection of the Rush nametags that I have seen from the CAD Rushes. She also collected a complete set of all twelve from the following year. All twenty-four of those nametags are a remarkable sight seen as a collection, and equally impressive are the various individual types of nametags lined up in tidy rows on the welcome table at the Rush events. Even Chis say they are amazed when they see the nametags laid out so neatly, displaying their accomplishments in the summer months leading to Rush Week.

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<sup>111</sup> Chloe Interview, 2/16/13.



Figure 3-1 Chi Alpha Delta Rush Nametags, yr. 2010. (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)



Figure 3-2 Chi Alpha Delta Rush Nametags, yr. 2011. (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)

Rushees receive the cutest nametags, and the sorority votes to rank the cuteness of the nametags as a group during the process of designing and assembling them, which is usually done during the summer break. Although no Chi could explain what defined “cuteness” in her eyes, this is what I observed in terms of aesthetics: different textures, dimensionality, mixed media, and glitter all around, accenting and outlining part and pieces of the nametag. There are also many animals found on the nametags: lions, foxes, raccoons, and snails have been handcrafted in the last several years. “Feel the nose, it’s fuzzy,” said Whitney, a second-year Active, sitting as the sorority’s welcome table at Rush, as I was handed a nametag made in the shape of fox sitting upright on a log to wear before I joined the garden party in the backyard of a Chi alumna’s house, “That was my

idea.” I touched the tiny black “nose,” smaller than a pea, on the fox nametag with my fingertip and felt the paper’s velvet texture. It was subtle, but perceptible; however, I would not have known if Whitney had not directed my touch.

Chis give little things a lot of attention. Small paper goldfish were raised and cut with incisions where even smaller paper fins were inserted and popped up, and then glued to fishbowl-shaped nametags with gold glitter gravel at the bottom of the bowl. A first-year Chi Active informed me that “something needs to move during Rush,” referring to at least one craft object that Chis make for that week’s events, after I noticed I could spin the hands of the paper-made clock on a chain around the alligator pillow. A small Ferris wheel made from pliable wires rotated on the Active nametags for the Garden Party event another year. Masubuchi listed seven elements of *kawaii* in his treatise of cuteness: smallness, naiveté and innocence, youth, dependency (*amae*), roundness, pastel colors, and animal-like qualities.<sup>112</sup> Chis satisfy the majority of those cuteness essentials from their imaginations, individually and collectively, when they propose and produce the annual assortment of *kawaii* for Rush.

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<sup>112</sup> Masubuchi, 1994.



Figure 3-3 Chi Alpha Delta Rush Nametags, yr. 2013. (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)

A nametag undergoes a development process: designs are proposed and mock-ups are made, evaluated, and approved (or not) by the Active House, before any one of the twelve nametags gets mass-produced for Rush Week. For as much pride and pleasure the young women feel about their completed products, they are also disappointed when their designs are rejected because of the time and effort they invested in the prototypes. Chi-crafted nametags also receive a critique of the workmanship from the sorority and collective scrutiny, as much as they (the nametags) also benefit from the collective crafting experience from the members of the Active House. A young alumna who was an Active member during the 2000s showed me the nametags she kept from her years at the university, including a nametag she made herself.

Brooke: This was one that got rejected.

Vivian: Awe, it got rejected.

Brooke: I worked really hard on it and I was really sad. I was like, ‘guys, come-on.

Vivian: This is a prototype.

Brooke: [...] Yeah, I kept it because I worked so hard on it, and they rejected it, and I was, ‘damn.’ [...] They said it was too big.

Vivian: The fan? (On the nametag was a piece of paper folded into the shape of a fan.)

Brooke: Yeah.

Vivian: Yeah, they didn’t kinda wanna help you—

Brooke: It would be difficult to make it smaller and I’m not really good at making all that small stuff, so. [...] Yeah, I tried.

Brooke and I spent twenty minutes looking at her mementos from the sorority. While she mused on the amount of stuff that she kept from the experiences she had over five year ago, I benefited from her personal archives and the selected memories and residual feelings those small objects evoked.

Vivian: Oh god, look at the detailing.

Brooke: Yeah, I didn’t make that one. [...]

Vivian: I noticed--. Someone told me that you can usually tell the difference between—

Brooke: Oh, a Chi nametag and a Theta nametag.

Vivian: (Laughs) That too.

Brooke: (Laughs) I hear that one a lot. (Laughs)

Vivian: What is the difference, you think?

Brooke: Oh well, Thetas usually have bigger things on theirs [nametags].

For example, people were like “that looks like a Theta nametag” [referring to her rejected nametag]. And I was like I don’t know if you mean that as an insult or compliment, but okay. ‘Cuz their add-ons are not as small and minute, and sometimes I’m like, guys, “Come on already, you’re thinking way too hard about this [...].” I mean, I guess in general, they’re not as detailed supposedly, but I mean that just could be bias speaking. I have no idea.<sup>113</sup> (Laughs)

Chi Alpha Delta’s Rush nametags are detailed by design: many small details screened, examined, and assembled in a quality-controlled environment. Chi crafting is rigorous work; not everyone can do it, and nor even every Chi apparently. However, all members try for the good of the sisterhood. Chis are crafty (and many highly, creatively and skillfully so), but they craft with a purpose and in service to their sorority.

The sorority’s collective crafting effort is most on display during Rush Week. If one goes to a Chi Rush event, one will get a small parting gift; and if one is luckier, one might collect a prize for winning the ice-breaker game. Those are some of the most coveted objects by the sorority sisters, alumnae, and Rushees alike. In the past, these prizes included handmade tote bags and pillows in the shape of stars, alligators, and ring-shaped life preservers. While all the Actives help for Rush Week, the crafting for the week’s events is spearheaded by the first-year Actives, the youngest class in the sorority

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<sup>113</sup> Brooke Interview, 10/6/13.



who take charge of the decorations, nametags, party favors, and prizes that compose and comprise each of the four-themed events. Rush Week is a big production for the sorority, and it is a copious amount of work for the young women, which they do under pressure and hard deadlines. Rebecca explained how much time and effort went into those twelve nametags I saw in Chloe's room.

Rebecca: Rush was definitely memorable, us putting on Rush. It was like the most stressful time of life, yeah, incredibly stressful.

Vivian: Why?

Rebecca: Well, because, for us, I guess for every year it happens, but when Zero Week rolls around, aaah, we weren't done with any—like we didn't finish anything.

Vivian: You guys weren't done?

Rebecca: We weren't done. 'Cuz we had to mass-produce like seventy of each and we had like fifty or so maybe, something like that. It was so stressful. Then like during the day we had to go out to our events and at night, we go out to the guys' events. And then that means when we come back which is like two or three in the morning, we have to come back and craft and do that 'til morning again 'til we have the next event. Like during that week was the most stressful time of my life, yeah. (Laughs)  
Hmmm, I remember at one point, like Chloe, we had got into an argument—like somebody got into an argument, and Chloe was fed up 'cuz she was stressed out and she like threw down her scissors and stormed out and slammed the door. And then she came back like ten

minutes later—“okay let’s do this.” And it’s just so funny, we think back now how tense it was; it was silly. (Laughs) Yeah.”<sup>114</sup>

Other sorority sisters share Rebecca’s feelings when they got caught up in the delicate work of cutting little pieces that are put through an assembly line that produces up to one hundred nametags that appear identical although many Chis’ hands have cut, glittered, tied, and twisted the twenty odd parts, and handed-off all those pieces in plastic zip-lock bags to their sorority sisters until the sets of nametags are fully assembled

Brooke: I just feel like every year, they’re like make sure that they are detailed. It’s the details that make the small things important.

Vivian: Ah, it’s the details.

Brooke: Yeah.

Vivian: I mean look at this little stem.

Brooke: Uh, I know it’s insane, and you know the worst part is that some poor girl or some poor couple of girls had to sit there cutting out these little, little, little stems, like probably two hundred of these for the nametag. Some one else had to glue it, some else had to cut out the leaf, so the assembly of these is like insane. [...] Yeah, it’s intense and it’s so fun to look back because I don’t have to do it anymore.

As “insane” as the assembly line is for making these nametags, it is intricate, tedious and time-consuming labor that the Active House not only dutifully commit time (and stress), but it also transmits this collective process, *en masse*, to the successive generations of

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<sup>114</sup> Rebecca Interview, 5/17/13.

sorority sisters, continuing Chis' shared crafting identities as remarkable as the objects they craft.



Figure 3-4 Alligator pillows, yr. 2013. (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)

### **The Occasions Chis Craft for Themselves: Informals and Formals**

Crafters take pleasure in the personal touch; they enjoy making things with their hands. They will craft even when they could easily buy the item or object they are making, or at least something similar, if not exactly the same. In our modern day, consumer-driven, labor market economy, mass-produced small goods and products are well made and affordable, so that consumers are not required to make the everyday things that they need, want, and/or like. Furthermore, today's consumer goods are even labeled and marketed as "crafted" or "handcrafted" by companies to forefront the artisanal qualities of their designs and production. Crafting is still more a choice for the majority of American society and a leisure activity. While some enthusiastic crafters with entrepreneurial

spirits might try to sell their wares at craft fairs, local stores, or from virtual storefronts on the World Wide Web, most crafters are hobbyists. They are considered non-professionals even as they can be very skilled and sophisticated in their handiwork; crafting is an avocation at most and best for them.

Chi craft a lot, this they will admit: “It *definitely* is a *huge* part of our culture,” said Rebecca.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, as any sustainable culture that persists (and thrives) in a community, the Chi craft culture requires perpetual buy-in from the young women in the organization, year after year, with each entering Pledge Class. Chi craft culture continues because there is a certain level of commitment from the sorority “body politic,” a tacit agreement down the line that everybody crafts at some point, regardless of one’s personal desire or fondness. The young women of Chi Alpha Delta accept that they craft for good of the sorority, so to speak, much like they vow to uphold the CAD constitution when they become a member of the organization.

Even though crafting is not the end-all of Chi sisterhood, the sorority’s crafting reputation is an aspect of its collective identities that the young women work to uphold with pride—or some serious effort, as well as some loss of sleep at least. “Like for Rush, we craft to attract girls, ‘Oh, that’s so cute, you know,’” said Amanda, a third-year Active, “but then like Informals and Formals and stuff, crafting is like for sentimental value, ‘cuz you know you’re putting your time and effort into it—I can totally understand that.” “Uh, but I’m just not good at it,” she added with an apologetic laugh.<sup>116</sup> Chi who profess a dislike of crafting and/or lack skills and creativity participate in crafting things

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<sup>115</sup> Rebecca Interview, 5/17/13. Emphasis mine.

<sup>116</sup> Amanda Interview, 5/18/13.

when the occasions call for it, because they accept and understand its value and importance within the sorority and the purposes it serves—it is their duty to craft. Although Amanda’s craft-making skills are lamentable, she admitted that crafting is a necessary activity, “Yeah, yeah, it’s important, especially at big events, Informals and Formals; everyone crafts those times because it’s like something to give to your little sister, like welcoming them in, in the stages of their pledging.” This craft to express care and belonging, but crafting also carries a certain currency in the sorority where a young woman’s craftiness can be established, admired, and even envied among her sorority sisters. Amanda also recalled planning and practicing her crafting projects when we talked.

Amanda: Sometimes I feel like it’s a competition. Like when you know there’s going to be great stuff at Informals and Formals, so you’re like planning ahead sitting in front of your stuff—alright how am I going to make this noticeable, like what is like my little sis[ter] going to be proud of.

Vivian: You feel pressure.

Amanda: Yeah, for my little sis, for her Informals, I remember like I planned ahead ‘cuz girls are going to go all out and I don’t want my Little Sis to feel I didn’t try, so hmmm. (Laughs) I like practiced on two or three bins before, and I looked at it in the end and—no, this is going to get me recognition ‘cuz I thought it was so great! And I went to Informals and

I'm setting up my stuff and I'm looking around; and alright, I'm just average. (Laughs) 'Cuz everyone is just so good!<sup>117</sup>

The bigger the occasion, the more importance it has in the social lives of Chis, the greater the number of handcrafts produced by the sorority members. After Rush, Informal and Formals are the two other events where much crafting occurs and many handcrafted objects are produced in the sorority as Big Sisters decorate bins, make pillows and quilts, and photo collages for their little sisters. The families in the sorority have customary handcrafts that are their "family traditions:" particular kinds of handcrafts the sisters make and give to family members up and down the line, i.e., Little, Big, Grand Big, and Great-grand Big Sisters etc. for as many generations that attend the events. This is not to say that Chis cannot craft for each other individually, and many do, but that is left to each woman and what she wants to make and whether she will take the time to make it for her sorority sisters.

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<sup>117</sup> Amanda Interview, 5/18/13.



Figure 3-5 Big and Little Sisters at the Chi Alpha Delta Formals, yr. 2012. (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)

A Chi's craftiness or lack thereof endures beyond her college years. Chis know their collective craft histories and identities; they remember who among them are and were "good crafters." According to her sorority sisters, Danielle is one of those exceptionally crafty-Chis, although she was graciously modest about her talents and attributed her skills to practice.

Danielle: Like for me, 'cuz I've picked up a little sister or little bro[ther], at least one every year; so I've consistently been crafting a lot of bins and a lot of care packages and stuff. So, for me personally, it's like a challenge to top myself every time. And like every year I'm like getting better, and just like with practice and stuff, so-so yeah, like, that's the general mentality: top what was last year, you know, so that's why. My

big sis[ter] was not like extremely good at first ‘cuz I remember the first bin I got versus the last bin I got from her was like a world of difference. Like her first one was, it was really bumpy and like very unskilled, and then the last one was crazy good. I was like, “Whoa, what have you been crafting throughout this time?” I think with practice—your first bin you make is always going to be like, yeah.

Vivian: So I happen to hear from Chloe that she thought you were the best.

Danielle: (Laughs) ‘Cuz that’s ‘cuz I’m competitive with myself.

Vivian: ‘Cuz she showed me one of the bins you did.

Danielle: Which one was it?

Vivian: It had like—

Danielle: Is that the Disney characters on top?

Vivian: Yes.

Danielle: Oh, that was my Formals bin for her, yeah.

Vivian: Yes, it was like pristine.

Danielle: Yeah, that’s my hobby though.

Vivian: But that’s a hobby you—

Danielle: Yeah, that’s a hobby I picked up from Chis. I find it really calming when I’m—‘cuz just like it’s so mindless. You color and glitter, color and glitter, color and glitter.

Vivian: Apparently it’s not that easy to get it that smooth. [In reference to the glitter]



Danielle: (Laughs) Yeah. (Laughs)<sup>118</sup>

Good crafting has its own histories in the sorority; Danielle who recently graduated from UCLA in the 2010s goes down in the sorority's collective memory as the best crafter of her Pledge class, if not the best overall while she was an Active in the sorority.



Figure 3-6 Formals Bin. (Photograph by Vivian Wong, 2013)

### **All That Glitters**

A well-decorated bin is a sight to behold; it sparkles, shines, and shimmers. The glitter that covers its sides is bedazzling when it catches the light. But all that glitters is not gold when many Chis attempted to work with glitter for the first time and have spelled disaster for many young women while they crafted the Informals and Formals bins. The practice to attain proficiency in this aspect of the sorority's craft culture is not without its challenges and pitfalls, or utter fails when glittering is involved.

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<sup>118</sup> Danielle Interview, 3/5/13

My first one ever I used, hmmm, like Elmer's glue, and you're supposed to use puffy paint and I used Elmer's glue and I closed the bin—and it was for my friend —and everything flaked off. Like everything! I was like, “Oh my god!” It was really bad in the, the beginning. You definitely learn as you go.<sup>119</sup>

While Rebecca had glitter flake off her container, her sorority sister had glitter fly off the cover of her bin, marring a pair of shorts in the process and dampening her desire for glittery handcrafts in the future. As a result of Amanda's clothing casualty while making a bin for her Little sister, her Little Sister knows that she does not need to glitter any gifts for Amanda.

I want people to be impressed with my crafting also, but it takes a lot; and I had glitter like in places I didn't know, I, I—I don't know. At one point I lifted it up 'cuz I forgot had some glitter on it and I just lifted [*gestures with her arms*] and it just went everywhere and I had to shower five or six times. I just threw away the shorts I was wearing 'cuz there's no way I could wash them with my other clothes and not have glitter everywhere—it was horrible! [...] I feel like glitter is like herpes. Once you start using it, you can't get rid of it. So, I don't want it in my house or anywhere around me. My little sis[ter] knows I hate it so much she never crafts anything with glitter on it. She knows I'll throw it away. She just knows I hate that kind of stuff<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Rebecca Interview, 5/17/13.

<sup>120</sup> Amanda Interview, 5/18/13.

Those who can deal with glitter have many opportunities to develop their skills to artfully deploy it on all manner of objects. Rebecca admitted she was “really bad in the beginning,” but she seemed to prove that practice and persistence do make it better. At least I thought so when she showed me photographs of bins and trashcans she decorated later when she was a senior Active.

Vivian: Clearly you have skills. I don’t know what someone told you.

Rebecca: They’ve developed through Chis.

Vivian: So no one taught you. Your big sis[ter] didn’t tell you how to glitter.

Rebecca: Oh, my big sis was so bad; she was notorious too for terrible glittering. I wish I could show you her bin. It’s so funny, because it’s like really bad. (Laughs)

Vivian: So you don’t actually need to be crafty to be a Chi.

Rebecca: No you don’t.

Vivian: But it helps.

Rebecca: Yeah, it helps. It makes it so much like better—or easier.

Vivian: Do you think there’s pressure?

Rebecca: Aaah, hmmm, not really pressure. But like everyone says, “Oh, Chis are crafty; Chis are crafty; Chis are crafty.” But if you’re not crafty, you’re like, “Awe, man—‘sad’.”<sup>121</sup>

Although it might not be readily apparent, there are subtleties when glittering a bin: techniques that can make the process go smoother. Precision and patience help if

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<sup>121</sup> Rebecca Interview, 5/17/13.

the image and lettering are complex, and involve multiple colors and different patterns within the design. Whatever design one wants to paint in glitter, if it requires outlining and uses many colors, it needs to be done in stages, and the glitter applied in sections and parts, according to pigment and proximity to other colors. I do not anticipate decorating the sides of any plastic containers that I own with glitter, but I was still curious about how one might go about the process. I asked Amanda when the subject came up in our conversation; and she shared what Danielle, her pledge sister, had taught her.

Amanda: Yeah, she, she gave me a little tutorial; and I remember ‘cuz I went to her apartment and she like taught me a good technique how to do it. And so I was okay, that’s what you do, ‘cuz I was doing it wrong like the whole time.

Vivian: What was this technique?

Amanda: She was, like the way—you know how the puffy paint?

Vivian: I don’t ever use glitter with puffy paint; go ahead, tell me.

Amanda: So basically like you put the outlines underneath; and then you have to do, if there’s an outline, you can’t do the outline first, you have to do everything in the middle first. I did the outlines first and I was like what if you want to—so if there’s another color on the inside of it, do you put it on top? She was like, “No you don’t put it on top.” And when I tried to put it on top, the bottom came off and everything around it came off! “So you like you do it one-by-one?” She was like, “yeah, so you have to let it dry”—so it takes like days to do like different colors. She told me that she did one with four or five colors and it took her like more

than a week to do—she had to wait for it to dry. And she was like, “Oh yeah, you tap it this way; don’t tap it this way because it will go on the other stuff.” I was like [*breath*] okay, let me write this down ‘cuz it’s overwhelming. And she was like, “this puffy paint is the best; and when you’re using this color, don’t use this ‘cuz it will”—all right pro. (Laughs)

Vivian: This is *knowledge*; this is what needs to be passed down.

Amanda: Yeah, she told me all those things. Actually, yeah, I told my little sis about it too ‘cuz she doesn’t know how to glitter either. This is what Danielle taught me; and like don’t do this *whatever you do*; and you have to get this brush and don’t use that brush ‘cuz then it’s going to ruin everything. And my little sis[ter] was like, “Does it matter?” “Trust me, it matters.” (Laughs) “Trust *me, it matters!*” “I had to go back out and buy a whole new bin because yours—it looked like someone threw up on it,” like that was how bad it was. (Laughs) And I had to run to Danielle’s apartment and tell her what happened. She did her bin in thirty minutes and it looked awesome. It took me two days just to have her name in glitter and it was so simple. (Laughs) It was really bad. (Laughs)<sup>122</sup>

Crafting makes for memorable experiences in Chi Alpha Delta; it plays a significant part in the rituals and traditions of the sorority. Chis are crafty, although some are craftier than others by their own admission. However, in more recent years, the sorority sisters themselves think Chi Alpha Delta as a group has evolved to even *craftier* heights, citing the Rush nametags as evidence.

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<sup>122</sup> Amanda Interview, 5/18/13. The emphasis is mine.

## Craftier Chis

The rise of craftiness happened in the 2000s, even as the Chi and/or Pledge Class who raised the bar that every successive Pledge Class tries to top is unclear, or varies as one talks to different sorority sisters. However, regardless, I was assured by more than one Chi that their crafting has improved because the nametags have become more detailed and intricate, and design standards for approval more exacting over time. “It’s gotten much better over the years. I’ve seen the old ones, so I know,” said Chloe; however, she was less certain when Chi crafting improved, although she offered what she thinks is the story: “I want to say in the last five years—just I’ve seen the old nametags and how intricate they are now. I think it got—heard, there’s a legend that this one older Chi, she’s an alumni now; when she was Rush Chair, I heard that she was amazing. Like all of that, it just came so natural to her and I think, I heard that’s how it became so intricate, and we became known for being very crafty in our Rush, being like detail orientated and stuff.”<sup>123</sup>

Danielle believes it was the pledge class before hers that really pushed Chi Alpha Delta to new and improved levels of crafting. “Egrets, they really stepped it up; and everyone since then has been using—basically they set a new standard and that’s become like our baseline standard. So every year we have to keep topping ourselves.”<sup>124</sup> In addition, other sorority sisters who were contemporaries of the Egret Pledge class in the Active House also spoke highly of the Egret’s crafting abilities as a whole. They said that class had some exceptional “glitter-ers” who employed a style of “gradient glittering” to words, where letters fade or shift from one color to another or a rainbow of

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<sup>123</sup> Chloe Interview, 2/26/13.

<sup>124</sup> Danielle Interview, 3/5/13. Egret is a pseudonym for the purposes of this chapter. All the Pledge Classes animal names are pseudonyms in this chapter.

colors in a letter and/or through the word that was introduced into the sorority at that time and continues to be employed by sorority sisters afterwards on the handcrafted bins.

However, Stephanie, from the Ferret Pledge Class, is certain her class was the one to up the crafting ante.

Honestly, I can confidently say that started with my pledge class, because my pledge sister, her name is Jackie; she's sooooo *creative*, but in a sense that's very detailed, but it all works. And it started with her nametags, swear to god! My year, we did Rush, all her nametags were like this [*holds up a piece of paper and demonstrations with her hands*]—Dut, dut, dut, dut. Wire, wire, wire. Dut, dut, dut, you know. Other people were like a thing a thing on it. Hers just had all these little things that eventually became mass production 'cuz we all needed to make 5,000 mini-suns and 5,000 butterflies, know what I mean. But on a nametag, in the bigger picture, it just looks so pretty and so cute.<sup>125</sup>

Regardless of when it all began, and maybe it was always present in the beginning in some form or another, Chi handmade nametags for Rush Week are designed and crafted in delightful ways that reflect the material cultures of contemporary society and the sorority sisters' collective and common ideas of “*cute*” in the consumer styles and expressions found in today's popular culture.

### **The Cutest Toast Pillow**

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<sup>125</sup> Stephanie Interview, 6/29/13.

The sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta have shown me the many cute handcrafts they make, to the point that I might even be charmed to pronounce Chi crafts, crafting, and craftiness comprehensively cute—and maybe even “categorically” so. However that being said, I remember one handmade pillow in particular that I continue to have much affection for even now: it was so cute then and still on my mind.

Chloe: I have another thing to show you that I think you’ll really love.

Here’s one of the other things we made, my year; the year I was Rush Chair. So one of the prizes for our games was a French toast pillow.

Vivian: Oh my gosh!

Chloe: Everything is handmade, of course.

Vivian: This is fantastic.

Chloe: Butter pocket. My pledge sister—I did not design this one—I told her like you know what, we need a gift, so yeah; so she made this.

Vivian: This is for, what gift?

Chloe: One of the prizes. So like during our Rush, we have games. And the, hmmm, so the group that wins it will get it. So, she made twelve of these. And my pledge sister, she made that; yeah it was really cool. It’s a French toast pillow.

Vivian: Actually, oh my god; this is fantastic! Oh my gosh, I would buy this. If you like marketed this, I would buy it. This is way too cute, my goodness! Are there other pillows?<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Chloe Interview, 2/26/13.



That was the cutest French toast pillow I have ever seen, although I have not seen another French toast pillow in my life that I can recall. Chloe did pay her pledge sister for an extra one, which she also mentioned while I gushed about the pillow. While another sorority sister, who I will not call out, confessed that during Rush she purloined two from the table, putting them in her bag to take home. However, she also said her sorority sister made extras, so perhaps she thought she was helping herself rather than pinching the pillows. Regardless how the pillows were distributed, I still enthusiastically remembered that toast pillow when I interviewed Rebecca two months later to her pleasure and appreciation.

That means a whole lot. Especially that everyone else is like, “Rebecca you’re good at nothing at crafting” and then I have that. I was notorious for being one of the worst crafters; and that, the toast pillow was my redemption. Everyone was like, “Whoa!”<sup>127</sup>

Chandra Talpade Mohanty describes the meaningfulness of constructing a “genealogy of oneself,” and its conceptual functionality of articulating intimate belongings, creating spaces/places to call “home” that ascribe significance to (self) identities and identifications: “[H]ome, community, and identity all fit somewhere between the histories and experiences we inherit and the political choices we make through alliances, solidarities, and friendships.”<sup>128</sup>

In exploring the “crafty-lives” of the sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta, I have endeavored to rethink, re-conceptualize and reimagine, identities through the collective

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<sup>127</sup> Rebecca Interview, 5/17/13.

<sup>128</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 136.

ideas of cuteness and communal crafting practices that continue to create belonging for the oldest Asian American sisterhood in the nation. Belonging is contingent, dependent on more than happenstances; it is in the purposefully “doing:” the conscious willingness to make and remake, create and recreate communities for ourselves and of our own in agency, empowerment, and liberation. It exists at the convergence of place and desire; it resides in the spaces we carve out for ourselves where we connect and feel connected. Chi crafts embody an artful mix of enduring traditions, whimsical aesthetics, and collective social values. They represent and present the performance and display of sisterhood in effects and affects for Chi women as they exchange and transfer knowledge and know-how among themselves to make sentiment objects for each other and their social network. Sara Ahmed writes: “Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects.”<sup>129</sup> Chi craft to great *affect*, animating their sisterhood with crafty-crafts, handmade objects that demonstrate and display Chi pride as cute as can be.

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<sup>129</sup> Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects”, in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 29.



Figure 3-7 Toast Pillow (Photograph by Vivian Wong, 2013)

## Chapter 4

### Serving Up Sisterhood: Contemporary Chi Cooking

Sharing food with another human being is an intimate act that should not be indulged in lightly.

– M.F.K. Fisher

Yummy, yummy, yummy  
I got love in my tummy and as silly as it may seem

– A. Resnick and J. Levine, *Yummy, Yummy, Yummy* (lyrics)

Plates covered every inch of the serving area in the dining room with desserts, overflowing to the kitchen table in the adjacent room. This abundant spread of edible delights was waiting for the guests of the evening to arrive: coeds rushing one of the University of California, Los Angeles' historically Asian American Greek sororities, Chi Alpha Delta (CAD or Chi/s).

But before the current crop of Rushees desiring to be the newest Pledge Class stepped off the coach that carried them from the university's Westwood campus on a warm, late summer evening in 2013 to the *alfresco* dinner that awaited them poolside in the backyard of a Chi alumnae's home in the Hollywood Hills, another group of UCLA coeds were doing a quick "food check" before the guests arrived. Captivating in their cocktail dresses, striking high heels, and coiffed hair, the Active members of CAD were the epitome of the dress-to-impress attire of the evening as they inspected the chicken tenders, rice-stuffed red peppers, and other assorted entrees made into *amuse-bouche*.

I walked into this hustle-and-bustle scene fashionably late but still ten minutes before the bus was due to arrive. While the event had not yet begun, the gathering was in high gear as the members of Chi Alpha Delta collected themselves to host the Social Night, the second event of their annual Rush Week. Hovering over the home-cooked foods, the members were *finishing* the dishes with garnishes while preserving their sorority's culinary tradition and reputation. They sprinkled fistfuls of chopped parsley over some tasty nibbles and tucked small bunches of cilantro among the plates of finger foods.

Chi can cook *well*, in ways that maintain the organization's standards of "Chi quality" food, making the women's culinary skills the demonstration of the sorority's rich history as the oldest Asian Greek sorority in the nation, and their home-cooked food an abundant display of their multiethnic Asian heritages and identities. Chi Alpha Delta was founded in 1928 by a group of women of Japanese heritage at the University of California, Los Angeles; the university granted the official sorority charter a year later. Chi Alpha Delta's membership has diversified racially, ethnically, and culturally over the past eight decades to include young women of Asian descents from countries across East and Southeast Asia whose families came to the United States from the 1970s to the 1990s, as well as mixed-ethnicity Asian Americans who are the third, fourth, and fifth generation offspring of families who immigrated in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century.

In this chapter I discuss the ways in which "Chi foods," home-cooked food prepared by the sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta, perform the collective histories and shared experiences of the sorority members ethnic-Asian cultural heritages and Asian

American identities in a *carte de jour* of culinary mash-ups and food fusions that comprise the diet that only feed the women's corporeal bodies, but also nourishes the sorority's body as the *corps—l'esprit de corps de Chi cuisine*.<sup>130</sup> To serve the bill of fare that fortifies my contention that Chi cooking feeds the sorority bodies and soul, the sisters of CAD and spirit of sisterhood, I begin by articulating how identities are consumed; in other words, we are what we eat. Then I examine what Chis cook, how they make it, and when they make it. Chi food is homemade, often prepared in small apartment kitchen crowded with generation of sorority sisters and pledge sisters (i.e., Pairs of Big and Little Sisters and sorority sisters who are in the same Pledge class). Chis cook "Chi food" for themselves at sisterhood events and for their Asian Greek brother fraternities at their parties, and they cook for all the Rushees during Rush Week.

When Chis cook, they are participating in culinary coups that revive the collective histories and shared identities of their sisterhood. The act of cooking with the "Chi cooking methods," the ways the sisters of Chi Alpha Delta prepare and serve food, reproduces the sorority's communal past in the present-day through "embodied memories" of its cooking heritages.<sup>131</sup> The women of CAD say themselves that "Chis can

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<sup>130</sup> "Corps de cuisine" literally means "kitchen body" in English. There is no such word in French. However, "esprit de corps" is an actual French word; the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines its English meaning as: "the regard entertained by the members of a body for the honor and interests of the body as a whole, and of each other as belonging to it that." (From: The Oxford English Dictionary website, <http://www.oed.com/>, April 26, 2014.) I am using the phrase figuratively (not literally) for the purpose of this chapter to denote "belonging."

<sup>131</sup> Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor defines "embodies memories" as the reiterative acts of cultural production that reconstitutes and transmits "communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next." And these "embodied acts" function as its "archive" (a record of the group's histories, memories, and values) when acted out or enacted (i.e., performed) by the group as a collective body; or as Taylor says, these embodied acts are "archives as repertoire" and although the acts

cook and craft.” The sorority Actives and Pledges cook a variety of ethnic-Asian and American foods while they attend the university. They prepare these home-cooked dishes for the events on their social calendar, making the affects of belonging to the Chi Alpha Delta sisterhood good enough to eat, in the (cooking) process.

### **Melting Bowls and Salad Pots: Food Fusions and “American” Foodways**

We “*find*” ourselves in our foods: who we are, the places we are from, and even what we aspire to be are *in* the stuff we eat. What we eat defines our identities and facilitates our collective belonging in communities of sentiments and solidarities, as well as groups marked by race, ethnicity, and socio-economic class. For ethnic groups in the United States, “ethnic eating” both symbolizes and serves as a vehicle for their ethnic identities.<sup>132</sup> The consumption of foods that are considered and classified a part of the cuisine of one’s heritage allows the Asian individual in America to affirm her ethnic identity by maintaining a diet that is representative and similar to the food culture associated with her Asian “homeland”—her birthplace, the country her parents (or a past generation) im/migrated from, or the land of her ancestors. Instead of the foodstuffs that are typically associated with the white, Western-European and North American diets, i.e., “American foods.” For example, the majority of the second-generation Asian American women in Chi Alpha Delta who identify with a specific Asian ethnicity, Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean etc., said they ate Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean foods (relative to

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are “live,” i.e., actions-in-progress, they are still records that “transmit knowledge through physical movement.” (Diana Taylor, *Archive as Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>132</sup> Susan Kalcik, “Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and the Performance of Identity,” in *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States*, ed. Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

their ethnicities), in the home with their families, growing up in the United States. It was not until they attended college and joined Chi Alpha Delta that they were introduced to “American foods” like deviled eggs and Pigs-in-a-Blanket and even entrées from non-Asian ethnic cuisines such as baked pasta casseroles with tomato and cheese sauces.

Likewise, one can disavow and transgress her ethnic identity through food consumption. A fourth-generation Chinese American sorority member describes herself as “very Americanize” because of the food she ate growing up in Central California. Her grandmother likes steak and pasta, and her father cooks hamburgers and spaghetti and bakes “the best chocolate chip cookies.” She did not own a rice cooker until college when her ex-boyfriend’s father bought one for her apartment. Anthropologist Mary Douglas writes that food is a “code” where messages are found in the “patterns of social relations” that signal and sign “different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries.”<sup>133</sup>

If we *are* what we eat, then contemporary eating in America offers multiethnic and multicultural experiences for the “adventurous eater” to experience a variety of international foods without necessarily traveling beyond the physical borders of the United States. Diverse ethnic communities with cultural heritages from around the globe have cultivated their foodways in America when different countries’ populations immigrated here in waves for socio-economics opportunities or to escape civil war, political unrest, or environmental crisis in their homelands. They took their cultural practices, traditions, and customs with them as they moved from their countries of origin to America, including the foodways from their former homes. They “imported” cuisines

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<sup>133</sup> Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” in *Myth, Symbol, and Culture*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1971), 61.



with unique flavors and textures, bringing with them the cooking methods of those “native foods” and the socio-cultural practices of preparing and eating those traditional dishes. They added, adapted, and assimilated their foods and food tastes to the existing “American” diets and tastes.<sup>134</sup>

Food historians consider American food itself to be a cuisine of adaptation and adoption. Even the most American of foods (such as hamburgers, hot dogs, and apple pies, for example) and U.S. regional cooking are derived from somewhere else. Folklorist Don Yoder explains this conflation of national foods and regional cooking in the United States as the country’s historic culinary hybridity: “Viewed historically, each region and national cuisine is a culinary hybrid, with an elaborate stratigraphy of diverse historical layers combined into a usable and evidently satisfying structure.”<sup>135</sup> Historian Donna Gabaccia traces the roots of America’s “multi-ethnic creole foodways” back to its Colonial era in her book, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Foods and the Making of Americans*.<sup>136</sup> While folklore scholar Susan Kalcik asserts, “regional and ethnic foodways are often intertwined” in the United States with “drift from ethnic to regional

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<sup>134</sup> In the Social Sciences, “foodways” as a term covers the production and consumption of food. I consider this definition of foodways particularly productive in conceptualizing and analyzing its function—products and processes—in ethnic Asian populations in contemporary American society: “Foodways bind individuals together, define the limits of the group’s outreach and identity, distinguish in-group from out-group, serve as a medium of inter-group communication, celebrate cultural cohesion, and prove a context for performance of group rituals.” Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell, “Introduction,” in *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity*, ed. Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 7.

<sup>135</sup> Don Yoder, “Folk Cookery,” *Folklore and Folklife*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 334.

<sup>136</sup> Donna Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

identity” when “individuals without a strong sense of ethnicity may fill the need for a more specific identity than ‘American’ with regional traditions, including cooking.”<sup>137</sup>

Immigrants have made America’s foods theirs; and in turn their foods have made American culinary traditions and contemporary food practices into food fusions, mixes, and remixes—“melting pots” and “salad bowls.” “American food” or “American cuisine” is a culinary *mélange*: edible medley of diversity, difference, and hybridity that are “good eats” of the reminders and recollections of “home,” old, new, and adopted. The foods we eat make and mark our tastes, values, and habits. They inform our identities and form our social relationship, intimately, individually, and collectively.<sup>138</sup> The sustenance we feed on and the nourishment we eat evoke feelings and memories that stimulate our palate and satiate our body and soul.

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<sup>137</sup> Kalcik, 61.

<sup>138</sup> Food is a topic of inquiry that crosses many academic disciplines. It is out of the scope of my dissertation to discuss all the discourses in food studies and the discursive strategies used to conceptualize of food as a subject. There is growing corpus of food studies in many fields that can be readily referenced and accessed. My understanding of food and foodways and the ways in which they shape identities, cultures, and traditional cultural practices emanate primarily from history, anthropology, and Asian American studies and sources are referenced in the bibliography.



Figure 4-1 Buffet Table, Social Night; Rush Week 2013 (Photograph by Vivian Wong)



Figure 4-2 Home-cooked Food prepared for Social Night, Rush Week 2013 (Photograph by Vivian Wong)

## **Chi Quality Foods**

The women, past and present, of Chi Alpha Delta are reputedly the best cooks among all the Asian American sororities in Southern California.<sup>139</sup> Chi Alpha Delta is not the only Asian Greek-letter sorority that cooks, but like the group's finely honed crafting skills, the sorority consistently prepares homemade cooked food for their events. Moreover, like Chi crafts, well-prepared, good-tasting home-cooked food is a matter of great pride for the sorority. For example, the sorority Actives makes all the food they serve Rushees at their Rush events; they have kept this food tradition with tenacious determination even when it requires thirty individuals cooking enough food for more than one hundred people for four events in seven days, which they do every year for Rush. Even its sister sorority, Theta Kappa Phi, does not attempt this, although Theta Actives also cook when they are members of the sorority at the university. They just do not cook as much or as consistently as the Chis. Thetas serve both home-cooked food and ready-prepared food during Rush Week and cater the dinner for Social Night, which is usually at a hotel. Although they set out lovely buffet spreads and always have an abundance of food for everyone at the events, in the same manner as their Chi sisters.

As exacting as the details Chis insist upon with their Rush nametags, the food they cook must maintain certain standards of "Chi quality." Chis cook for their sorority much in the manner they craft: dutifully, but not always innately. Regardless of one's cooking experiences prior to pledging or enthusiasm for domestic pursuits generally, if a

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<sup>139</sup> Other historically Asian American-interest sorority in Southern California include (partial list): Theta Kappa Phi, UCLA; Kappa Zeta Phi, UCI; Sigma Phi Omega, USC; Delta Phi Kappa, USC; Rho Delta Chi, UCR; Chi Sigma Phi, CSUF. (From the Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi websites, April 25, 2014.)

young woman wants to be a Chi, she is going to find herself in the kitchen during her college years making dishes in the *service* of the sorority.

Lindsey, a Chi legacy and Active in the 1990s, was self-assured when she spoke about her sorority's collective cooking ability. She credits her sorority sisters for nurturing her own culinary skills and broadening her food horizons at UCLA:

We've always been known to know how to cook. That's a tradition that's been longstanding and something we're very proud of. And I remember when I was the Social Chair I had to manage all the food that came through. And we were like, "If nobody ate your food that means you shouldn't make it again, you know."

And I learned how to cook through Chis. I mean my mom taught me the basics, but I really learned how to cook through the sorority. And my big sis[ter] was a really good cook and Great Grand Big Sis. Everyone above me was actually an amazing cook, and they taught me how to make these dishes I never knew how to make; and hmmm, it was great. That was our claim to fame. Our parties with the other fraternities: they would look forward to our party 'cuz they knew they were going to be fed well.<sup>140</sup>

She was not the only sorority's Social Chair who bragged about Chi cooking and touted her sisters' talents in the kitchen. When I admired the big food spreads on the buffet tables captured in photographs from previous Rush Weeks, a second-year Active and the

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<sup>140</sup> Lindsey Interview, 3/11/13.

sorority's Social Chair was quick to respond, "it tastes as good as it looks," without hesitation or reservations."<sup>141</sup>

Chi cooking has "standards," cultivated and refined over time, that are transmitted to the newest recruits who accept bids in the Fall quarter to "pledge the sorority." These recruits, also called Pledges, are working towards becoming Active members of the sorority once they complete their pledge-ship.<sup>142</sup> Chi Pledges are tasked with making the most food for the sorority's "exchanges" with Asian American fraternities during the school year. Exchanges are closed parties; only the Actives and Pledges of the sorority and fraternity whose "exchange" it is are invited. These parties often have themes where costumes are worn that express and demonstrate thematic elements of the social gathering; Actives and Pledges also make their own costumes. Approximately twenty to

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<sup>141</sup> Chloe Interview, 2/26/13.

<sup>142</sup> Greek-letter fraternities and sororities have pledge programs (a pledging process, pledge-ship period) that Pledges need to complete before they are admitted into any Greek fraternal organization. The pledge process differs across the various fraternities and sororities nationwide, as well as among the many chapters of one Greek fraternity or sorority. However, regardless of the variations and differences, pledging as the practices of joining Greek-letter organizations is constant. This pledge-ship distinguishes and sets apart Greek-letter fraternal orders from other collegiate students organizations and social clubs where joining those groups do not involve a "probation period" before one is allowed "in the club." The pledge programs themselves are kept secret within the individual fraternities and sororities. Fraternity brothers and sorority sisters are prohibited from discussing their pledge activities outside of the organization with non-members, or they swear not to at least. However, the details of pledge activities do get public attention, although the circumstances of these disclosures are usually distressing and sad because some sort of hazing resulting in the serious physical injury or death of an individual in the group is reported. Asian American fraternities are not innocent of such incidents, unfortunately. While conducting the research for this dissertation, two incidences in Asian American fraternities (in Northern California and New York), resulting in death of young men in the organization, were reported in national newspapers. Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi have not had any reports of hazing in their organizations, but the Asian American fraternities on campus have come under scrutiny from the university for activities although there has been no loss of life in the Asian American fraternities at UCLA.

thirty young people are eating and drink while partying at an exchange. The fraternity supplies the alcohol that fuels the party atmosphere, and the Chis bring the food for the night. Pledges must make two entrees; Actives must make one or a combination of entrees, appetizers, and dessert. Second-year Actives make an entrée and either a dessert or appetizer. Third-year Actives, who have the most seniority in the sorority, can choose between preparing an appetizer or a dessert.

While Actives and Pledges cook different parts of the menu, Chis of all ranks and Pledge classes apply a set of “culinary basics” to how they cook the dishes of food. These are the fundamentals of Chi cooking that I gathered from the Actives and alumnae and the qualities that distinguishes the Chis and their cooking as “the best” from the rest of Asian Greek-letter sororities in their social circles.

★ Homemade, or else—nothing else

If you did not make your dish, do not bring it to the party. No supermarket-bought, pre-prepared food is allowed, nor restaurant takeout permitted to be passed off as what a Chi cooks in her kitchen.

★★ No double dishes

Food is potluck-style with the sign-up sheets for dishes on a “first come, first serve” basis when the digital document is emailed to the group. No food dishes are duplicated. Once a dish is “taken” by one person, another person does not cook it too, and make two. Or as Chloe said, “No repeats, I don’t allow it.”<sup>143</sup> Until the 2010s, the sign-up sheet was an actual sheet

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<sup>143</sup> Chloe Interview, 2/26/13.

of paper decorated with the party theme and passed around at the sorority's general meeting.

★★★ Looks matter

The food needs to look appealing. If what one cooks is unsightly, it will not be put on the table. Alternately if no one eats your food and it is untouched at the end of the night, one has the good cooking sense not to make it again. Recently the sense of visually appealing foods has incorporated food styling (i.e., presentation) that emphasizes single bite-size servings and entrees that are pre-portioned into small serving cups.

★★★★ Cooking means *cooking*—heat must be applied.

In other words, no cold-cut sandwiches or raw salads are allowed because one is just “assembling” the ingredients, not cooking them, which anyone can do. This do not only “assemble” when preparing Chi quality food.





Figure 4-3 Buffet table, Information Night, Rush Week 2013  
(Chi Alpha Delta Facebook Album)

### **Family-style Cooking**

Did you know how to boil an egg when you entered college? If so, you were ahead of the culinary curve of some Chis who needed an introduction to the kitchen, when they cooked with their Big Sisters. Danielle, a third-year Active, not only taught her Little Sister how to boil eggs, but also showed her a trick when peeling their shells:

The first time she cooked with me in my apartment [*Laughs*], she's like, "I don't know how to boil eggs." So I was like, "What do you mean, you get—just put it in the water and turn on the water, I mean, you just turn on the fire." And she's like, "Oh, okay." I was like, "you should probably put salt in there to, to prevent the cracking and stuff," and she's "Okay." And after she did it, I was teaching her to peel it. She was like doing it one at a time (*Laughs*); and I was like, "If you roll it, it kinda just comes right off." And she was, "Oh my god," and she did it and she was so proud of herself. [...] I taught her how to make a pasta dish I made a lot my first year 'cuz when you're a Pledge you have to cook two main dishes. So like, ... I taught her how to make a pasta thing and deviled eggs, bacon deviled eggs, yeah. And they kinda became her signature [*dishes*] that year; and she just made the same thing every time (*Laughs*). And that's kinda what I did. I made Spam Musubi and that pasta every single time, yeah. It's funny 'cuz I don't even eat meat. I just have other people taste my food: Is it good? All right, perfect (*Laugh*).<sup>144</sup>

Along with the memory of an endearing and amusing time in the kitchen with her Little Sister, Danielle's story serves to illustrate another important aspect of Chi cooking and the processes of the sorority's food production: how Chis make, prepare and cook, their food. Chis cook together when they need to make food for the sorority's various events throughout the year.

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<sup>144</sup> Danielle Interview, 3/5/13.

Cooking is a group effort for Chis; their food is prepared collectively, pooling and sharing their material resources, as well as cooking know-how and food knowledge. Chi cooking does not come from following the recipes in cookbooks, although cookbooks and recipes are used; it is a “culinary apprenticeship” in a home kitchen with “sous-chefs,” “chefs,” and “line cooks” working a “service,” cooking as on the job training. In other words, the sorority’s cooking education comes from Chis who know how to cook, a lot or little, teaching Chis who know less or not at all, which is then reinforced with the habit of cooking repeatedly for events during the year. Chis have a cooking culture similar to their crafting culture; when a young woman joins the sorority, she understands and accepts that she *will* cook, willing or not she must at least “get her hands dirty.”

‘Cuz I feel a lot of sororities don’t emphasize any of that, you know; and I don’t know if that’s a good or bad thing, but I’ve appreciated the skills I’ve acquired because of the environment Chis has put me in. To need to learn how to cook, you know, week after week, and different things ‘cuz cooking the same thing over and over is not going to be very appealing. Hmmm, and crafting because it’s kinda of like tradition in our line to pass down a family quilt that we make every year, and you are forced to kinda learn how to make a quilt (Laughs), yeah.<sup>145</sup>

Chis cook in small groups that are formed and informed by the various families in the sorority and individual Pledge Classes, as well as in combinations that integrate both. Or as Grace said when I asked her who she cooks with: “I always cook with my big

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<sup>145</sup> Jessica Interview, 2/19/13.

sis[ter] and one of my P. sis[ter] and her big sis who's also my big sister's pledge sister. So two Cranes and Hedgehogs always cook together.”<sup>146</sup> Big and Little Sisters often cook together, which reflects and reinforces the kinship of the Big Sister “watching over” her Little Sister and mentoring her in the “ways,” i.e., the traditions and cultural memory-keeping practices, of the sorority. Who better to rescue you in the kitchen than your family? It is not only that an Active has “got your back” in the kitchen and teaches a young Pledge things she may not know in the food department; but cooking together, several women crammed in a small apartment kitchen, literally reinforces the sorority’s camaraderie in body and spirit with lived experiences. There are many American English idioms that say the activity a family does together also keeps them together: “the family that eats together stays together,” “the family that cooks together stays together,” “the family the plays together stays together” etc. Chis cooking together also provide “bonding time” for the young women; they crowd into kitchen and work the food preparations and tasks among themselves to make what they need to cook. They also go grocery shopping together to buy the ingredients they need, in advance of cooking.

Cooking together is socially strategic, but it becomes a material necessity during Rush Week when the sorority wants to give Rushees positive impressions about the organization and needs to make copious amounts of food for them (Rushees) to enjoy. Chis prepare enough food for crowds that are double and triple the numbers of the Active House. For example, the RVSP list for the Social Night that I described in the beginning of the chapter included more than 80 UCLA coeds, while the Active House that cooked for the party numbered about 30 or less. It was a successful party for the Active House,

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<sup>146</sup> Grace Interview, 5/28/13. Chi Alpha Delta Pledge Classes are named after animals; however, “Cranes” and “Hedgehogs” are pseudonyms. “P. Sis” is Pledge Sister.

but a busy night of hosting and entertaining for them as well, added onto the cooking done earlier in the day.

Everyone cooks for Rush, even women who might avoid making food for other events during the year, because there will not be enough for the Rushees to eat otherwise. Like all good hostesses, Chis know that it is bad form not to have enough food, so Rushees eat first and are served “the nicest” food, and Chis may or may not eat at their Rush events.

Rebecca: Like ‘cuz during Rush we really don’t get to eat that much ‘cuz we let the Rushees eat the food first. But then if the food is really ugly—we’ll do a check really quick—and if it’s ugly, we’ll put it in the back; and Chis, like if we’re super hungry we’ll be like, “Let’s get the food in the back (Laughs) and eat everything.” (Laughs)

Vivian: Okay. (Laughs)

Rebecca: So it still gets eaten, but it’s just by different people. (Laughs)<sup>147</sup>

Often Chis are too busy entertaining to eat themselves, but they check on each other to ensure their sisters are at least fortified to get through the night without being entirely ravenous. They are generous with food among themselves, as well as making sure their guests are well fed. Deborah was making a plate of food for her Little Sister, along with her plate, while she and I were at the buffet table, because she saw her little sister could not eat because she (Little Sister) was talking to Rushees.

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<sup>147</sup> Rebecca Interview, 5/17/13.

Chis are aware of the reputation their culinary skills seem to carry, and some of them feel it is aspirational for them to cook well. Much like the “poor crafters” who still take the time and put effort into their handcrafts on the “special occasions,” such as Formals, even the “bad cooks” do their kitchen duty when there must be enough food for everyone to eat—Rush Week is an example of this.

Amanda: And like hmmm, my big sis[ter] passed on a lot of recipes to me 'cuz she's a really good cook. She's an awesome baker. Hmmm, sadly, no one in our line after her is good at these kinds of things. (Laughs)

Vivian: You didn't pass it on? (Laughs)

Amanda: I mean, I tried to help my little sis; and she's like, “Can we get takeout?” (Laughs)

Vivian: Okay. (Laughs)

Amanda: 'Cuz we're just lazy. She's like “Do you have this kind of baking pan?” and like, “I've never seen that before and okay, forget it.” And like my big sis gave me those recipe cards and recipe books to help me through out pledging for good recipes; and I'm just like not good at it. (Laughs) When I was with my big sis, she, we cooked together, which is fun. 'Cuz she's good at it and I can watch her; and she'll teach me, and things like that. [...] Some fraternities even know—they're like looking forward to certain things we make. Like, I don't know, I know—they're like, “did you make those Jalapeño poppers?” and they're looking for them on the table (Laughs). I guess we kinda have a reputation for that,

but nowadays every sorority does that though, I feel, think. All the sororities I've met are always cooking for exchanges also.

Vivian: Yeah, but I heard your guys' food is the best.

Amanda: I know, that's what everyone says; but now I can't say anything because I feel like now I'm the one jeopardizing that name, so I always keep quiet when people ask me about it. So, yeah, no, I'm a great cook; like (Laughs) I could be on *Top Chef* if I wanted.<sup>148</sup>

Vivian: (Laughs) It's about the reputation, huh?

Amanda: Yeah—

Vivian: You gotta protect the rep.

Amanda: For those girls who can cook, I don't want to ruin it for them. I want to keep their good name 'cuz we're kinda connected at this point.<sup>149</sup>

Even Amanda who does not enjoy cooking and feels she cannot cook well said she had fun when she was in the kitchen with her sorority sisters, because it was an occasion to socialize: “ I don't even make food for myself that's made from scratch. That was a hard thing for me, but it was fun because we would cook at each other's apartments; and that was cool 'cuz we get to hangout and stuff and drink a bit before (Laughs) we went out; we'd drink together.”<sup>150</sup>

There is also the practical matter of physical space that facilitates the communal nature of the sorority's food preparation patterns: who has kitchens at their disposal where several people can cook, as well as the necessary basic kitchen tools and staple

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<sup>148</sup> *Top Chef* is a contemporary reality-TV show on the Bravo cable network. In 2013, it was in its 11<sup>th</sup> season on broadcast television; a 12<sup>th</sup> season is scheduled for 2014.

<sup>149</sup> Amanda Interview, 5/18/13.

<sup>150</sup> Amanda Interview, 5/18/13.

ingredients (oil, salt, and pepper, for example). The “youngest” or “newest” class of coeds in the sorority, i.e., the Pledges, are tasked with the most cooking throughout the year, while Pledges are also usually first-year students who live in the dorms on campus without kitchens.<sup>151</sup> They depend on their big sisters and other senior members of their sorority family who are sophomores and upper-class women (juniors and seniors) who live in apartments off-campus for the means to cook, in addition to the other assistance they might get with easy, tried-n-true recipes and other and cooking tips to help them in their culinary training.

### **Cooking Trials and Success**

Not every young woman who comes to the sorority is inexperienced in the kitchen, although ineptness makes for more interesting fodder, especially when one wants amuse and entertain one’s interviewer. In addition to not being able to boil an egg, other Chis told me of times when a pledge sister was ready to use a jar of tomato sauce that had turned green with mold for a pasta dish, and a little sister who had to be stopped from rolling *taquitos* on the kitchen floor.<sup>152</sup> I also heard stories of the lengths that some Chis went to, to avoid cooking that included planning to show up to an exchange late, after everyone has eaten; to buying Chinese takeout and putting it in one’s Tupperware to bring and pass off as home-cooked; and sneaking pasta out of the dining.

Similar to the naturally “crafty” women, good with glitter and nimble with needle and thread, there are Chis who have cooked before college. Abigail, a first-year student

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<sup>151</sup> Dormitory residents at UCLA are fed through meal plans, which they purchase for the school year that allows them to eat at the various dining halls on campus.

<sup>152</sup> Rebecca Interview, 5/17/13; Heidi Interview, 4/29/13.



and Pledge, said that she enjoys cooking (and crafting) and had cooked with her older sibling at home, making dishes around the Christmas holiday. She and her sister would “randomly cook for our parents,” as well.<sup>153</sup> Abigail’s Pledge Sister, Shannon, was already a foodie and knew how to “survival cook,” in her words, before she arrived at UCLA. She was impressed with the food at the Chi Rush events she attended; Chi cooking met her standards:<sup>154</sup>

Vivian: So Chi food is definitely better.

Shannon: Yeah, in my opinion.

Vivian: Significantly better? I mean it's one of--

Shannon: Yeah, like I would say there was a significant difference. Like if I knew about it, then, oh, this is a lot different.

Vivian: Beyond taste was there anything else—Chi food just tasted better?

Shannon: Yeah, Chi food just tasted better. [*Laughs*]

Vivian: Okay, all right. (*Laughs*) [...]

Shannon: Chi food, yeah it's decent 'cuz I didn't know how college people cook. Yeah, it was edible and everything. They were both good; but then, just the impression I got from Chi's was that their standard was already set and I didn't really think Theta didn't kinda meet my criteria.

Young women can build a name for themselves from their food. Good cooks can earn status in the organization, as well as bragging rights. Lindsey remembers “the girls”

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<sup>153</sup> Abigail Interview, 6/3/13.

<sup>154</sup> Shannon Interview, 6/5/13.

could tell who among their ranks cooked well, sorting the good food from the less than best on sight.<sup>155</sup>

I think— I'm not sure if we still do it, but while I was there in the sorority, we had these Tupperware that we'd decorate. So there's even a crafting element that goes into the food. So you serve everything in the crafted Tupperware, so you know who made what. And, hmmm, if you really wanted to—you know that boys could really care less—but like the girls know, oh, who made that and that; and you start to have reputations amongst ourselves who's a really good cook—and it's fun. I'm glad I got that out of that experience.

Chis can figure out who made what dish from the containers they are brought in, which are embellished with the individuals' names and other illustrations, using paint pens and glitter (a practice that continues today); or they will ask each other if they wanted to know.

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<sup>155</sup> Lindsey Interview, 3/11/13.



Figure 4-4 Decorated plastic containers, Chi Thanksgiving Dinner, yr. 2010 (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)

Even the Chis who disliked cooking or found the rigorous homemade standards challenging expressed pleasure and pride when others praised their foods, making the time and effort they spent toiling in the kitchen worthwhile. Rebecca learned to cope with the demands through trial and error, and by observing what others made for different events.<sup>156</sup>

Rebecca: I was pretty bad in the beginning or I picked very weird dishes. (Laughs) I picked really difficult dishes so I thought: Aw, man, I can't cook. But when I became a second year, I realized that you could just

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<sup>156</sup> Rebecca Interview, 5/17/13.

Google like Martha Stewart and all these like easy recipes come up; and I wish I'd known that before—

Vivian: So no one told you?

Rebecca: No one told me—

Vivian: Your Big Sis[ter] didn't tell—

Rebecca: She was kinda like why are you making this, it's so difficult.

(Laughs) But, yeah, then I slowly learned, like, yeah, through what I see myself. So, like if I go to Exchanges or the weekend at fraternities, like I see like Pigs-in-a-Blanket, and I'm like, "What is that?" And I found out who made it and I asked them how they made it. (Laughs) And that's how I figured out what to make and what not to make.

Rebecca found two dishes that seemed to work for her by the time she was a second-year Active. One is *Bruschetta* and the other is a fruit tart recipe that is a "winner" for her, although it is more time intensive: "And sometime I make Fruit Tart, which is significantly more time consuming, but tastes a lot better so everyone seems to appreciate it, so that I really like that. (Laughs) 'Cuz I never get that (Laughs)." Equipped with that dessert in her culinary repertoire, she appears hopeful to alter her family's reputation with better cooks in its ranks: "I think my family is notorious for being bad at crafting and cooking; we're slowly breaking the trend, which is good."

### **Signature Dishes**

Popular dishes are handed down family lines and passed around the sorority. These foods are crowd-pleasers, tasty or easy to make, and often both. Heidi, a young alumna,

mentioned a few things that she had made when she was an Active in the early 2000s and still sees at sorority events now.<sup>157</sup>

Vivian: What did you cook? What's in your repertoire?

Heidi: I've been asked for a few recipes that I think have been handed down 'cuz I've seen them. I've actually seen them being made recently.

Vivian: Oh really?

Heidi: I made like a *Furikake*, mayonnaise Salmon-thing, which is baked, so easy. I've actually seen Mallory make that and I've actually seen people ask Mallory for her salmon recipe, so who knows where that got—whatever—so I've made that before. I've made a sesame chicken salad with noodles in it and *shoyu*. I've been asked for that recipe and I've seen it at events. [...]

She continued to list and describe a few other dishes, including: bacon fried rice; a time intensive chicken dredged in soy sauce and sugar and fried to a crisp that “everyone loves;” and *Teriyaki* beef roll-ups that her mother made all the time. Heidi came to Chi Alpha Delta knowing how to cook, much to the surprise of her Big Sister who Heidi said anticipated needing to show her a thing or two in the kitchen:

No, I remember the first time I had to cook for an Exchange as a Pledge. My big sis[ter] was so shocked because I made this chicken that's my Auntie Ginny's recipe, but I knew it from heart, so I just made it. And she was just amazed. She was like, “How do you know to do that? What am I

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<sup>157</sup> Heidi Interview, 4/29/13.

suppose to teach you now!” Like, sorry, do you wanna pretend I can’t cook?

Heidi’s father made her cook a family meal once week as a way to prepare her for life on her own, so she and her brother accumulated practical experience in the kitchen before they went to college, which helped her when she was in the sorority. Or as she said to me cheerfully: “Thank goodness I was blessed with that, otherwise, I’d be a terrible Chi (Laughs).”

*Furikake* Salmon is not a dish I am familiar with, but it is “famous” in the sorority and the recipe has a lore that surrounds it. I was alerted to a special salmon dish during my first interview for this project. Naka, the young alumna who brought it up, said that there is this “amazing salmon recipe” that was in her former roommate’s family line that the family would pass down to every year to its Little Sister in the newest Pledge Class, to help her get through her first year of cooking in the sorority. The recipe has become “like their family secret.”

*Furikake*, a Japanese rice topping, is commonly sprinkled on steamed rice for flavor. It is a dried condiment and usually contains seaweed, dried fish flakes (*bonito*), and soy sauce; variations with dried egg and sesame seeds are also common. While *Furikake* has its roots in Japanese cuisine and home-style cooking, many Asian food traditions have dried “rice toppings.” Dried pork and beef “toppings,” sometimes translated in English as “floss” on Chinese restaurant menus, are commonly eaten with rice porridge or congee. *Furikake* has found its way to season other foods and snacks, and has been “discovered” by professional chefs who put it on their menus mixed with

popcorn and nuts such as two appetizers found in Los Angeles restaurants and bars.<sup>158</sup>

*Furikake* Salmon recipes are most often attributed to Japanese Hawaiian cuisine, but different versions of the recipes have circulated widely enough that it has become embedded in the Asian American food consciousness.

After I talked to Heidi, I interviewed Mallory, also a recent alumna although younger than Heidi. She brought up the salmon dish again and gave me her version.<sup>159</sup>

Mallory: I can make one thing good—everyone loves it. It is my signature dish, the only thing I can make. Salmon.

Vivian: You make the Salmon.

Mallory: It's called *Furikake* Salmon.

Vivian: Is that the one that's been passed down forever?

Mallory: Not forever. I started it.

Vivian: You did. I heard other—

Mallory: No way.

She learned to make *Furikake* Salmon from a church member in Northern California, where Mallory was raised before moving south to attend the university. She pressed me for the others who laid claim to her “signature dish,” but I politely declined to comment. This salmon dish offers an example of the circulation of recipes that reproduces the sorority’s flexible and fluid Asian American identities, while simultaneously affirming its Japanese American heritage and its ties to early Japanese American youth organizations.

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<sup>158</sup> Two restaurant in Los Angeles, for example: *Aframe* in Culver City, CA, “*Furikake* Kettle Corn” and *The Wallace*, Culver City, CA, “*Shishito* Peppers.” The Wallace does not listed *furikake* is in the description of this item on its menu, but a restaurant review in the *Los Angeles Times* captions the food photograph of it including the ingredient.

<sup>159</sup> Mallory Interview, 10/16/13.

Cooking was a part of the singled-gendered youth social clubs in Japanese American communities when these girls and boys clubs were established in urban areas with large Japanese immigrant and Japanese American populations before World War II, from the 1920s to 1950s. Girls were encouraged to cook for the boys when their clubs socialized together. Local Japanese American newspapers that advertised the social “mixer” would even print reminders for the girls to fulfill certain culinary expectations as they were responsible for bringing the food that fed the boys, which meant preparing “a lot of food.” These instructive reminders described the food that these girls were expected to cook; the prepared dishes should be “manly food,” in addition to making them in quantities that satisfied a growing Japanese American boy’s appetite.<sup>160</sup> Japanese American girls were socialized to cook food, cook food for boys, and cook lots of food before they became married women with husbands and children and needed to make their families’ meals. Since these second-generation Japanese American (*Nisei*) youth clubs were widespread in cities such as Los Angeles and San Francisco, the Southern California area alone had 400 to 600 clubs, it is not difficult to imagine that many girls and their (girl) friends were learning to cook, if only because they wanted to go to these parties, socialize with their friends and meet boys, not because they liked cooking per

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<sup>160</sup> Matsumoto, “Apple Pie and *Makizushi*: Japanese American Women Sustaining Family and Community,” In *Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader*, edited by Robert Ji-Song Ku, Martin F. Manalansan IV, and Anita Mannur (New York, New York University Press, 2013), 265. “Manly foods” and “a lot of food” are my interpretation of what Matsumoto quotes from the newspaper: “heavy refreshments” and “even if you are a light-eater, boys always have a big appetite.”



se.<sup>161</sup> However, they ended up with the same results; they have the embodied experiences of cooking—for better or worst, burnt pans or perfectly tender chicken.

Cooking is a skill; how to boil an egg, sear meat, blanch green beans, and a host of other cooking techniques and tricks are abilities that are learned in life. (Babies are not born knowing how to make beef stew, even feeding themselves takes practice.)

Moreover, although one can learn these techniques from reading a cookbook, following a recipe, and watching a cooking show, one still needs “do it:” try to cook it, apply those techniques physically, in person to ingredients, cook the food, and make the dish. Chi cooking is a marriage of knowing and doing; when Chis cook, their food skills and experiences are mixed together, seasoned with their own special blend of traditional cultural practices, social kinships, collective identities, and embodied memories. The “signature dishes” in the Chi Alpha Delta recipe box embody, document, preserve, and display its rich histories and identities as food legacies that are “refreshed,” updated and remade in equal parts, by each generation of sisters who make it their duty to keep Chi cookery as sustainable resources of sorority pride and value.

### **A Chi Thanksgiving**

Let talk turkey, specifically a Chi Alpha Delta turkey. The Social Chair always prepares it, or she should because it is part of her official job description; and the turkey must be home-cooked. A Chi Thanksgiving turkey is never ordered pre-baked, fried, smoked etc. from the supermarket. These are the Chi turkey rules, hard and fast, and they must be

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<sup>161</sup> Historian Valerie Matsumoto writes about the history of Japanese American boys and girls clubs in Los Angeles in her book, *City Girls: The Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950*. I defer to her for further review of the histories of youth social groups in Japanese American communities in Southern California.

followed. Moreover, they certainly seemed kept in recent years, in concordance to the Chi turkey tradition—and with pleasing results, if one would like to judge from the pictures below.



Figure 4-5 Turkey, Chi Thanksgiving Dinner, 2012 (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)



Figure 4-6 Turkey, Chi Thanksgiving Dinner, 2013 (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)

Chis “bring it” in other ways, food-wise, for Thanksgiving as well: the Thanksgiving meal is where Chi cooking is at its “best-best.” It is at the Chis’ Thanksgiving when the sorority sisters take *real care*, insuring that they *cook really well* for each other. Chis bring their “A-game” and there is always plenty of food, according to Amanda. She explained: <sup>162</sup>

Cooking is important—I get it. It's a bonding just like crafts. I feel like you do it together also. I mean not so much for exchanges, 'cuz guys just eat everything; they're like garbage disposals. I mean, Chi's Thanksgiving dinner is always fun 'cuz it's food for just Chi, so it's always a lot better. I like Chi Thanksgiving dinner 'cuz everyone puts in their A-game; and all the food is really good; and it's just for us so

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<sup>162</sup> Amanda Interview, 5/18/13.

we don't have to worry about like not getting some or something. So, it's always nice.

The Thanksgiving meal brings the entire House together, literally and figuratively. It is an occasion for which Chis cook for one another, exclusively. It is one of the sisterhood events that the sorority has during the year, which requires everyone's mandatory attendance (Actives and Pledges) while being closed to everyone else. Chi alumnae are also welcome; the recent graduates return to make it a reunion of sorts, visiting their young sisters who are still in school. Moreover, making first-class food is a sensibility that Chis carry with them after college:

And it's not just even like in the Active Class. Even when Alumni come together; like Alumni Board every year will met with the Active Board—and just Cabinets getting together. And during that time, even our Alumni President was emailing out, “Okay, we're going to have a potluck and you better make sure your dishes are great,” because we're like with Actives and you like wanna show it off, you know, yeah.<sup>163</sup>

Chis set high standards for their cooking and each Pledge class is personally invested in ensuring the bar continues to remain “high” for the current pledge class that has come into sorority every year. Big Sisters make sure their little sisters know how to hard boil eggs, safely cut meat and vegetables, and cook chicken until well-done, even if it entails senior Actives hovering over the stove and watching their younger charges boil water. These collective cooking experiences are the Chis' personal guarantee that their food is quality controlled according to the sorority culinary standards that reflect the

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<sup>163</sup> Mallory Interview, 10/6/13.

organization's long history and the diverse experiences of its members, making Chi food "good and tasty" now, then, and forever—as long as Chis are in the kitchen.

### **Taste of Rush Food**

There are sayings that express how food tastes: you "eat with your eyes," but food is also only "as good as it tastes" and "the proof is in the pudding." How does Chi food taste? I am not a professional food critic and nor are Chis professional cooks, but I ate their food several times over the course of a week during Rush (I was glad too, and would eat their food again if I had more opportunities to do so). The food was good: it was tastefully arranged on the table, tempting to the eyes, and edible when served. It was well cooked and met all the qualities of Chi cooking I was told to expect.

So what did I eat, besides eating well? My Rush Week food Cook's tour was a mixed plate lunch smorgasbord that took me through time capsules and on international flights, mouthfuls at a time. For starters, I had *hors d'oeuvres* I would describe as retro-American cocktail snacks: deviled eggs, Swedish meatballs, and Pigs-in-a-Blanket. There were individual, cup-sized portions of fried rice and pan-fried noodles that represented the Asian-side of the cooked foods. Pasta of all shapes, (*fusilli*, *penne*, and elbow *macaroni*) in béchamel and marinara sauces, was the other starchy food. I ate chicken at all the meals: breaded, skewered, and glazed, most often with teriyaki sauce. Dumplings were also popular; while I saw them on the table, they were gone before I could get my hands on any. Similarly, Vietnamese spring rolls were placed on the table a couple times, but those went quickly as well. However, I did grab a steamed bun stuffed with pork early in the buffet line that was satisfying. Bacon regularly showed up in

dishes throughout the week, most noticeably wrapped around asparagus. I particularly enjoyed it baked with ham and eggs in a paper-ramekin for brunch at the Garden Party. Since the sorority was in Southern California, there were certainly Mexican influences, usually in the form of *quesadillas*. Along with savory foods, sweets were on the table. The desserts were mostly baked goods and were quickly eaten. If I still had room for dessert, I returned to the buffet table and picked one of two things still left after the Rushees had swept through with their plates.

If clean plates and platters are any indication of merit, then the sorority scored high marks all-around. The Rushees walked through the food line, event after event, piling their plates high with food before sitting in circles and at communal tables, talking and eating with each other and sorority sisters who kept animated conversation with the Rushees. Notably, the buffet tables were always bare at the conclusion of the events. Serving trays were removed from the food spread once the dishes were eaten. “Clean” paper plates, plastic utensils, used napkins, and empty cups filled the trash bags at the end of the night.

The experiences of cooking together in college are an avenue to expertise that the women of Chi Alpha Delta take with them when they graduate from college, albeit some with less mastery of skill by their own admissions, along with their UCLA bachelor’s degree that conveys academic achievement. For many Chis, cooking and crafting are what make their sorority special. When asked to describe what makes their organization “unique,” the refrain I heard the most was: “Chis are crafty and can cook.” Chis need to cook when they are Actives in the sorority; it is an inevitable part of the Chi college experience.

In this chapter I have endeavored to “plate and serve” the vital role cooking plays in the lives of Chis. It shapes their identities and fuels their experiences, individually and collectively; it makes and remakes the feelings of belonging and traditions of Chi sisterhood into nourishment they can taste, touch, and feel. Not only can the women of Chi Alpha Delta cook, but their cooking *crafts* Chi foods and cookery as solid performances of culinary skills that hit their mark every time—past, present, and repeatedly—in effects and affects as “basic nutrition” for *the Chi body*.

## Chapter 5

### Succeeding Archives, Exceeding Belongings: A Conclusion

We are communal histories, communal books.  
We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience.

— Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*

It's our party we can do what we want to  
It's our house we can love who we want to  
It's our song we can sing if we want to  
It's my mouth I can say what I want to

- *We Can't Stop*, Miley Cyrus (popular singer)

It was a historic moment: the sisters of Theta Kappa Phi huddling with a Founding Mother, one of the nine “original Thetas” in the Charter Class who established the sorority at the University of California, Los Angeles in 1959. However, the momentous occasion happened in the most mundane and unremarkable place, a nondescript classroom like any other on campus—functional but devoid of interior design.

Uncomfortable chairs and white veneer tables were arranged in four straight rows with an aisle down the middle. Fluorescent lights above casted the room in a dull sterile glow.

Nevertheless the surroundings were irrelevant, it was the gathering that mattered. I could not have scripted a better scene than the acts that unfold in spite of the indifferent *mise en scène*.

Asian American activist, writer, and second Poet Laureate of the City of San Francisco Janice Mirikitani stepped forward to the podium, after a warm introduction from her longtime friend, Russell Leong, poet and former editor of the *Amerasia*



*Journal*.<sup>164</sup> She was at the university to read from her recently published book of poems, *Out of the Dust*. Attired in a white sheath dress accented with a red patent-leather belt, slate-gray pumps, and black silk shawl draped over her shoulders, Mirikitani stretched out an arm to expose her wrist, “I’m wearing my Theta lavalier.” The pendant was normally worn around the neck, she explained, but added that it did not go with the dress as a necklace. “I like to do things differently,” she remarked.<sup>165</sup>

Mirikitani was animated and engaging while she talked candidly about the traumatic and life affirming experiences that shaped the woman she is today, her social justice work at the Glide Foundation and as a poet and writer.<sup>166</sup> She read one piece from her new book, but spent the majority of her reading encouraging the audience to talk. She wanted to have a conversation with them as much as they came to hear her poetry. She stepped away from the podium and walked back and forth in front of the room as she answered questions and spoke directly to individuals in the audience that included the Asian American Studies Center staff and Asian American Studies Department faculty, in addition to several of her friends and many sorority sisters. The young Thetas in the Active House who made up half the thirty or so people in the room were there to see one of the first of their own.

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<sup>164</sup> *Amerasia Journal* is the foremost academic journal in Asian American studies. The UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press has published the journal since 1971.

<http://www.aasc.ucla.edu/aascpress/aj.aspx>

<sup>165</sup> Janice Mirikitani, Poetry reading of *Out of the Dust*, University of California, Los Angeles, January 15, 2015. (Video courtesy of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center) Pseudonyms are not used for the Founding Mothers/Charter Members of Theta Kappa Phi and Chi Alpha Delta in this chapter. I consider them historic figures in their sororities; however, I employ pseudonyms for other Thetas and Chis in this chapter.

<sup>166</sup> Glide Foundation website: <http://www.glide.org>

The Thetas walked to the front of room after Mirikitani's talk. First, they stood around her for a series of sorority photographs, handing their cameras and smart phones to the people standing nearby. Mirikitani stood in the middle flanked by two Theta alumnae: Etsuko was Mirikitani's contemporary at the university in the early 1960s and they remained friends; Barbara was an Active a decade later, but connected with them as the current Theta Alumnae Board President. Then the young Theta Actives ordered themselves around their founder and older alumnae sisters in three neat rows. They turned themselves and angled towards Mirikitani who was front and center. Unlike most group photos that required instructions from the photographer to squeeze everyone into the frame and adjustments to see all the faces, the women knew their places for the pictures.

After the photographs, the Actives gathered around Mirikitani who then asked, "Do they know I wrote the words of the Theta song? It's supposed to be sung slowly." She explained the meaning of sisterhood that she was conveying through those words, speaking intimately to her young Theta sisters. When she finished talking the Actives and alumnae clustered around more tightly until they linked themselves and made a circle. The women were bound, shoulder against shoulder, and arms around each other's backs. They bent forward with their heads down and stood quietly in stillness as long minutes passed. Everyone else in the room walked to the tables in the back for the buffet lunch that the UCLA Asian American Studies Center provided as the organizers of Mirikitani's reading, but the circle of Thetas was hushed. History came to rest and the sisterhood materialized in their space. Belonging was in body and spirit in this circle, its affects moving to tears.

In this dissertation I have examined the kinds of archives produced by Asian American women in single-gender social organizations or Asian Greek-letter sororities, reconceiving them as transformative acts of affects: embodied memory-keeping practices that transmit knowledge, traditions, cultural practices, and social customs as collective identities and communal histories across time and space, among different, diverse groups of ethnic-Asian women from one generation to the next. Archives reconceived as the transformative acts of affects and participatory memory-keeping practices in Asian American women sorority groups demonstrate collective and individual identities in complex, crafted social communities. They display self-determination and express intimate belongings that connect individuals in kinship: women as sisters in the sisterhood.

The affective archives of the Asian American sisterhoods of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi complicate the conventional understanding of the archives and memory-keeping projects in minority, marginalized, and disenfranchised communities of color in the United States. Their transformative archives of affects and affection revise remembering as not only the recuperative practices motivated by the anxieties of personal and collective community forgetting and loss, but these archives of sisterhood are also the embodied performances of collective memories that celebrate identities, social cultures, and shared histories and experiences. The traditional practices of documenting, collecting, preserving, and accessing archival records in online and physical repositories are reimaged and reproduced as affective participatory acts that exceed the archive in body and spirit. These practices transfer the collective knowledge and know-how of the group corpus to its corps through embodied experiences that create intimate effects

(sentimental archival artifacts and personal belongings) to express the members' supportiveness and kindnesses to each other and the pride for their groups. The archives of sisterhood are processes of joy and enjoyment and exhibits of diligence and duty, in addition to the manifestations of the aspirations of self-acceptance, personal validation, conferred respect, and due regard amid alienation and exclusion.<sup>167</sup> They are the laudatory performances of the sororities' repertoires of sisterhood that transfer embodied knowledge with experiential know-how and group traditions—as cute and tasty as the affects and effects can be.<sup>168</sup>

### **Founding Mothers and Exceptional Sisterhoods**

Nine young Japanese American women founded the Theta Kappa Phi sorority, but no Charter Member embodied the Thetas more than Margaret Ohara did. “Theta was her baby,” said Phyllis, an alumna and Active in the late 1960s.<sup>169</sup> Frances, another Active in the late 1960s and Phyllis' Big Sister in the sorority, said that Margaret was “the epitome of a Theta.”<sup>170</sup> Frances along with a group of Theta alumnae worked with Ohara to plan the sorority's 41<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Reunion in 2000; she said that she was “blessed” for the opportunity to assist Ohara for a year as Ohara passed away soon after from cancer.

Etsuko said Margaret possessed “great physical beauty” and a self-confidence that drew

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<sup>167</sup> Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai describes the archives as the aspiration of migrants and how “migrant archives” are constructed and manifested as the political projects of migrant communities to represent their belonging, togetherness, and solidarities, see: Arjun Appadurai, “Archives as Aspiration.” In *Information Is Alive*, edited by Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder. Rotterdam: V2 Publishing/NAI Publishers, 2003.

<sup>168</sup> For embodied memories and the “archive as repertoire,” see: Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>169</sup> Phyllis Interview, 8/30/13.

<sup>170</sup> Frances Interview, 7/29/13.

people to her.<sup>171</sup> Carol, a contemporary of Etsuko and Active in the early 1960s, recalled Ohara's poise, the way she carried herself, when Ohara approached Carol in the student union and recruited her to join the sorority.<sup>172</sup> Barbara needed to pause our interview to get tissues when she talked about the woman who was the heart of the sorority and the Theta that all Thetas model themselves after.<sup>173</sup>

Ohara remains a beloved figure in the sorority, remembered and memorialized after her death over a decade ago. The sorority has a fully funded scholarship in her honor that is awarded every year to the Theta Active who "demonstrates outstanding leadership and service to the university and community."<sup>174</sup> The current Theta Alumnae Advisory Board with Thetas from each decade of the sorority and Alumnae Board Cabinet were formally establish to carry on "Margaret's sorority." Phyllis believes the alumnae's diligent involvement with the Active House, which includes taking each new pledge class of the current academic year to dinner, makes Thetas "special" and distinguishes it from the other Asian American sororities around them: "I think it's Margaret's legacy. Her passing and the vision of the sorority she wanted stuck with us." The Theta alumnae are actively engaged in maintaining the "goals and values Margaret wanted" which include traditions that recall and embody "her grace" in actions and deeds. The most important Theta tradition is keeping "Margaret's traditions:" the rites

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<sup>171</sup> Etsuko Interview, 2/20/13.

<sup>172</sup> Carol Interview, 2/4/13.

<sup>173</sup> Barbara Interview, 3/9/13.

<sup>174</sup> The scholarship is called the Margaret Ohara Shinohara Memorial Scholarship. Shinohara is her married name. The Theta Kappa Phi sorority also awards a second scholarship for "academic excellence;" it is named after the sorority's longtime faculty advisor, Dr. Robert S. Kinsman. It was later renamed the Kinsman Family Scholarship after Dr. Kinsman wife, Barbara passed away in 2006. (From the Theta Kappa Phi Alumnae Board 50<sup>th</sup> Theta Kappa Phi Anniversary Reunion letter.)

and rituals she put into place when she established the sorority—her way is the traditional way things are done.

The sisters of Theta Kappa Phi do not have the collective histories and shared identities of cooking and crafting bearing on them like their Chi sorority sisters, but the traditions that Ohara prescribed entail other rigors that require strict adherence. Andrea, a Theta alumna from the 1980s, recalled the stress of getting the objects to the specifications that “Margaret said” they had to be: “You had no idea what we had to do to get these darn candles, because we didn’t have the Internet someone could Google.... People had to drive over God’s creation to find these candles.”<sup>175</sup> The young women’s dresses at Informals and Formals were also traditions that Ohara instituted. The Pledges wear short white dresses and Actives, short black dresses at Informals. For Formals, the newly crossed-Pledge or Neophyte wears a long white dresses and Actives, long black gowns.<sup>176</sup>

Ohara is a larger-than-life figure in the sorority, the Charter Member most attributed with establishing the second historically Asian American sorority at the university. Alternatively, as Thetas say, “the first officially recognized Asian American sorority at UCLA.” Young Thetas in the twentieth-first century still know Margaret Ohara Shinohara’s name although she no longer attends their general meetings or comes

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<sup>175</sup> Andrea Interview, 8/21/13.

<sup>176</sup> Chi Alpha Delta also has traditional attire for its Informals and Formals from its sorority charter. Pledges dress in pastel colors, tea-length dresses with white stockings, closed-toe shoes, and gloves, and Actives wear floor-length black gowns and long black gloves at Informals. At Formals, the Chi Actives wear long pastel-color gowns and Neophytes wear long white dresses and gloves.

out for sorority events.<sup>177</sup> Ask any young Theta and she can recite how the sorority came into existence through Ohara's will and determination. This story is their lore, and recited like revered verse. Ohara received a Panhellenic Scholarship when she was accepted to UCLA. However, once the historically white Greek-letter sororities on campus realized Ohara was Japanese American and not the woman of Irish descent (i.e., O'Hara) that they had thought, she was denied admittance to the all-white Panhellenic sororities on Sorority Row. From that incident of racism and discrimination, Ohara gathered eight friends and Theta Kappa Phi was born with the support of Mrs. Rex P. Enoch, a Panhellenic sorority alumna and organizer of the UCLA chapter of Alpha Delta Pi, faculty advisor Dr. Robert S. Kinsman, and his wife Barbara Kinsman, an honorary Theta.<sup>178</sup>

Why did Ohara start another Asian Greek-letter society instead of joining the Asian American sorority already established at the university? The Theta alumnae I interview echoed the sense that Ohara wanted "an alternative" for Asian American women at the university. She had the desire for some "thing," a social group, environment, and camaraderie, that was not already in place and the knowledge to make that social belonging into a reality. "She knew exactly how to get that sorority going, lay down the bylaws, and the constitution," explained Frances, "She was just an amazing lady; she probably got those other eight ladies together and said let's have an alternative to Chi." As we continued talking, Frances added, "Maybe they were the rebel, her and the eight other Charter Members."<sup>179</sup> Ohara is the Theta founding mother upheld by the

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<sup>177</sup> Shinohara was her married name. Since her passing, her son and his daughter (Ohara's granddaughter) often attend Theta's Charter Day, the annual luncheon in the Spring that celebrates the founding of the sorority, to represent Ohara and honor her legacy.

<sup>178</sup> Theta Kappa Phi Alumnae Board 50<sup>th</sup> Theta Kappa Phi Anniversary Reunion letter.

<sup>179</sup> Frances Interview, 7/29/13.

sorority as its “visionary earth mother:” the “self-assured, mature, and well-spoken” Japanese American woman who created Theta Kappa Phi from her aspirations and imaginations of social belonging and sisterhood.<sup>180</sup> Her biography acts as the corpus to the corps; her story, its telling and retelling are part of the sorority’s memory-keeping practices. It is text-like tenet in principle and practice, and a tradition unto itself. Rebels or not, Ohara and the other eight women founders were upstarts, young women who challenged “the Establishments” of the historically white Greek-letter and the first Asian American sororities on campus.

Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi have their own individual collective identities that persisted in the sororities and play off each other. These traditional stereotypes draw Chis and Thetas in broad strokes, but are also the shorthand that the women use to describe the “typical” or “type” of young woman the sororities tend to attract. The saying goes, “Date a Theta, Marry a Chi” since the two Asian American sororities have been in existence at the university together. Although the implications do not carry the same currency for the present generation of Chis and Thetas as social attitudes and expectations of women have changed since the 1960s to the 2000s in America, the young Actives and alumnae in both groups know that historically Thetas women were associated with a “party girl” image, while Chi women were casted as the “homemakers.”

Chis continue to embrace their cooking and crafting reputations. They know these traditional practices reinforce the domestic skills that their Chi forewomen valued, but they also realize that having such “domesticities” make them seem “old-fashioned” in

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<sup>180</sup> Estuko Interview, 2/20/13.



contemporary times. However, the young Chis of the twentieth-first century still work diligently to uphold the good homemakers' name of the sorority as did their sisters before them. Moreover, they think they have heightened the sorority's reputation as they continue to burnish the group's cooking and crafting prowess, raising the bar of "Chi homemaking" to higher standards in their generations. Cooking and crafting distinguish them and make them proud to be Chis, even if these domestic skills seem *passé*.

Likewise, the Theta alumnae from the 1960s did not shrink or disavow their good-time girls' status when I spoke to them. Beverly, an Active during the 1960s and Frances and Phyllis' contemporary, reveled in the Thetas' reputation and added that it also came with the cachet of being "prettier" than their "homely" Chi sorority sisters in the eyes of the young Asian American men with whom they socialized and who aspired to date them because of their beauty.<sup>181</sup> Another alumnae said she knew the women in the pledge class during her active years who probably caused the sorority to receive that partying reputation.<sup>182</sup> In the 2010s Thetas were "more chilled and laidback" whereas Chis were thought of as "more high-strung," according to Danielle, a third-year Chi Active, who said that these were the reputations the young women have among their fraternity brothers in Omega Sigma Tau and Lambda Phi Epsilon.<sup>183</sup>

However, the Chi and Theta women who I interviewed did not select one sorority over the other because of those identities, which are names and labels, fixed and affixed

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<sup>181</sup> Beverly Interview, 8/15/13.

<sup>182</sup> France Interview, 7/29/13.

<sup>183</sup> Danielle Interview, 3/5/13. Chi Actives also said their Omega and Lambda fraternities brothers have collective identities, historically, that still circulate among the four historically Asian Greek-letter organizations at the university, regardless if it holds any truth now (and maybe ever did.)

to the groups. They accept those identities as an inheritance when they join the groups; those identities are legacies and the traditions they perform in their groups as rites and rituals, customary acts that produce the cultural affects and effects of their sisterhood. They choose one group because they felt more connections to it than to the other. It was the affects of identities, not the identities alone that swayed the balance.

When I asked the Theta alumnae from the 1960s and 1970s why they chose the sorority they did when they rushed Chi and Theta, their answers emphasized having an affinity for the young women in the sorority at the time:

Phyllis: They didn't seem to be as cliquish. When I went to a Chi event and I only went to one, I didn't feel anyone took the time to embrace my being there. I didn't feel anyone noticed I was there. And it might have been that there were other perspective Pledges that they knew that they were trying to recruit and get to join, but I didn't feel anyone—whether I was there or not would have made no difference. Whereas with Theta I felt they took to time to get to know all the people there.

Estuko: I think I did notice a difference. I felt as though, hmmm, Thetas was more of what I wanted at that time. I know that Thetas was set up to be more like a sorority, and I mean at the time, because Chis were just there, hmmm, and the only ones there. They were not set up like a sorority per say, when you say a sorority does this, this, this. They were more set up like a club, which is fine, so their presentation was a little bit different, but now I would say you can't even tell them apart. (Laughs). .... I felt I wanted to be in a more intimate, small group [Thetas], than be in a big

group [Chis], and get to know everyone. And my initial impression of the [Theta]girls was they were very well spoken. .... At that time, they were more eager to please, the Thetas, because they were brand new. They were excited; they were—they seem peppier, more energetic.

Beverly: Thetas had a reputation for being pretty, having parties, and having fun; and, hmmm, the Chis were a little more subdued. .... Thetas look better, but Chis were nicer. I knew inside I was a nice person, so I didn't need to prove that. So I joined the group that had the best looking girls and had a lot of fun—the Thetas had a good time.<sup>184</sup>

The young Chi alumnae and Actives I interviewed from the 1990s and 2000s also gave me similar answers, but with warmer feelings attributed to the Chis:

Jessica: The only difference I noticed in the rush process were the girls. Although I loved the girls from both sororities, I felt I got to know more girls in Chis.

Danielle: It's not that I didn't like Thetas; I just liked Chis more.

Marisa: I feel like Chis are a little more girly in a way: more girly, gentle, and affectionate, kind of, actually. I felt a more emotional connection.

Shannon: They gave me the impression that they're really nice and have these outgoing personalities, and I really like that and that's why I applied to Chis. .... The reason I chose Chis over Thetas is because I clicked with

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<sup>184</sup> Phyllis Interview, 8/30/13; Etsuko Interview, 2/20/13; Beverly Interview, 8/15/13.

more of the girls in Chis, like more than I did Thetas. .... I wasn't able to get that connected with Thetas.<sup>185</sup>

Identities are affecting and have effects: effects of consequence, impact, influence, and significance. When embodied they have the ability to “move people;” affective identities can call people into action and gather them together. People who share identities create communities of belonging with their collective identities, be they aspirational belongings in imagined communities, diasporic communities with shared experiences, or local communities tied to an actual place (i.e., suburban neighborhoods, urban ethnic enclaves).<sup>186</sup> Affective identities when embodied and performed are the “difference that makes a difference” for people of color.<sup>187</sup> When they coalesce in communal groups, these identities are variances that signal and signify more than “the Other,” aliens and outsiders, and undocumented and excluded populations. They are the matters that create the “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity of Asian Americans as Asian American diversities” (diversity of “Asian America” and Asian Americans): enabling and empowering people to form communities for social justice, civil liberties, and validation and self-expressions of their histories, cultures, and experiences.<sup>188</sup> Collective identities are the effects and affects of belongings. If they brought together in the “right mix” of ideals, persons, and purposes, they effect change and create

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<sup>185</sup> Jessica Interview, 2/19/13; Danielle Interview, 3/5/13; Marisa Interview, 6/1/13; Shannon Interview, 6/5/13.

<sup>186</sup> For “imagined communities” see, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on Origin and the Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London, UK: Verso Press, 1991).

<sup>187</sup> Gregory Bateson defined information as “the difference that makes a difference.”

<sup>188</sup> For the “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity of Asian American differences” see, Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: The Politics of Asian American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

communities of affects in mutual support, affiliation, and friendship. These affectual communities stir the social and emotional actions that produce the (material) effects—personal belongings, intimate archives, and sentimental objects—of their kinship, affinal relationships, and communal associations.<sup>189</sup>

Furthermore, it is the embodiments of these varied and various identities that craft ones-selves in complex selfhood. Identities are complex and crafted; and crafting these complex identities are ongoing, lifelong processes. Individuals and groups craft complex personhood and collective identities in creative projects, employing participatory practices that make the aspirations and inspirations of togetherness into the forms and feelings of “community:” in solidarity and sentiment, creating and recreating the sisterhood.<sup>190</sup> Communities forged in bodies and spirit that simultaneously exist in spaces, places, and groups where personal complex selfhoods connect and collect with other complex selves-hoods, making lines and lineages that reform in the continuums of circles and rings where individuals join groups, dwelling together as “kin:” sisters and

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<sup>189</sup> Sociologist Max Weber coined the term “social action.” According to Weber’s theory of social action, one’s behavior (an individual’s action) is socially contextualized. Social situation influences and effects social behavior, and the individual form her actions in social contexts, according to the social effects she wants to achieve in social situations: see, Max Weber, “The Nature of Social Action,” *Runciman, W.G. 'Weber: Selections in Translation'* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991). For “affectual action” and “emotional action” also see: Weber, 1991.

<sup>190</sup> For “complex personhood” see, Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting the Sociological Imaginary* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2008). For “crafting selves” see, Dorinne Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses in Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990)

sisterhoods in a myriad of effects and affects and all possibilities and potentials of belongings.<sup>191</sup>

Theta Kappa Phi and Chi Alpha Delta are different organizations; they should be unlike, because they emerged in distinct historical moments. Different histories and experiences influenced the varied collective and individual identities of the women who formed these two separate groups (Chis and Thetas). Even though both sororities were founded in response to the prejudice, racism, and discrimination that Japanese American women faced as ethnic-Asian women and women of color on campus, the women who established these two groups lived their young lives decades apart. The organizations embody their time (the Charter Members' lives, time, and place) even as new generations of Chi and Theta women continuously add their cultural experiences and ethnic heritages to the sororities' "original mix."

Histories are scripts and performances; they are enacted and embodied even as they are revised, augmented, and reconfigured by individuals and groups who enable alternate selves identities and shared identities to refashion the past and reimage their future.<sup>192</sup> The Charter Members of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi Delta wrote themselves into "being," founding sororities of their own when they were excluded from historically white Greek-letter sororities in the 1920s and 1950s respectively. The (traditionally all-white) Panhellenic institutions that were already established at the university wanted their histories to remain "all-white," so the founders of Chi Alpha

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<sup>191</sup> For "imagined communities" see, Anderson, 1991. For "complex personhood" see, Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting the Sociological Imaginary* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2008).

<sup>192</sup> Gary Okihiro, *Common Ground: Reimagining American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Delta and Theta Kappa Phi wrote their own histories, carving out somewhere to belong: sisterhoods of their own that persist and endure as spaces where generations upon generations of Asian American women belong among themselves and with each other in the past, present, and future of their own making.

### **Succeeding Sisters and Successful Archives**

“No” is a powerful word. It shuts the door, closes the gate; it makes borders and boundaries on territorial claims. It separates: exclusion and inclusion, insiders and outsiders, and patrols the edges of the lines it draws. Its strength shapes peoples and their places into fortresses with high walls: groups make their institutions as the Establishment; societies form social orders, hierarchies based on socio-economic class and biases from race, ethnicity, gender, self-orientation, and individual ability or disability that disenfranchise whole Other-populations; and citizens invoke their nation-state as a nationality that does not recognize naturalization. “No” demonstrates that there is a party, but the “beautiful people” are already in the club. It is VIPs-only and the rope line is on the curb; wait outside in the cold, wearing your skimpy dress.

In 1962, the Chi Alpha Delta sorority was asked to join the National Sorority of Lambda Delta Phi and become a chapter in its national organization. The Chi Actives held a tea in March of that year. An alumna from Phi Delta Nu presented the particulars of national affiliation with Lambda Delta Phi. The different points of views were exchanged and discussed between the two sororities: Chi Alpha Delta’s Active House and the Lambda Delta Phi representative. A list of pros and cons circulated among the

Chi Actives who voted on becoming part of a national Greek-letter sorority. The pros equaled the cons, but the final vote count was not even close.

In the “pro” column:

1. Prestige
2. Chi’s will be a member of the UCLA Panhellenic Conference (i.e., It would be a part of the historically white Greek-letter sororities on campus)
3. Possible future financial aid from the National [Lambda Delta Phi sorority].
4. The ideals (i.e., the sorority’s values, the principles the organization is founded on) includes: a. local option—each local chapter can choose its own methods of selecting, b. acceptance of all girls for membership regardless of background or heritage.

In the “con” column:

1. We will be losing the name of Chi Alpha Delta, our pin, our colors.
2. We will be losing our common cultural background.
3. We will have to change our basic structure: a. membership will have to be completely integrated; b. we will have to change our rush activities (probably have to conform to the Panhellenic rules and rush similarly to the way done on the Row).
4. Higher dues. (see constitution)<sup>193</sup>

Another sheet of paper was circulated to cast the votes. Typed alphabetically were the name of the Chi Actives with a line to write “yes” or “no” and longer line to sign their names. The vote was five to one against joining the national sorority. Chi Alpha Delta had carved its space at UCLA, and its young women were not going to surrender it—not by a long shot. The first Asian American sorority in the nation had “arrived.” Chi Alpha Delta built its House on the solid ground of Asian American sisterhood, in the face of discrimination and exclusion. When “the Establishment” came knocking thirty-three

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<sup>193</sup> *Chi Alpha Delta Sorority. Alumnae Administrative files* (UCLA University Archives Record Series 651). Library Special Collections. Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.



years later, the House that Chis built shut the door and locked the gate to the National Panhellenic Council which barred them in the first place in 1928.<sup>194</sup>

A letter dated May 7, 1962 and signed by the President of Chi Alpha Delta sent the resounding “no” in a paragraph:

Thus, it is with regret that after much discussion and thought, the members of the Chi Alpha Delta Sorority have decided to postpone national affiliations until some future time. We feel that it is not possible at the present time to undergo the changes, which would be necessary in order to affiliate with your national group.<sup>195</sup>

In affect it said: “Yo! Chis in the House, let’s hear it, ya’ll!” The sign on the door read: Chi Alpha Delta Club, Members Only with a velvet rope line outside for everyone else to wait behind.

The Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi sororities have archives in the most common sense of the word; their record collections—administrative documents, scrapbooks, and sorority memorabilia—are housed at the university library. They are open to public view except for one set of boxes, which are restricted by the sororities. Their Active House materials are private and reserved, only members of the sororities can request to view them unless their leadership gives permission otherwise.

Both sororities established these organizational archives at almost the same time in the late 1990s. Chi Alpha Delta started depositing its materials earlier, perhaps a year before the Theta Kappa Phi sorority; but these dates do not have the same import as do the years when these sororities were founded and chartered at the university, or the collective identities that the Chis and Thetas have forged and cast for themselves since. Nevertheless, both organizations have a similar volume of records in the university

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<sup>194</sup> *Chi Alpha Delta Sorority. Alumnae Administrative files*

<sup>195</sup> *Chi Alpha Delta Sorority. Alumnae Administrative files*

archives, although one group has an “extra” thirty years of history to document. My point is that it is one thing to “have a history” and another to “have a recorded history” in the most traditional sense as historical record, writing the past into legibility and placing oneself in history—“in the history books” and “making history.”<sup>196</sup>

In other words, the length of one’s history does not necessary correspond and correlate to the mass of one’s historical records documented, collected, and preserved in periods of time. Perhaps this is obvious enough that it is nonsensical to say, but value does not equate to volume, and richness is not always about material abundance. However, in spite of that, the spirit of things is hardly enough to tie ourselves and our histories and experiences to the physical world, inasmuch as we need material wealth to live in a material world: “Recordkeeping is a ‘kind of witnessing.’ On a personal level it is a way of evidencing and memorializing our lives – our existence, our activities and experiences, our relationships with others, our identity, our ‘place’ in the world.”<sup>197</sup>

The institutional archival records of Chi Alpha Delta “witness,” give testimonies and serve as proof to the storied history of the first Asian American sorority in the nation, the young women who joined the group, and the Asian American communities to which they belong. The archival records provide a longitudinal study of Asian American communities, belongings, identities, and culture over eight decades and the lifespans of

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<sup>196</sup> Because our contemporary society also “lives” in the Digital Information and Technology age, record-making and record-keeping are increasingly digital documentation, storage, and preservation archival projects, which one could argue is not “real” as it is “virtual information” and intangible and highly unstable in its forms. However, such debates and discussions are outside the scope of my dissertation.

<sup>197</sup> Albeit the amount of such “wealth” and its “equitable distribution” in society is continually contested by peoples from all strata of society, as well as those considered apart and outside of civil and social structures—and i.e., illegible in public histories. Sue McKemish, “Evidence of me...,” *Archives and Manuscript* 24(1): 28-45.

generations. Material objects and sorority minutes that personalize the violence and cruelties of war and honor fortitude and resilience in its aftermath, while documenting the changes in society (women's roles, attitudes toward Asian Americans, and how Asian Americans continued to make and remake their identities) through these women's social lives. There are the artifacts of affects—happy, sad, and bittersweet—that document the trials and triumphs of the sorority, and the acts of its members in everyday life, in good times and bad.

The sorority threw a Charter Day dinner at the university's alumni center to celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1979. Over three hundred Chis and their guests attended the reunion, which including many Charter members who were in their seventies by then. Along with catering a four-course meal with salmon *en gelle* appetizers and charbroiled New York strip steak entrées plus *hors d'oeuvres* and *crudités*, the sorority compiled a 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion Book as a gift for its members. A group that began with fourteen Charter Members had grown to over 450 alumnae and 80 active members in half a century. Their history was compiled in a thick book, congratulating and commemorating “Fifty Years of Existence, Memories, and Sisterhood.”<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> *Chi Alpha Delta Sorority. Alumnae Administrative files.*



Figure 5-1 Chi Alpha Delta Charter Members, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner, yr. 1979  
(Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles)



Figure 5-2 Chi Alpha Delta Charter Members (Library Special Collections,  
Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles;  
Donated by Aiko (Mary) Misue Sugita)



Figure 5-3 Chi Alpha Delta Charter Members  
(Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research  
Library, University of California, Los Angeles; Donated by  
Aiko (Mary) Misue Sugita)

### **Exceeding Actives and Enduring Belongings**

There are the only two historically Asian American sororities at the university. They have the pride and spirit to rival each other, and strength to keep themselves in a league of their own in the fifty-six years they have been on campus together. They are safely secured as the only official Asian American-interest sororities at UCLA. If a young woman wants to “go Asian Greek,” she has to go through Thetas or Chis—rush, pledge, and cross in these sororities. There are no other ways to Asian American sisterhood on the other side.

Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi are rival sororities. They compete for the same pool of young women who rush both sororities, but their rivalry is also stylized and

performed. They project the appearance that one is better than the other, but in reality, they want each other to do well. It is to both their benefits if both organizations succeed because it shows their popularity and demonstrates their relevance as Greek-letter sororities in the larger population of university-wide “Greek life” and the Panhellenic sororities on the campus’ Sorority Row. When the young Actives in Chi and Thetas realized that they had the same Rush theme for their 2013 Rush Week, the two groups met in the summer and agreed to change their themes to be “fair” and “equal” with each other, as not to compete directly with each other, using the same theme that the Rushees could actually compare and judge side-by-side. Neither sorority wanted to have a head-to-head competitive event: the material objects, pamphlets, and other publicity that the sororities’ make, give away, and display at their events during week would be “too close for comfort.” Chi Alpha Delta’s 2013 Rush Week theme was based on J.M. Barre’s Peter Pan and Theta Kappa Phi went with the Jazz Age, Roaring Twenties theme à la *The Great Gatsby*, but the sororities originally planned something else, very different, which was the same idea.

The same group of Chi and Theta Actives and Pledges see each other at all the Asian Greek Council events during the school year, although some of the activities are competitive events themselves between the four Asian Greek organizations (e.g., the AGC basketball tournament, AGC picnic, Thetas Battle of Pledge Dances). The Chis, Thetas, Omegas, and Lambdas also support each other by attending everyone’s social events, including the public portions of Informals and Formals. The Omega and Lambda fraternities throw the after-parties at night after Chi and Thetas’ Rush Week events, and both sororities take their Rushees to these parties, which are usually dance parties where

the fraternities reserve and rent the space and provide the DJ for the night. As the two Asian American sororities on campus, Chis and Thetas are rivals; however, individually the sorority members are friends. Chis and Thetas have been roommates while attending UCLA, and they share apartments after graduation. Theta Kappa Phi’s Annual Battle of the Pledge Dances fundraiser is a good example of their camaraderie. The Chi Pledge Classes do not fail to prepare a routine and compete in the competition. The same cannot be said about other Asian American-interest sororities and fraternities in the larger Asian Greek social network in Southern California who are no-shows after making commitments to perform. When I interviewed the current Theta President, she remarked that an Asian Greek sorority in the area had pulled out of the dance battle, yet again as they seemed to do every year; she was indifferent as she said, “no surprise there.”<sup>199</sup>

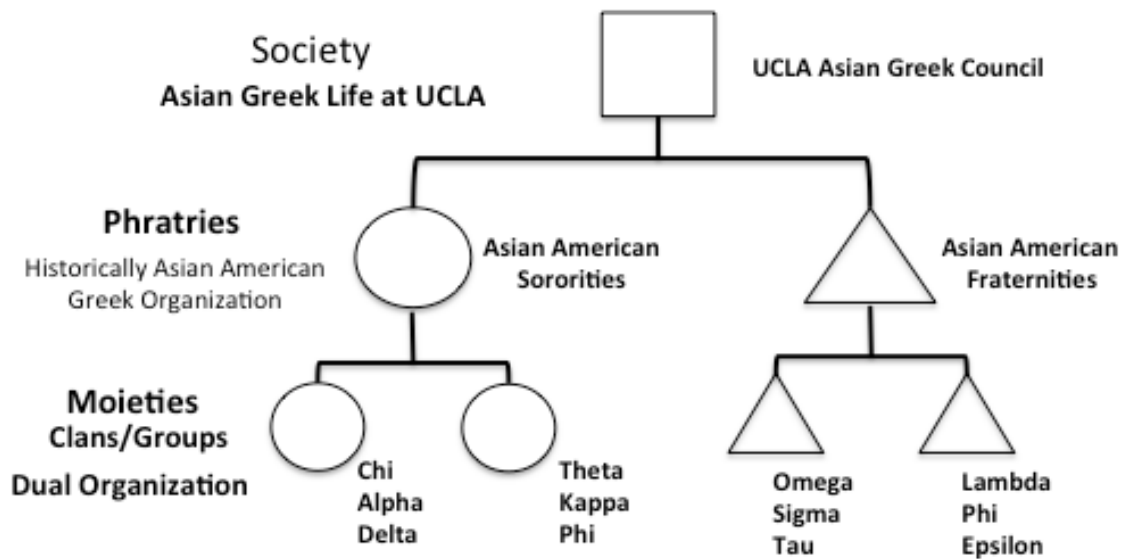


Table 5-1 Asian Greek “Kinship” at UCLA

<sup>199</sup> Erica Interview, 3/2/13.

Chis and Thetas are sister sororities and share a kinship with each other. Chi Alpha Delta was established for three decades before Theta Kappa Phi existed as the alternative, the other and second Asian American sorority, but they have developed a mutually dependent relationship over time. Kinship structures not only account for social relationships within a single group, but also map the relationships of groups in larger groups or social units—e.g., a village, neighborhood, etc., as well as migrant and virtual communities with no physical border or boundaries. As the two Asian American-interest sororities on campus, Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi function in a moiety system in the bigger picture of Asian Greek kinship at the university. Over time, they have evolved into a dual organization where they both “need” each other for their respective sororities and pledge program to function smoothly and consistently every year. They represent half of Asian Greek life on campus, while the Asian Greek fraternities, Omega Sigma Tau and Lambda Phi Epsilon, offer Asian American brotherhood to young Asian American men at the university.<sup>200</sup> Chis would not be Chis without Thetas besides them and vice versa; their collective histories are linked and identities intertwined, complimentary and competitively conjoined, even amid the heterogeneities, hybridities, and multiplicities of their sororities’ histories, traditions, and identities and the varieties and variations of their material cultural effects of Asian American sisterhood.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> For “dual organization” and “moiety system,” see Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (Basic Books, 1963) and David Maybury-Lewis, “The Analysis of Dual Organizations: A Methodological Critique,” *Antropologica* (1960), pp. 17-44. [Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27860217>].

<sup>201</sup> For heterogeneities, hybridities, and multiplicities of Asian American difference, see Lowe, 1996.





Figure 5-4 Theta Kappa Phi 2013 Rush publicity (Theta Kappa Phi Facebook)



Figure 5-5 Chi Alpha Delta 2013 Rush publicity (Chi Alpha Delta Facebook)

Since I told the young Chi Actives and Pledges when I first met them at a sorority House general meeting I was interested in the history of the sorority, many of the Chis I interviewed later said I should look at their scrapbooks or asked if I had seen them yet. The sorority creates one scrapbook each year to document and commemorate the social activities and occasions it celebrates every year. These scrapbooks are like a family photo album, high school yearbook, and mementos from a keepsake box merged into one, and include many charming craft elements on its pages and cover for which the Chis are well-known. These books are elaborate, sentimental, and some are oversized so that they cannot be held in one's hands and are instead looked at the tables where they are

displayed. Each one is unique and interesting to flip through, although they document the same events, but with different people and the “new” Pledge Class of that year.

Perhaps one can think of them as their history books, because it is the sorority historians’ job to make them and deposit them at the university archives at the end of the year, at the close of her term.<sup>202</sup> Her other responsibility is taking photographs at every sorority event. Both sororities, the Chis and Thetas, take many photos; they always have in the past and especially now when smartphones have digital cameras. Sorority “picture-taking” is ubiquitous and the number of photographs of any single event can easily exceed one hundred, if not double that number. Chi alumnae joked with me that during their Pledge year they learn to be “always picture ready,” because Chis will have a lot of photograph taken of them and often when they would least expect it.<sup>203</sup> And indeed, I looked at so many photographs during the course of my dissertation project that I felt at times more like a voyeur than an ethnographer when I saw hundreds of photos that appeared to look the same—there are only so many ways to drink from bottles and plastic cups.

A whole afternoon is spent taking a variety of photographs at Informals and Formals, before the young women (and their escorts) eat dinner and participate in the ceremonial portions of the evening. There are a variety of photos that group the young women in different sets of smaller subgroups in the sorority: sorority house photographs

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<sup>202</sup> All the positions in the Chi Alpha Delta Cabinet are one-year terms, but do not correspond to UCLA’s academic year. Instead, the Cabinet officers’ terms begin at the Installs in the Spring quarter, when the “new” Cabinet is sworn in and the sorority sends its graduating Seniors off at the event. The terms also last through the summer in as much as the sorority is “active” during the university’s summer break. Chi Alpha Delta has two sorority events in the summer: a CAD Cabinet retreat and a CAD Actives sisterhood retreat.

<sup>203</sup> Kimi and Julie, 3/24/13.

include everyone; sorority family photos, just each family line; individual Pledge class, which is four different sets of “class pictures;” and all the Actives and Pledges/Neophytes of the year, separately. And these are just the formal pictures for the occasion; more informal photos are taken by the young women individually as they are getting ready, doing their hair and putting on makeup etc., or waiting around at Informals and Formals between the picture-taking, dinner, and ceremony. These personal “snapshots” showed the young women from a casual and relaxed point-of-view; it is literally how they see each other in the midst of themselves—it is their views from inside the ring, on the playing field.

An ethnographer cannot maintain her “outsider self” by definition, if she gets inside the circle. Nevertheless, outsides and insides are not simply divided by lines; and it is a naïve viewpoint in light of the complex lives we live and the complex identities we negotiate in ourselves and with the people around us. Sororities have secrets; Greek-letter fraternities and sororities would not be “Greek,” if they did not have rites, rituals, and traditions that are known only to them. They are fraternal orders; and thusly, also secret societies historically, and they continue to keep that practice today.

I was reminded of the value of these secrets; both the importance of the traditions practiced and performed in private and the value, power, and privileges of such “hidden knowledge,” (i.e., secrets) that are represented and embodied in these sisterhoods. When I interviewed a young Neophyte, she asked me if I had to do this project on her organization or could I “write my paper” on something else? She was concerned because many things her sorority does are “a secret,” as she said, adding that I would not be able to

see those things nor could she tell me about them.<sup>204</sup> Chis and Thetas told me many things about themselves and their organizations because they wanted to help with my research, but they also did not want me to publicize that information, i.e., “tell anyone else.”

The “inside” in relationship to the “outside” is not a straight line; borders and boundaries are more flexible and the spaces between “in” and “out” more fluid and permeable—high fences and gates do not always keep people out. Access is necessary to conduct an ethnography study; however, an ethnographer does not need to be in the inner circle, although she needs to be close enough to see it. Alternatively, at the very least, she should know that there is one, even if she cannot see for herself. The things I was asked not to tell, I have not told. In addition, as I said to Bethany, the young women who worried about the feasibility of my research in light of the many things she could not talk about: I had “no worries” in that regard and there was always “stuff to talk about;” she could keep the secrets, still talk to me, and have plenty to say.

After I brought it to the attention of the Chis that their organizational archives at the university library “ended” in the early 2000s, and I could not find the scrapbooks they talked about they apparently asked around the sorority on my behalf. When I interviewed Shannon, she brought it up again:

Shannon: Hmmm, I remember that you mentioned about keeping records; and how you said you couldn’t find a lot of records from 2000, like early 2000s.

Vivian: Yeah, in the archives.

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<sup>204</sup> Bethany, 5/22/13.

Shannon: Yeah. It's actually hard to keep record of traditions, but I actually found out where they are. They're actually like at one of our, like, sisters' houses. So like, we keep them as reference through the years. So, I guess like no one has submitted anything to Archives for a while [...] Hopefully like the really old ones we're going to send back to Archives. [...]

She also explained that the sorority has the newest ones, because it is "easier" for them to access and keep track of them. Although they might not know specifically which sorority sisters have them, knowing that these books are with them, somewhere, is more tangible than the knowledge that the university archive has them in safe storage.

Shannon: Yeah, you know, it's a little bit easier for us too. Like if we get them, if we pass them on, like one generation to the next, so that like we're able—. Like instead of asking for Archives, like checking them out, like we just keep them for now as reference.

Vivian: Yeah, I think that's fine. You don't have to explain to me. I just mentioned that, just like I think you just probably have them all yourselves.<sup>205</sup>

Whether or not I could see them, these scrapbooks were where the sorority members had ready access when they needed to use them or just wanted to look at them personally for their pleasure. I also found out later that the majority of them did not know where the university archive was on campus either, so that was an issue even before getting to their materials. Access to archival materials is not as simple as walking into the library, pulling

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<sup>205</sup> Shannon Interview, 6/15/13.

a book from a shelf, and checking it as one exits the building, which I tried to explain to several young Chis who asked about their official archival records at the university library. Eventually I saw one of these sorority scrapbooks, and it was easier for me as well that they kept these books in their hands.

Danielle: You know we keep scrapbooks, every year. And I know for the past few years it hasn't been submitted to the archives. But I still have mine—

Vivian: Oh.

Danielle: It's not done yet, that's the thing.

Vivian: It's not done yet. (Laughs)

Danielle: I know. [*Walks to the closet and brings the scrapbook out, to the living room*] It's not very good either.

Vivian: Oh, that's okay. (Laughs)

Danielle: [*Flipping through the pages of the book*] Mine is not nearly complete yet.

Vivian: Everyone one has to do this?

Danielle: Every historian is suppose to, but—

Vivian: Ah, that why we—yes, okay, one day, who knows, this might not be a scrapbook anymore, like you said, huh.

Danielle: Maybe like a CD. (Laughs) I'm halfway done.

Vivian: You're not getting any pressure, okay. I'm not here to pressure, no pressure—

Danielle: I know like for the past ten years; it's not just me. (Laughs)

Then she opened the scrapbook and showed me the pages, explaining the events and activities that they detailed and documented for the sorority. It was a sweet and sentimental tour of the sorority—of her and her sorority sisters’—in contemporary times, as she recounted and described the events behind the photographs, crafted objects, and printed materials I looked at.

With this trip of “a year in the life,” I learned the most about Chis: their acts and actions, and the meaning of those movements in the lives of Chis. The things they do together as a sorority and their feelings of sisterhood. The reasons why Chis do what they do: how they do it and what it all means to them as the women of Chi Alpha Delta, the oldest Asian American sisterhood in the nation that survived a war, could not be more apparent, “real” and tangible, as we looked at this incomplete book.

Furthermore, most meaningful to me was for once I was not on my toes, craning my neck to see around a shoulder, standing behind a figure or looking over her head.<sup>206</sup> Instead, the book was taken out for me, for my eyes to see by the woman whose task it was to keep the account, make the scrapbook that is the “official” history of Chi Alpha Delta for the year and for that Chi generation who are in its Active House. She held it and read the stories from its pages for both of us.

In this dissertation I have endeavored to articulate and analyze the interrelated physical and material, emotional and intellectual, intimate and public processes and communal, participatory performances of memory-keeping archival practices in Asian American

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<sup>206</sup> For the reference of this analogy, see: Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” *Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1973).

communities, specifically women social groups or Asian Greek sororities. The effects and affects of such efforts and activities (memory-keeping archival practices) are evidences of trauma and resilience, rupture and continuity, and the heterogeneities, hybridities, and multiplicities of Asian American diversities and differences at the intersections of racial and ethnic identities, socio-economic class, and gender and gender identities. The Chis and Thetas' archives are processes of fun and enjoyment, in addition to exhibits of duty and community service. They are the glowing performances of sisterhood that transfer embodied knowledge with experiential know-how in the acts of Chis and Thetas—in “faith, love, and trust” and “once, always, and forever.”<sup>207</sup>

For the women of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi, their memory-keeping work and embodied archival practices are done in service to the meaningful social kinships and the enduring bonds of sisterhood that these women share with their sorority sisters—past, present, and in perpetuity. The Houses that Chis and Theta crafted as safe dwellings have succeeded the racism and discrimination they faced as minority women of color excluded from campus social life, which the historically white Panhellenic sororities saved for their privileged social circles. The sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi kept their archives close to their persons and embody them because they actively care; they consider and value their archives as more than physical places to collect and preserve their belongings—sorority effects: material objects, organizational records, and memorabilia stored in the climate control, closed circuit television rooms in archival institutions. The archives of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi are not only

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<sup>207</sup> The Actives and Alumnae of Theta Kappa Phi commonly sign their communications and correspondence with each other and on behalf of the sorority: “In Faith, Love, and Trust.” The Chi Alpha Delta sorority has some sayings I have heard repeated or written on ephemera and memorabilia: “Once a Chi, Always a Chi” and “Chis forever.”



the displays of personal feats of affects and affections that demonstrate their familial bonds, the kinship that these women share as the sisters of their (sororities') House; but they are also the groups' recitations and recitals of the social solidarity and support that applies the spirit of sisterhood as acts of belongings to generations of Asian American women at the university, making them the sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi. Their transformative archives live through the collective processes of community(-building) that creates these sororities' cultures of care in the lives of Chis and Thetas: the sympathies and solidarities of Asian American (Greek-letter) sisterhoods that enable and animate these women's everyday lives, artfully crafting them into groups of sisters for life.

The archives of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi persist and persevere as testaments and tributes to the knowledge and know-how of the affective belongings that the sorority sisters of Chi Alpha Delta and Theta Kappa Phi embody and perform: the affects and effects that they carry with them, give to each other, and share together. These sorority women's archives exceed in body and spirit, as corps and corpus, creating and crafting the cultures of sisterhood that bind and connect one generation of women to the next in circles of solicitude: the collective identities, communal histories, and share experiences that circulate intimate belongings in their rings.

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