



Designing for Homesickness: An Emotional and Nostalgic Approach to Burmese Milk Tea (Laphet Yay) for Burmese Immigrants

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Abstract

Homesickness can profoundly impact the emotional well-being of immigrants, disrupting social and cultural ties. This study investigates how design interventions can alleviate such emotional challenges among Burmese immigrants by focusing on the cultural significance of Burmese Milk Tea (Laphet Yay). A qualitative approach was employed, involving surveys; survey 1 (n=43) and survey 2 (n=20), cultural probes (n=3), and user testing (n=12), with the majority of participants being university students in Thailand. Key findings highlight nostalgia triggers and accessibility barriers—such as the difficulty of replicating authentic tea flavors and the absence of communal tea-shop ambiance abroad. User testing emphasizes the importance of meaningful, long-lasting artifacts and immersive experiences that go beyond taste alone. Informed by theoretical frameworks in Emotional Design and Nostalgia, the study produced three design solutions: (1) an earthenware drinkware, (2) a “memory box” packaging concept, and (3) an interactive audiovisual web experience. Together, these solutions aim to evoke cultural and emotional memories tied to Burmese tea-shop culture. This research demonstrates how integrating sensory, emotional, and cultural elements in product and experience design can support immigrants’ emotional well-being and social connection in transitional spaces.

Keywords: *Burmese Milk Tea (Laphet Yay), Homesickness & Nostalgia, Burmese Immigrants, Emotional Design & Cultural Memory, Participatory Design & User Experience, Sensory & Ritual Design*

1. Introduction

The concept of home extends beyond its material dimensions. It encompasses mnemonic and emotional significance that many immigrants worldwide cherish. Homesickness, a term first introduced by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer in 1688 as 'nostalgia,' describes the acute longing for one's homeland (J. Matt, 2007, p.7). Psychoanalysts have since explored this phenomenon, recognizing it as a multidimensional emotional state that intertwines with a diminished sense of self and communal belonging (Lijtmaer, 2022). Migration induces feelings of loss, grief, and nostalgia. It can also lead to social traumas, depriving individuals of a secure environment and necessitating a mourning process to adapt to new realities. In coping with the pain of displacement, many rely on 'linking objects'—tangible items that serve as anchors to their memories of home. These may include ancestral artifacts to traditional significant foods (Lijtmaer, 2022, pp. 311-315).

In an increasingly globalized world, where patterns of migration and forced displacement have been intensified, the psychological impact of homesickness is a pressing issue. Against the backdrop of Myanmar's ongoing crisis, particularly the military coup in 2021, a significant number of individuals have been uprooted, creating a diaspora marked by displacement and trauma. This study responds to this context by investigating how design can address such emotional needs by drawing from case studies of emotional design and design for nostalgia. While the design of familiar items offers a broad spectrum of cultural practices—from clothing to everyday objects—this study narrows its focus on food-related items. Food serves not only as nourishment but also as a tangible link to heritage with cultural roots, especially among immigrant communities. Prior research has explored food nostalgia among immigrants; however, there remains a paucity of studies on how product design—beyond the food itself—can enhance the emotional well-being of immigrants. This study

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fills this gap by examining the design of objects and digital experiences that evoke cultural memory through the lens of Laphet Yay. Burmese milk tea (Laphet Yay) is chosen as the focal point of this research, due to its strong cultural associations and widespread nostalgia. Furthermore, tea shops function as a vital key social space at the local level in Myanmar, significantly influencing interpersonal relationships and local economies (Zaw & Molnar, 2024).

This research delves into the multifaceted experience of consuming Burmese milk tea (*Laphet Yay*) among Burmese immigrants. It aims to address the following research questions: (1) what emotional impact does Burmese Milk Tea (Laphet Yay) have on Burmese immigrants, and what memories are tied to it?, (2) how can Burmese Milk Tea (Laphet Yay) ease the homesickness of Burmese immigrants?, and (3) how can design evoke cultural/emotional memories that connect users to their Burmese Milk Tea (Laphet Yay) experience at home?

1.1 Background

Among the diverse range of traditional foods in Myanmar, Laphet Yay has been selected due to its widespread availability and deep cultural resonance. Many Burmese immigrants were raised within the tea shop culture. Understanding the history of tea shops in Myanmar is required for effective design for Burmese immigrants. The design strategies should aim to capture the essence of these shared communal experiences.

The oral stories trace the origins of tea consumption in Myanmar as far back as the 5th century. Since ancient times, tea consumption has been a communal act in Myanmar, intended to foster social interactions (Zaw & Molnar, 2024). The addition of milk to tea was introduced later, during British colonization in the 19th century (Saha, 2016). While British tea rituals emphasize refinement and social class (Standage, 2009, pp. 75-95), Laphet Yay is a worker's drink enjoyed by people from all walks of life in Myanmar. In the post-colonial context, Burmese tea shops (Lahpet-Ye-Hsain) have evolved into vital social venues where individuals across all walks of life gather for more than just cheap food and good tea. Proximity to a tea shop can expand social networks as neighbors connect through regular visits and conversations. These spaces serve as hubs of gossip, newspaper reading, laughter, or even artistic creating, reinforcing their role as vibrant arenas of daily cultural expression in Myanmar (Zaw & Molnar, 2024, pp. 6-8). Recognizing such distinctions in tea culture is crucial for the final design — for instance, while British tea drinking requires formal etiquette, Burmese tea shops embody a more relaxed and inclusive atmosphere.



Figure 1 British Tea vs. Burmese Tea

2. Objectives

- 1) To examine the sensory, cultural, emotional, and social impact of drinking Burmese milk tea, linking these insights to the broader theoretical frameworks of Emotional Design and Cultural Nostalgia.
- 2) To propose design interventions (products and experiences) that enhance both the emotional and social aspects of enjoying Burmese Milk Tea—going beyond flavor replication to address communal rituals and personal memories.



3. Materials and Methods

This research employed a mixed-method qualitative approach combining surveys and cultural probes. Participants were Burmese immigrants residing abroad, recruited via social media platforms. Survey 1 (n=43), titled "Laphet Yay Access Abroad," was administered through Google Forms to collect participants' tea consumption habits and accessibility issues. Survey 2 (n=20), "Tea Product Research," also distributed via Google Forms, explored emotional connections related to Laphet Yay, conducted primarily among Burmese university students in Thailand. Survey 2 served as a prelude to the cultural probe phase. As the researcher would send physical artifacts, such as (1) a diary to be kept with the participants for a week and sent back to the researcher for data collection, (2) instant Burmese tea packets and an aroma candle as gifts to participants, she decided to focus on a demographics within the same city as her for logistics convenience. Three participants from Survey 2 were selected using an online random name selector (<https://wheelofnames.com/>) to minimize research bias. The selected three participants were approached for cultural probe participation, which aimed to collect inspirational and subjective data regarding their lifestyles, values, and emotional triggers of homesickness. Each probe kit requested diary entries documenting participants' tea-drinking routines and the emotions attached to those moments. Additionally, the participants were asked to include photographs or sketches of objects and settings in which they typically consumed beverages in their everyday lives.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of user experiences related to homesickness and cultural nostalgia, qualitative data from Surveys 1 and 2, as well as diary entries and images collected through cultural probes, were manually analyzed using the thematic analysis model proposed by Naeem *et al.* (2023). This model comprises six steps: (1) selection of quotations, (2) selection of keywords, (3) coding of the data, (4) development of themes, (5) conceptualization through the interpretation of keywords, codes, and themes, and (6) development of a conceptual model. Images obtained from the cultural probes were paired with their corresponding quotations and turned into storyboards using Platz's (2017) CROW model—Characters, Relationships, Objectives, and Where—to facilitate a more intuitive design process.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Theoretical Framework

Bascuñán-Wiley (2021) investigates the influence of sensory cues—such as taste, smell, sound, and touch—on the migrant experience, emphasizing the pivotal role of food in simultaneously engaging multiple senses allowing migrants to symbolically reconnect with their cultural origins. Similarly, J. Matt (2007) examines the role of food within migration contexts, arguing that nostalgic foods represent more than sustenance; they serve as emotional anchors linking immigrants to their cultural roots. However, Matt concludes that while nostalgic food may provide temporary relief from homesickness, they offer only partial emotional comfort. Food alone often lacks the capacity to fully replicate the emotional depth of the original lived experience. While nostalgic foods may evoke memories of home, they often fall short of replacing the broader familial and cultural context that imbues these foods their emotional significance. In this gap, designed objects have the potential to play a critical role. A compelling example can be seen in the work of Jian Li (2023), who sought to bring his Chinese heritage into his everyday experiences the US where he migrated. Li designed objects based on Chinese calligraphy heritage, aiming to transform abstract cultural values into tangible and intimate user experiences. In one instance, he combined the sensory experience of eating steamed eggs and soy sauce with Chinese calligraphy. Using the soft resin tip of the spoon he designed; users can write Chinese characters on the steamed egg surface with soy sauce. Through this act, the routine of eating was transformed into a fun, engaging, and memorable experience.



Figure 2 SCOONSH by Jian Li (2023)

Jian Li's work exemplifies how the intersection of cultural heritage and sensory memory can inform the design of emotionally resonant objects for migrant populations. His approach aligns with Don Norman's (2005) theoretical framework of Emotional Design, which emphasizes the role of affective responses in shaping user experience. This theory divides emotional design into three levels of cognitive processing: visceral, behavioral, and reflective. The visceral level refers to our initial, automatic responses to a product's appearance, feel, or sound. The behavioral level pertains to the product's functionality, usability, and the quality of the interaction it affords the user. The reflective level operates on a deeper, more abstract plane, engaging users through personal meaning, cultural associations, and narrative identity. Norman (2005) highlights that this level is where symbolic and emotional connections are formed, enabling products to transcend functionality and aesthetic appeal. According to his theory, effective emotional design should go beyond functionality and aesthetics, aiming to evoke reflective experiences that reinforce one's sense of self and cultural belonging.

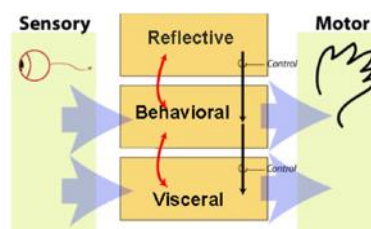


Figure 3 Emotional Design Framework, Don Norman (2005)



Figure 4 HomeSeek App

Further exploration of existing literature reveals that designing for homesickness involves the integration of both physical products and digital interventions. A notable example is the HomeSeek application developed by Zhou *et al.* (2024), which provides personalized sound therapy designed to alleviate homesickness before it escalates into severe psychological conditions. Designed for Chinese users who have relocated from their hometowns for purposes such as education and employment, HomeSeek offers tailored audio experiences intended to elicit comforting memories of home. Grounded in cognitive-behavioral music therapy, the application features a dual-level system: a basic mode delivering essential sound therapy based on initial user input, and an advanced mode enabling deeper customization through immersive virtual reality experiences and individually tailored soundscapes. Results from user testing indicate a high level of effectiveness, with 92.5% of participants reporting satisfaction and significant relief from their homesickness.

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This approach underscores the potential of digital interaction design to effectively harness nostalgia and sensory memory, thereby offering emotional reassurance and meaningfully mitigating experiences of homesickness.

Given that Laphet Yay serves as a cultural medium in Myanmar, the research further investigates how design interventions can be utilized to evoke cultural nostalgia. Haian Xue (2017) identifies cultural and collective nostalgia as a societal response to significant transformations in political, economic, or technological contexts. Design plays a significant role in fulfilling these nostalgic yearnings by creating objects and spaces that embody shared cultural memories. One of Xue's case studies involves the revival of the Ampelmann (Traffic Man), the distinctive pedestrian crossing signal figure used in East Germany during the GDR era. Prior to its revival, symbols of East German daily life were predominantly relegated to museum exhibitions—functioning more as static, curated reminders as dynamic elements of living tradition. The integration of this symbol into consumer products and urban design reintroduced elements of East German identity into contemporary daily life. The Ampelmann evolved beyond a historical relic, emerging as a vibrant cultural icon. This case demonstrates how cultural and collective nostalgia can be leveraged not only to preserve historical symbols but also to create commercially viable products that resonate across diverse audiences.



Figure 5 Ampelmann Design on traffic lights and commercial products

As food alone cannot fully capture the holistic experience of “home” that immigrants often seek, research suggests that physical artifacts can enhance the emotional resonance of food-related experiences. Simultaneously, digital experiences have demonstrated a distinct capacity to evoke a vivid sense of home through immersive, multisensory interactions. By thoughtfully combining physical interactions with digital experiences, designers can develop integrated solutions that offer a more holistic and emotionally resonant user experience. As demonstrated in the Ampelmann case study, cultural symbols and practices can be integrated into everyday consumer products, allowing users to engage with their heritage in ways that are both meaningful and relevant within contemporary contexts.

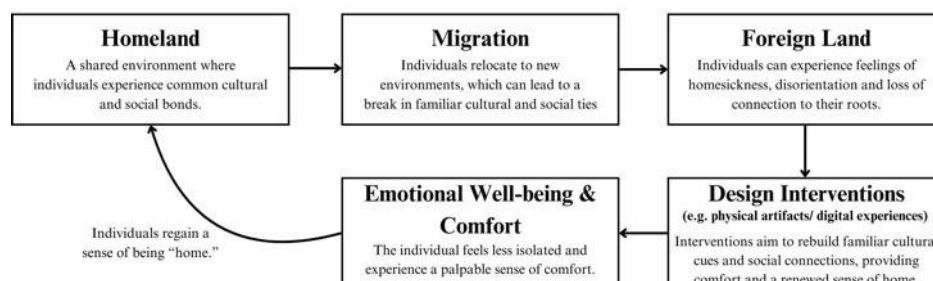


Figure 6 Theoretical Framework for Designing for Homesickness

4.2 Research Framework

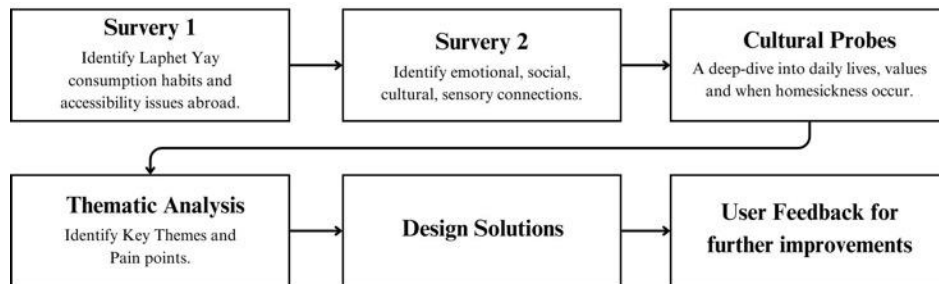


Figure 7 Research Strategy for Designing for Homesickness

As part of the research strategy for designing interventions to alleviate homesickness, data was collected and analyzed from Burmese immigrants. The initial survey, conducted in April 2024, received 43 responses from Burmese immigrants primarily residing in urban areas across Thailand (n=28), the Philippines (n=4), the United States (n=3), South Korea (n=2), Hong Kong (n=1), Singapore (n=1), and Myanmar (n=4). Given the study’s focus on the homesickness of immigrants living abroad, responses from Myanmar were excluded from the final data analysis, resulting in a sample size of n=39. Of these, approximately 72% were students currently residing in Thailand. The findings revealed significant challenges encountered by Burmese immigrants in accessing authentic Laphet Yay while living abroad. Although tea shops remain a common destination for consumption, many respondents noted that the taste of Burmese Milk Tea in foreign establishments is often unsatisfactory compared to its original version in Myanmar. Instant products, though widely available, were described as often lacking to replicate the familiar taste. Additionally, cost and accessibility emerged as recurring barriers. For example, Burmese Milk Tea served in international restaurants was consistently more expensive than in Myanmar, and many respondents indicated that the beverage was entirely unavailable in certain regions, which further intensified feelings of homesickness among the respondents. Although Survey 1 primarily aimed to explore consumption habits rather than emotional connections, five participants voluntarily shared reflections on what they missed about tea culture in Myanmar to the final open-ended question: “Anything you wish to add about your tea drinking experience you haven’t said here?”. These five quotes were integrated with 20 results from Survey 2—designed to investigate emotional connections—and further enriched with diary entries and images collected through cultural probes to construct a thematic analysis table.

Table 1 Thematic Analysis of Surveys & Cultural Probes

Overarching Themes	Representative Statement	Codes	Keywords
Ambiance of Burmese Tea shops	“I do miss tea shop culture. The food I can get together with tea in the shops and the ambiance. I used to hate the ambiance but now that I am abroad, I came to understand it is something that can authentically be experienced in Myanmar only.”	Cultural Authenticity and Nostalgia in Tea Shops Unique Traditional Settings	tea shop culture, authentic, Myanmar, ambiance, food, wooden chairs, unique setting, traditional, change, exploration
Social Bonding	“I think sharing tea with your	Familial and Nostalgic	sharing tea, father,

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through Laphet Yay	father at a tea shop when you were a child is a special memory only you can get at a Burmese Tea Shop.”	Bonding	childhood, special memory, Laphet Yay, social life,
		Community and Social Life	community, trip, friends, Chiang Mai, escape, cold milk tea, bubble pearls,
		Social and Shared Experiences	refreshing, cool air, laughter; ex-girlfriend, lunch, stroll, chatting, home
		Social vs. Solitary Consumption Contexts	country, family, boyfriend, no more tea time; in-class activities, alone, big breakfast, friends at university
Special memories & life milestones related to Laphet Yay.	“It was 2023 May; I was assigned a task to create a chatbot for my humanitarian job regardless of my background. It took a lot of effort and finally that chatbot was successfully developed. And my director/department head offered milk tea as a successful accomplishment. It was a small but sweetest milk tea I ever had in Myanmar.”	First Encounters and Nostalgic Milestones	chatbot, humanitarian job, accomplishment, reward, sweetest milk tea,
		Achievement and Reward	Myanmar, first time, tried milk tea, new discovery, changing preference; childhood, first taste, boba shop, taro boba, nostalgia; first period
Tea as a Conduit for Emotional and Experiential Wellbeing	“Today, I am drinking Burmese Tea with my breakfast. The first sip of the Burmese tea was like a wave of nostalgia. The aroma of the tea leaves filled the air, instantly taking me back to Myanmar.”	Mindful Rituals and Personal Spaces	slow living, matcha, clear mind, mindful, focus; making tea at home, joy, excitement; home, work desk, balcony, tea cup, looking outside, Burmese Tea, wave of nostalgia, aroma, Myanmar, tea shops, semi-bitter taste, memories of home; old kitchen, chatting with family, warmth
		Nostalgia and Home-bound Comfort	

The thematic analysis table presents a systematic distillation of raw qualitative data into coherent, overarching themes, utilizing the model proposed by Naeem et al. (2023). The process began with the selection of keywords from participant statements, followed by coding and categorizing related codes to form broader themes. For example, the theme “Ambiance of Burmese Tea Shops” reflects participants’ nostalgic emphasis on the authentic atmosphere of traditional tea shops in Myanmar. Similarly, themes related to social bonding, such as “Social Bonding through Laphet Yay,” illustrates how shared tea experiences and family traditions evoke strong emotional memories. Each theme is illustrated by a representative statement that best captures the core sentiments. Below is a conceptual model diagram that showcases the layers derived from the thematic analysis.

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Figure 8 Laphet Yay Conceptual Model

The Laphet Yay conceptual model is structured into three layers, each capturing the multifaceted experience of tea consumption. The first layer, on the left, highlights sensory and environmental factors—such as the ambiance of traditional tea shops, authentic settings, and the tea aroma and flavor—which establish the foundational context. The second layer emphasizes interpersonal and social dimensions, illustrating how these physical settings foster shared experiences, community rituals, and the development of strong social bonds. The final emotional and cognitive layer encapsulates the personal outcomes emerging from these interactions, including nostalgia, enhanced well-being, and a reinforced cultural identity. This dynamic interaction demonstrates that the tea experience is a holistic interplay between physical settings, social engagement, and individual emotional responses. These insights inform the final design decisions in two ways: (1) ensuring that products are emotionally resonant and evoke the ambiance of Burmese tea shops, and (2) fostering community interaction and engagement through design.

4.3 Design Results

Though the initial analytical data provided insight into the phenomenon surrounding Laphet Yay, it was predominantly text-based and lacked the ability to effectively visualize users' daily activities. Therefore, the images collected through cultural probes were paired with corresponding participant quotes and turned into storyboards through Platz's (2017) CROW model—Character, Relationships, Objectives, and Where—for an easier design process. This approach enabled the researcher to better visualize the context in which Laphet Yay is consumed and to understand the emotions experienced by users during consumption.



Figure 9 An example of how the data is combined in a Miro board and turned into stories

Following the visualization process, the design process was initiated. An early design concept explored a disposable tea kit that enables users to recreate Burmese Milk Tea in a home setting. This kit aimed to provide precise ingredient proportions and straightforward instructions to replicate authentic flavors. The



concept sought to address the dissatisfaction expressed by Survey 1 respondents regarding instant products and the high cost and lack of accessibility associated with tea shops. The kit was intended to support user customization, enabling individuals to tailor the preparation to suit their taste preferences. Though the concept effectively addresses users' practical needs, it falls short of capturing the emotional and cultural essence of Burmese tea shops. To successfully function as 'linking objects'—as referenced in the introduction—that evoke cherished memories, the design should incorporate durable elements that users can retain over time. Therefore, the development of versatile, long-lasting drinkware—suitable for various beverages—may offer a viable solution. Such items, designed for long-time use, can serve as memorable objects that remind the users of their culture and emotional connection. Furthermore, through the theoretical framework, this research has demonstrated that design interventions addressing homesickness and nostalgia can take the form of both physical artifacts and digital interventions. A combination of both can offer a more holistic and emotionally resonant user experience. Therefore, the final design is conceptualized in three elements: a piece of drinkware, a memory box, and an audiovisual web-based experience.

The drinkware employs earthenware as its primary material, drawing upon its cultural significance to foster emotional resonance among users. For many Burmese immigrants, Petit earthenware cups evoke nostalgic memories of childhood, as small clay pots were commonly used during playtime due to the high cost of imported toys. By replicating this familiar and cherished material form, the design aims to enhance the emotional appeal of the drinking experience.



Figure 10 Burmese girls buying earthenware toys

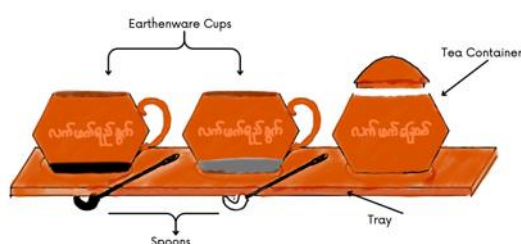


Figure 11 Final Design Sketch

The angled petite cup is ergonomically designed to fit comfortably in the curve of the hands, while the handle is raised above the rim for ease of holding. Accompanying the cup is a matching spoon in the same color, encouraging interaction through stirring and playing around with the beverage. In the final design, the cups were sparingly glazed on the outer base. Black and white colors were selected for a minimalist aesthetic, while patterns featuring Burmese alphabets adorn the surface, embedding cultural identity into the product. The cups are inscribed with the *Laphet Yay Kwat* (လက်ဖက်ရည်ခွက်)—which means “teacup” in Burmese, while the tea container bears the inscription *Laphet Chouk* (လက်ဖက်ခြောက်)—meaning “tea leaf container”.

The design draws inspiration from the simplicity and practicality of traditional Burmese earthenware. The use of earthy tones is intended to evoke memories of shared meals, playful moments, and the everyday rituals



of Burmese life. The final collection comprises petite earthenware cups, curved spoons, a tea container, and a tray.



Figure 12 Final Drinkware Design Photos

To further cultivate an immersive and nostalgic experience of drinking Laphet Yay, the researcher designed a packaging concept referred to as a “Memory Box,” which aims to enable conversation, activity, and memory. Through surveys and cultural probes, the researcher discovered that the act of reminiscing and sharing personal experiences proved to be significant themes. Participants expressed a strong emotional connection to shared drinking-tea experiences, often recalling these moments with fondness. The Memory Box aims to provide a way to remember special memories together. Users are encouraged to write down cherished moments and store them inside the box. Once filled, the box can be reopened to reflect on these—either individually or as a shared activity with friends and family—thereby reinforcing emotional ties and cultural connections.

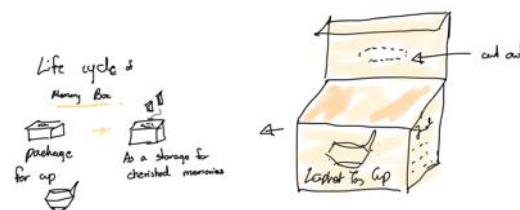


Figure 13 Concept Sketch of Memory Box

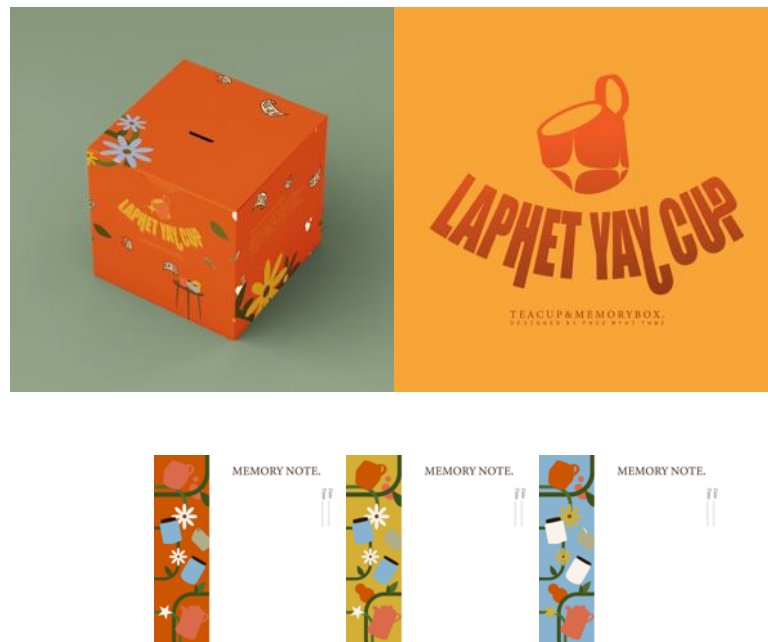


Figure 14 Memory Box, Logo, and Notes Design

Additionally, the interactive web-based story developed using Twine and hosted on Github provides an immersive experience of the daily lives of Burmese immigrants and tea shop culture. Twine is an open-source platform widely used for creating interactive, nonlinear narratives, often used for digital storytelling and game development. It allows creators to structure stories as interconnected passages, enabling readers to navigate through different choices and branching pathways. In this project, the experience includes illustrations—created in collaboration with a visual artist—depicting scenes from Burmese tea shops, along with ambient street sounds sourced from Myanmar from the internet. The final experience is accessible online at <https://www.phoomyathwe.com/designs-1/laphet-yay>.

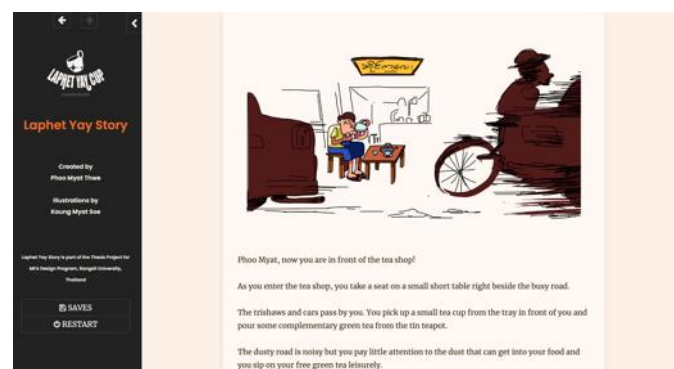


Figure 15 UI Design of the Web Experience

To evaluate the effectiveness and emotional resonance of the Laphet Yay Project design interventions, a user testing survey was conducted with 12 Burmese students residing in Thailand. This evaluation was administered through Google Forms and involved different participants from surveys and

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cultural probes, ensuring that the products developed from the initial data resonated with the demographic represented in the original data collection. The following summarizes key findings and recurring themes from participant feedback.

Table 2 Users' Feedback

Description	Theme	Feedback
Observations on the Earthenware Drinkware	Usability Considerations	The participants suggested that including additional shapes or decoration styles might cater to a broader range of preferences. Earthenware material resonated with some participants, <i>"I love the earthenware concept. It reminds me of the miniature earthenware pots and cups I used to play with as a kid."</i>
Reactions to the Memory Box Concept	Memory Notes as a Keepsake	Many participants appreciated the idea of writing down personal reflections or special moments tied to tea-drinking, then depositing them into the box. One participant noted, <i>"I think I will use the notes since I'm used to writing letters to my friends."</i> The participants suggested that the overall visual design could incorporate more Burmese Laphet Yay retro elements and reflected Myanmar tea more.
	Visual Design	
Emotional Responses and Overall Impressions on the Web Experience	Nostalgia and Homesickness	A majority of participants reported feeling a strong sense of nostalgia for their daily routines and tea-shop culture in Myanmar. The web experience, with its ambient audio of busy streets and visual depictions of tea-shop life, evoked vivid memories of Myanmar's lively tea-shop atmosphere. One participant stated, <i>"The storyline and the sound effects actually made me smile. I miss the market street of my housing back in my country; maybe because I opened this in the early morning too."</i> Another mentioned that the web experience improved their mood, <i>"It was such a calm, warming, alluring, interesting and something indescribable feeling. I got a good mood although I had a bad hair day today."</i>
Improvements on the Web Experience	Immersive Storytelling vs. Text Load	While most students praised the storyline and ambient audio for immersing them in familiar sights and sounds, some found the text-heavy format of Twine time-consuming. They suggested shorter textual passages or an optional audio narration to reduce cognitive load. One participant suggested for a more interactive experience, <i>"The experience really offered a nostalgic feeling. I loved the audio part which gives an authentic vibe of Burmese tea shops. It would be great if the website can support more interactive and visual experiences."</i>



Participant feedback revealed several opportunities for refinement and further development. These insights affirm that while the core concept resonates emotionally, iterative design enhancements could make the experience more visually cohesive and broadly engaging.

5. Conclusion

This research offers new insights into the potential of design interventions to address emotional and social dissonance among Burmese immigrants by leveraging the sensory and cultural significance of Burmese Milk Tea (Laphet Yay). Building upon established theoretical frameworks such as Emotional Design and Cultural Nostalgia, this study demonstrates that, beyond merely replicating flavors, well-considered physical artifacts and digital experiences can serve as meaningful “linking objects” that help individuals reconnect with a sense of home. While prior studies have underscored the role of food as an emotional anchor, this research advances this understanding by illustrating how specific design interventions can embody and preserve intangible cultural memories. Combining both physical artifacts and digital narratives offers a more comprehensive approach to mitigating homesickness. However, the study recognizes its inherent limitations. The participant sample predominantly consisted of university students in Thailand, which may not fully represent the diverse experiences of the broader Burmese immigrant community. Future research should strive to incorporate a more diverse participant pool and account for potential confounding variables, such as the duration of time spent abroad, which could influence the intensity of nostalgic feelings. Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that the emotional resonance of design may differ considerably across groups. Voluntary migrants, refugees, and long-term diaspora communities might engage with nostalgic products in distinct ways due to differences in their migration experiences and the lack of the possibility of return. Nevertheless, the findings provide valuable insights for designers, businesses, and policymakers. Designers can leverage these insights to develop culturally sensitive artifacts and experiences that not only evoke positive memories but also foster a sense of belonging and community. Businesses can leverage these design strategies to develop products that emotionally resonate with immigrant consumers. For instance, companies offering instant Laphet Yay might consider incorporating additional features or services if their instant tea taste cannot fully replicate the authentic flavor of a tea shop. Policymakers, meanwhile, could explore the integration of design-based interventions within broader social and cultural support programs aimed at enhancing the well-being of immigrant populations.

In summary, this study serves as a foundation for understanding the role of design in addressing homesickness, particularly through food-related experiences. It also highlights the necessity for further, in-depth research into the intricate relationship between cultural memory, emotional experience, and identity across diverse migrant communities. This work aims to lay the groundwork for future studies and practical applications focused on creating environments and products that are attuned to the emotional complexity of displacement and cultural nostalgia.

6. Acknowledgements

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