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Promotion of Gastronomic Traditions in the Sonoran Desert and Changes in the Representation of the US-Mexico Borderlands

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Introduction

The Sonoran Desert extends to both sides of the US-Mexico international border, and its approximate size is 260,000 square kilometers (100,387 square miles).[1] Tucson, a central city in southern Arizona, is also known as the principal city of the Sonoran Desert. The city stands roughly 100 kilometers (62 miles) north of the international border, and its population as of July 2019 is about 548,000.[2] In 2015, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated Tucson as a Creative City of Gastronomy (CCG). The city's popularity then increased due to its unique tradition of agriculture and food. In this article, I aim to show how the promotion of local activities in Tucson under the CCG initiative dismantled stereotypical narratives of the US-Mexico borderlands.

California-based researchers Paul Ganster and Kimberly Collins wrote that the definition of the US-Mexico borderlands as a region varies, and it needs to remain flexible, considering that the range would change depending on the topic taken up.[3] This article roughly considers its geographic range to be 400 kilometers (250 miles) northward and southward from the international border and the Baja California Peninsula

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(Fig. 1). The area defined in this manner covers the entire Sonoran Desert and significant cities in the US and Mexican states along the border. This definition is close to the notion of the borderlands defined in historian Oscar J. Martínez's book *Border People: Life and Society in the US-Mexico Borderlands*.[4]

Before starting the main discussion, I would like to explain the regional variations within the US-Mexico borderlands. The US-Mexico borderlands are more diverse than their popular image. In *Border People*, Martínez shows that there are four subregions in the borderlands: (1) the Southern California–Baja California borderlands, (2) the Arizona-Sonora borderlands, (3) the New Mexico–West Texas–Chihuahua borderlands, and (4) the southern Texas–northeastern Mexico borderlands. They differ in environmental conditions and culture. A significant section of the Sonoran Desert, including Tucson, belongs to the Arizona-Sonora borderland, which is characterized with a smaller population compared with other subregions, a harsh desert environment, isolation from surrounding areas, and copper mining and cattle ranching as major enterprises.[5] In the same book, Martínez emphasizes that Tex-Mex is unique to the southern Texas–northeastern Mexico borderlands. Tex-Mex is a hybrid culture that consists

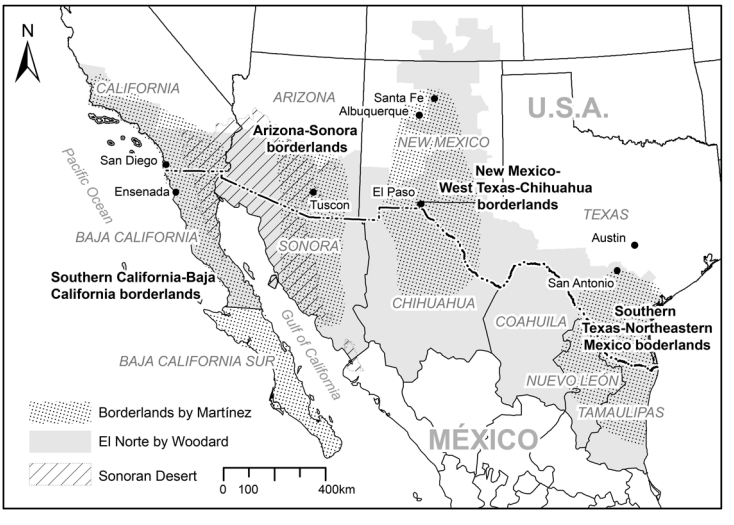

Fig. 1. Map of the US-Mexico Borderlands (compiled by author from Martínez 1994, 55; Woodard 2011, n.p.; Commission for Environmental Cooperation, "Ecological Regions of North America," 2006, US Environmental Protection Agency, https://gaftp.epa.gov/EPADataCommons/ORD/Ecoregions/cec_na/NA_LEVEL_III.pdf.)

of *norteño* (north Mexican) culture and the Anglo-American culture of Texas; the other three subregions have different cultures.[6]

Arizona-based historian Thomas E. Sheridan wrote about diversity in the historical experience of each region. The historical experience of southern Arizona in the nineteenth century differed from the experiences of Texas and California. Sheridan suggests that Arizona remained a tierra incognita, or a gap between Texas and California.[7] As the climate of the Sonoran Desert is harsh and there are no minerals found in this area, southern Arizona served only as a place for Anglo Americans to pass through, rather than a place to stay.[8] As a result, in southern Arizona, economic, political, and sociocultural powers were maintained by the local middle-class Mexicans instead of being taken over by Anglo-American settlers.[9] The discussions of Martínez and Sheridan indicate that a realistic figure of the Sonoran Desert might not precisely match the popular image of US-Mexico borderlands, which is often influenced by the character of the Tex-Mex culture originating in the southern Texas–northeastern Mexico borderlands.

I. Monolithic Understanding of the US-Mexico Borderlands

The US-Mexico Borderlands in Colin Woodard's *American Nations*

In addition to what was discussed above, the US-Mexico borderlands tend to be described as a monolithic space. One good example might be from *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America* by Colin Woodard. Readers in the US and beyond have widely supported this book since its publication in 2011. Woodard calls the US-Mexico borderlands "El Norte" (the North), consisting of southern and western Texas, Southern California, southern Arizona, most of New Mexico, and Mexican states adjacent to the international border.[10] In this award-winning book, Woodard respectfully describes the situation of El Norte. For example, with reference to some writings of scholars focusing on the area, he recognizes that people in the borderlands have cared much about their independence and autonomy, distinct from the dominant society. Additionally, he praises the fact that Norteños (people in El Norte) are independent, self-sufficient, adaptable, and work centered,[11] and the cultural and political power of Norteños as Hispanics is prominent in the contemporary US.[12] Moreover, Woodard expresses his concern that the existence of El Norte has been ignored, and people in other regions in North America have thought El Norte would be absorbed into the dominant

society and eventually disappear.[13]

However, the image of the US-Mexico borderlands presented in Woodward's book might not be fully reflecting the reality of the US-Mexico borderlands. Geographer James M. Rubenstein points out the same by examining descriptions of Greater Appalachia, which is one of the eleven rival regional nations Woodard suggests. He concludes that Woodard's narrative of North America is flat and stereotypical.[14] The same would apply to the narrative of El Norte. In Woodard's analysis, Spanish domination has characterized the history of El Norte. Regarding its culture, he concludes that El Norte, including on the US side of the border, is part of Norteño culture.[15] Norteño culture, in the understanding of Woodard and Martínez, might differ. Woodard's narrative of the US-Mexico borderlands sounds as if a general North Mexican culture flatly covers a portion of US territory.

Regional differences, including history and climate, have had an impact on the current sociocultural characters of each section of the borderlands. Ethnic diversity within the US-Mexico borderlands is an example of this. Contrary to Woodard's narrative that residents of El Norte are predominantly Hispanic,[16] Hispanic and Latino populations vary depending on the area, according to the US Census (Table 1). The Hispanic or Latino population represents 81.4 percent in El Paso in southwestern Texas. However, the percentage drops to 43.6 in Tucson. Moreover, in Tucson, the percentage of Indigenous people is over 2.8 times higher than the national average. When people with multiple racial and ethnic identities, including Indigenous people, are included, the percentage is even higher.[17] In addition, the percentage of Black or African American people in Tucson is approximately 1.5 to 2 times higher than other major cities in the US-Mexico borderlands. Furthermore, the Asian population in Tucson is larger than in the other three cities; so is the population of people with multiple racial and ethnic identities.

The framework suggested by Woodard could be helpful for the analysis of US national politics. Woodard seems to have a strong interest in discussing the political integration of the future US.[18] When examining the US presidential and midterm elections, he refers to the *American Nations* framework.[19] At the same time, his narrative may veil the historical, geographical, sociocultural, and ethnic diversity of the US-Mexico borderlands. Regarding the discussion of ethnic diversity in the US-Mexico borderlands, the existence of ethnic minorities besides Hispanic and Latino people is neglected in his theory.

Table 1. Race and Ethnicity of Major Cities of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands as of 2019 (Excerpt)

(%)

	San Diego (California)	Tucson (Arizona)	Albuquerque (New Mexico)	El Paso (Texas)	National average
Hispanic or Latino	34.0	43.6	49.2	81.4	18.5
White alone (non-Hispanic or Latino)	59.3	43.9	38.9	12.8	60.1
White alone (Hispanic/Latino and non-Hispanic/Latino in total)	89.2	72.1	73.9	80.1	76.3
Black or African American alone	2.4	5.2	3.3	3.6	13.4
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.5	3.7	4.7	0.6	1.3
Asian alone	2.0	3.2	2.9	1.4	5.9
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2
Two or more races	3.9	5.4	4.4	2.7	2.8

Source: US Census Bureau, "QuickFacts," https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219

Images of the US-Mexico Borderlands and Tucson

Woodard is not the only one who fails to present a realistic figure of the US-Mexico borderlands. Various scholars, writers, artists, and others have misrepresented the borderlands and associated them with negative images. This tendency seems to have increased under the Donald Trump administration from 2017 to 2021. Various media repeatedly broadcast news about reinforcement and extension of the fence along the US southern border and treatment of the refugees from Central America and Mexico by the US agencies. These reports tended to highlight negative aspects of the borderlands.

Ganster and Collins wrote that negative descriptions such as poverty, corruption, and pollution are associated with popular myths and stereotypes of the US-Mexico borderlands. According to them, these narratives obscure the realistic image of the borderlands, which is more complex and interesting.[20] Meanwhile, Kathleen Staudt, a political scientist in El

Paso, Texas, points out that films produced in the US and Mexico from the 1930s to the present have misrepresented the US-Mexico borderlands.[21] Staudt argues that lawlessness, sexual violence, death, and drugs are typical images presented in such films.[22] In contrast, a limited number of films portray the daily lives of people living in the borderlands.[23] According to Staudt, these films contain scenes that could cause "emotional reactions that disgust and distance mainstream viewers from border people and places."[24]

Just as the scholars mentioned above claim, eliminating misconceptions and enhancing a more humanistic representation of the US-Mexico borderlands area is necessary. I find that the presentation of regional food and agriculture is an effective way to realize this. Tucson's CCG initiative and multiple activities associated with it seem to have caused positive changes. For instance, an article in the *Boston Globe* in 2020 focused on Tucson. Its subtitle was: "The dusty western town of old has metamorphosed into a sophisticated urban destination. And the culinary scene is on fire."[25] Moreover, in May 2021, *Condé Nast Traveler* selected Tucson as one of the hot travel destinations in the world due to its local food culture.[26] What made this positive change possible was an effort by residents and organizations in Tucson, which kept sustaining, revitalizing, and celebrating the agricultural and gastronomical traditions rooted in the Sonoran Desert across the international border. The CCG initiative is promoting the long-term efforts of these local individuals and organizations nationally and globally.

II. Tucson as a Unesco Creative City of Gastronomy

The Designation of Tucson

CCG is a part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) program established in 2004. This program is meant to be a global platform for exchange and collaboration among cities that enhance sustainable urban development. On their designation, cities can choose one of seven fields prepared by the UCCN: crafts and folk art, design, film, gastronomy, literature, media arts, and music. By 2020, 246 cities in eighty countries had participated in the UCCN program, thirty-seven of which were under the category of gastronomy.[27]

A nonprofit organization, Tucson City of Gastronomy (TCoG), is responsible for managing activities related to the CCG initiative.[28] Considering the history of food movements in the US, the importance of

TCoG is evident. Eric Holt-Giménez and Yi Wang explained that what is roughly referred to as the "food movement" consists of multiple movements related to food security, food justice, food sovereignty, and food safety. The history, ideology, and purpose of these movements differ.[29] Therefore, the framework of the food movement in the US has been fragmented and segmented internally.[30] TCoG plans and conducts its projects, but more importantly, it serves as a hub for individuals and organizations whose activities had existed before the CCG designation. As a result, under its initiative, various actors segmented in the arena of food movements in Tucson can communicate and collaborate smoothly.

According to TCoG, there are three distinct aspects of Tucson's food tradition: (1) a long history of agriculture started by Indigenous people that has continued over four thousand years, (2) a variety of edible wild plants and crops, and (3) a multicultural regional cuisine that is a combination of Indigenous, northern Mexican or Sonoran, mission-era Mediterranean, American ranch style, and others.[31] This unique food tradition, locally called "Sonoran food," is explicitly rooted in the Sonoran Desert, and it is distinguished from Mexican food widely found in the US-Mexico borderlands.[32]

Comparison of Three CCG Initiatives in the US-Mexico Borderlands

Besides Tucson, San Antonio, Texas, which is also in the US-Mexico borderlands, was designated as a CCG in 2017.[33] In the state of Baja California in Mexico, which also stands in the US-Mexico borderlands, Ensenada was designated as a CCG in 2015.[34] Each of these three cities conducts its own unique initiative. Regarding the CCG initiative of Ensenada in Baja California, collaboration among local producers, researchers, and governmental institutions, particularly in wine production and fishery, seems to be the focus.[35] Therefore, the initiative is quite distinct from that of Tucson.

As for the initiative's management, the city of San Antonio is more directly involved compared with Tucson's case.[36] Additionally, San Antonio's CCG initiative partially overlaps with that of Tucson, especially in the emphasis on their regional character within the US-Mexico borderlands. San Antonio is known for the creation of Tex-Mex food, or a fusion of American and Mexican cuisine. In San Antonio's CCG initiative, the city's Tex-Mex food tradition is distinguished from general and commercialized Tex-Mex food. Sociologists Dennis Ray Wheaton

and Glenn R. Carroll describe contemporary Tex-Mex food as "cheap mass-industrialized food."[37] Adán Medrano, however, a local chef and food writer, states that the cuisine in San Antonio is not the same as Tex-Mex food. In his idea, the people who belong to the US dominant society established the category of Tex-Mex food for themselves. Contrarily, according to Medrano, the regional cuisine in San Antonio is based on the Indigenous food culture around San Antonio and is inherited by the city's residents.[38]

The following two points differentiate the CCG initiatives of Tucson and San Antonio: the geographic scope of the initiative and the presence of Indigenous peoples. First, TCoG aims to support local food movements in the Sonoran Desert across the international border rather than those of the city of Tucson exclusively. A restaurant and some wineries certified by TCoG are not in the city boundary of Tucson but still in the range of the Sonoran Desert on the US side.[39] TCoG has not certified any Mexican organizations. Still, some local organizations recognized by TCoG, such as Native Seeds SEARCH, San Xavier Co-Op Farm, and Friends of Tucson's Birthplace, are protecting the environment, history, and culture of the Sonoran Desert extending toward Mexico.[40]

Second, Indigenous peoples, mainly the Tohono O'odham and the Yaqui, participate in the gastronomic activities. The federal government recognizes the Tohono O'odham Nation and the Pascua Yaqui Tribe. Members of both Indigenous peoples also live on the southern side of the international border, as their traditional territories extend toward the current Mexican territory. Meanwhile, archaeological and historical studies indicate that humans settled in San Antonio more than ten thousand years ago.[41] More important, some people identify themselves as descendants of Indigenous people who lived in San Antonio, such as the Tāp Pīlam Coahuiltecan Nation and other Indigenous peoples. They have established groups and call for official recognition.[42] Although the influence of Indigenous cuisines on San Antonio's regional food culture is addressed, it is not clear if those who identify themselves as Indigenous people of the area actively participate in San Antonio's gastronomic movement. This may be partially because the federal government does not recognize the Tāp Pīlam Coahuiltecan Nation and other Indigenous peoples of the area. Without federal recognition, their sovereignty is not guaranteed, and they cannot have a reservation. To revitalize agricultural activities, tribally owned land is essential.

III. Indigenous Peoples and Their Cultures in Tucson's Gastronomy

Mission Garden Serving Agricultural Revitalization

The tribal land of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe and the San Xavier District of the Tohono O'odham Nation are within Tucson's city boundary. People actively farm there, especially in the San Xavier District of the Tohono O'odham Nation, where they run the San Xavier Co-Op Farm. The co-op provides workshops for members to help them learn how to harvest and cook wild plants, such as cholla cactus buds and mesquite pods. At a store on their farm, they sell food items harvested from and processed in the Sonoran Desert.[43] TCoG recognizes the contribution of San Xavier Co-Op Farm to the city's food culture.[44] It is not in the central part of the city, however, and its agricultural tradition might not be so visible, particularly for visitors. Mission Garden, operated by Friends of Tucson's Birthplace, presents Tohono O'odham agricultural traditions on their behalf. Friends of Tucson's Birthplace is one of the crucial nonprofit organizations in the revitalization of agricultural heritage in Tucson,[45] and TCoG highly regards its activities as a crucial part of Tucson's CCG initiative.

Friends of Tucson's Birthplace is run primarily by Tucson residents, and it aims to "preserve, honor, protect, restore, re-create and promote the cultural heritage and historical landscapes of Tucson's Birthplace."[46] In 2009, Friends of Tucson's Birthplace received permission to build a garden called Mission Garden,[47] which was meant to be "a living agricultural museum of Sonoran Desert–adapted heritage fruit trees, traditional local heirloom crops, and edible native plants."[48] Mission Garden stands in a quiet residential district in the western part of Tucson, by Sentinel Peak, also known as "A" Mountain. The foothills of Sentinel Peak is an area called Tucson's Birthplace, where the original inhabitants of Tucson settled at least 3,500 years ago.[49]

Mission Garden consists of the following themed gardens: an early agriculture garden; Hohokam garden; O'odham garden; Mexican-era garden; Anglo territorial–era garden; Chinese garden; Yoeme (Yaqui) garden; African American garden; Z garden in honor of a local citizen, Nancy Zierenberg; and Michael Moore medical garden.[50] According to one of Friends of Tucson's Birthplace's documents, some of the gardens listed above, including the Yoeme garden and African American garden, remain unfinished as of January 2021.[51] Friends of Tucson's Birthplace, a nonprofit organization relying on donations and volunteers, however, maintains

an effort toward completing all these gardens. In addition to the gardens listed above, the Spanish Colonial Orchard was established in part of the garden in collaboration with the Kino Heritage Fruit Trees Project of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in Tucson. The Kino Heritage Fruit Trees Project aims to relocate the original fruit trees, such as peach and quince, introduced to the Sonoran Desert by missionaries from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Through the collaborative project, these historical trees have been replanted in Mission Garden.[52]

Mission Garden is not the only place, however, where information on local agriculture and edible plants can be found. In Tucson, there are two botanical gardens: Tucson Botanical Gardens and Tohono Chul. TCoG also recognizes them for taking part in the food movement.[53] In Tucson Botanical Gardens and Tohono Chul, some sections exhibit local edible plants and methods of arid agriculture kept by the Tohono O'odham people.[54] Still, compared with these two gardens, Mission Garden is unique. This is because the space is open for local people to conduct agricultural and cultural activities related to food and agriculture. Additionally, both botanical gardens have dining facilities that serve some dishes with local ingredients.[55] In Mission Garden, however, visitors and volunteers are more deeply engaged in the activities. They water the plants and harvest crops and try cooking them. On a day that I visited the garden, Friends of Tucson's Birthplace staff members were roasting an agave root in a pit.

Although it is called a garden, Mission Garden is similar to a small farm. Moreover, it is also a space for the revitalization of regional cultural activities related to food. For example, through the efforts of Friends of Tucson's Birthplace, a local festival of the patron saint of farmers, San Ysidro, was revived. The festival has been held in Mission Garden since 2013.[56] During the annual San Ysidro Festival, which is focused on wheat, Tucson residents gather to celebrate their local gastronomic heritage. In the festival held in the past, some Tohono O'odham members offered blessings, and students from Tohono O'odham Community College presented their agricultural heritage.[57]

Tucson in the Traditional Territory of Indigenous Peoples

Explaining the relationship between the Indigenous people and Asian immigrants, particularly in Hawai'i, Candice Fujikane wrote that any immigrants are settlers in the homeland of Indigenous peoples.[58] The situations of Hawai'i and the US-Mexico borderland are not the same, but

I see some similarities, probably due to the similarity of their geographic uniqueness. Hawai'i is often described as an archipelago between the Eastern and Western worlds. Additionally, the presence of the Native Hawaiians, who are called the Kānaka Maoli people, Kānaka 'Ōiwi people, and other names in their language, tends to be forgotten. From the Native Hawaiian perspective, as Fujikane points out, immigrants from the US mainland and Asia are equally settlers on their land.

In the case of the US-Mexico borderlands, the relationship between the US and Mexico, or Anglo America and Latin America, is often highlighted. Issues regarding Indigenous people are often left out, although Indigenous people lived in the Sonoran Desert before the arrival of Spaniards, Mexicans, Anglo Americans, and other immigrants. The history and culture built by Indigenous people and their ancestors are the foundation of the borderlands, and the land initially belonged to the Indigenous people. Even a famous scholar such as Martínez, however, barely mentions the impact of Indigenous cultures on regions in the current US-Mexico borderlands. He explains that the lifestyle of the Indigenous people in the urban area of the Arizona-Sonora borderlands resembles that of Mexican Americans rather than being uniquely Indigenous. He continues that Indigenous people living on the reservation are geographically isolated, and their interaction with other residents of the area has been limited.[59] Therefore, issues regarding Indigenous people are not discussed much in the *Border People*, which is one of the significant scholarly works about the US-Mexico borderlands.

Under such circumstances, Friends of Tucson's Birthplace and other organizations in Tucson continue honoring the existence of Indigenous people of the area. This is crucial for Friends of Tucson's Birthplace, as Mission Garden stands on the very spot where an archaeological site was found. Archaeological studies conducted at a section right by Mission Garden from 2000 to 2003 indicated that the land had been farmed for 4,100 years, and the canal was constructed 3,500 years ago. An ancient people called the Hohokam cultivated the site between 1,250 and 700 years ago. Immigrants arrived after such events had occurred. Spaniards built San Agustín Mission and the Tucson Presidio in the late 1700s, and Chinese people farmed on the same plot of land beginning in the 1890s.[60] Mission Garden reminds people that without the contribution of the Indigenous people, the land would not have been cultivated, and the current city of Tucson might not have been built.

Additionally, without Indigenous people, edible plants of the Sonoran Desert, which are crucial for the garden and the regional gastronomy in

general, would not be known. Moreover, techniques of arid agriculture suitable for the climate of the Sonoran Desert were also developed by Indigenous people. For them, the desert was plentiful with food sources rather than being a deserted land. Gary Paul Nabhan, an ethnobotanist and cultural geographer, wrote that many people have stopped thinking about and understanding the desert land. Additionally, some consider the desert as simply a vacant space,[61] and the desert is "the least understood of all terrains."[62] Nabhan also wrote that the desert has been described as an unproductive place.[63] Contrary to this image, according to Nabhan, there are 425 wild edible plants in the Sonoran Desert, and about twenty-five species have been grown for centuries.[64] Due to the rapid sociocultural, economic, and environmental changes in the area, some traditional desert crops were abandoned and endangered,[65] and local people and organizations are eager to protect these species.

One example is a seed bank called Native Seeds/SEARCH, established by Nabhan and others in 1983. This organization conserves the seeds of beans, squash, melons, corn, onions, herbs, and other crops that are either native to the Sonoran Desert or grown by Indigenous people.[66] Moreover, this organization has a program to provide seeds of local species to Indigenous people for free; it also runs a gift shop to sell select food products and Indigenous art.[67] Organizations like Friends of Tucson's Birthplace and Native Seeds/SEARCH visually present Indigenous people's presence and revitalize the agricultural and food traditions in Tucson that started before the arrival of any immigrants. However, it should be emphasized that the main actors are the Indigenous people. In fact, under the CCG initiative in Tucson, Indigenous people do not simply receive the benefits. Rather, they are some of the major donors to the food movements in Tucson. In 2019, the Tohono O'odham Nation and the Pascua Yaqui Tribe each donated $20,000 to the CCG initiative. The $40,000 donated by these tribes exceeds 10 percent of the annual TCoG budget.[68]

Exhibiting the Multiethnic Sonoran Desert

As explained, the Sonoran Desert as a part of the US-Mexico borderlands is not a space only for Anglo Americans, Mexicans, Hispanics, and Latinos. People of other ethnicities, including Asian Americans and African Americans, also constitute the population (Table 1). It is noteworthy that Mission Garden celebrates the agricultural and food traditions of these people as well.

As for Asian Americans, the contribution of Chinese people to the local agriculture and food industry is prominent in Tucson. According to a historian in Arizona, C. L. Sonnichsen, Chinese people started arriving in Tucson mostly as railroad construction workers in the 1860s. After the construction was completed, many of them settled in the area as truck farmers. Chinese farmers would visit each house in the vicinity to sell their crops. Some of them worked in a field in the foothills of Sentinel Peak, where Mission Garden stands today.[69] Chinese farmers grew long beans, Chinese broccoli, goji berries, spring onions, eggplant, and other vegetables that had not been produced much in this area, along with some popular vegetables and fruits such as potatoes and peaches.[70]

A Chinese restaurant opened in Tucson as early as the 1870s.[71] Additionally, some Chinese people operated grocery stores. Niethammer mentions that there were more than a hundred Chinese-owned grocery stores in Tucson in the 1970s.[72] Anthropologist Edward H. Spicer wrote that Chinese grocery stores became popular shopping spots for customers with limited budgets, including the Yaqui people, as these stores sold various items affordably.[73] It is recorded that many Chinese grocery store workers treated customers such as the Yaqui people nicely. They provided customers with some extra products in their orders. Meanwhile, although not many were wealthy, the Yaquis always tried to pay their bills on time.[74] In sum, Chinese people also contributed to the food security of local people with low income, including local Indigenous people.

In past publications, the participation of African American people in Tucson's food culture is rarely mentioned. African American history in Tucson has been ignored over decades, and movements toward recognizing their contribution to creating the local food culture have begun. The University of Arizona is in the central part of Tucson. The university provides a grant for the preservation of African American history in Tucson. The project includes the publication of a historical cookbook of the local African American cuisine. Tani Sanchez, a professor at the university, published the first edition of this book in 1994, which nearly sold out. In this book, African American historical experiences in Tucson are explained, along with traditional African American cuisine handed down among families in Tucson. In an interview, Sanchez said she hoped the second edition of this book would be sold more widely at major bookstores.[75] In another interview, Sanchez and some other African Americans explained that they felt both isolated and at home in Tucson, and they believed their presence was not appreciated.[76] Under such circumstances, local stories

of African American people in Tucson were explained to visitors by tour guides in Mission Garden. Additionally, a section of the garden specifically exhibiting the African American agricultural tradition will be built in the near future.[77]

According to a publication in 2020, around 5,500 people visit Mission Garden annually.[78] Moreover, the garden serves as a living outdoor exhibit open to the public four days a week year-round, with public guided tours offered two days a week.[79] It constantly educates both Tucson residents and tourists on the environment, society, history, and culture of Tucson while presenting the city's rich gastronomical and agricultural heritage. Furthermore, its activities are connected to other local activities through the CCG initiative, promoting a positive and realistic image of the Sonoran Desert as a part of the US-Mexico borderlands.

Conclusion

The number of organizations participating in food movements in Tucson mentioned in this article is quite limited. Other organizations in Tucson also highlight a unique and realistic image of the Sonoran Desert and the city of Tucson, rather than emphasizing stereotypical descriptions of the US-Mexico borderlands. Regarding the environmental and cultural aspects, many restaurants and artisans certified by TCoG serve Sonoran dishes using regionally available ingredients and contribute to local communities; these dishes are distinguished from Mexican dishes or commercialized Tex-Mex food.[80] Moreover, vegetables and fruits unique to the Sonoran Desert are sold at farmers' markets that are held nearly daily in multiple locations.[81] In my fieldwork in 2017 and other years, I found that, among various local species, i'itoi onion (green onion) was sold widely.[82] Additionally, baking products using mesquite flour and sweets made with prickly pear cactus or agave syrup are often sold by local vendors. Even for some Tucson residents, these are not everyday food items. Therefore, I saw many customers ask the vendors questions about how to cook them. Such conversations can enhance interactions between individuals who would not meet otherwise.

As for the multiethnic aspect of the Sonoran Desert, the activities of the nonprofit organization Iskashitaa Refugee Network are also remarkable. This organization runs a program for United Nations refugees and asylum seekers resettling in Tucson. These refugees and asylum seekers are from countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. They harvest fruits from

trees in the city, which are otherwise left on the trees and wasted, and make food products out of them while learning English and receiving job training in the process.[83]

A significant outdoor event held annually in October called Tucson Meet Yourself should not be missed either. This folklife festival was founded in 1974 by an anthropologist from the University of Arizona, James Griffith. Ethnic foods, art, and music are presented to introduce "the multi-national Arizona-Sonora region."[84] A local media outlet reported that the organizer of this event estimated that over 120,000 people would participate in this three-day festival in 2019.[85] Just like activities held by Friends of Tucson's Birthplace at Mission Garden, Tucson Meet Yourself entertains people and celebrates the regional culture and society while educating local people and visitors. In the activities, the Sonoran Desert, as a unique section of the US-Mexico borderlands, is presented as a historically multilayered, culturally rich, and ethnically diverse place to be enjoyed and celebrated.

While the national debate over border policy continues, and many refugees pass through the area to continue their journeys, the US-Mexico borderlands and lives of the people there remain unknown. This is particularly true in the Sonoran Desert, which is a major border-crossing route for refugees and undocumented migrants. The California–Baja California borderlands on the West Coast and the southern Texas–northeastern Mexico borderlands along the Rio Grande used to be significant migration routes. However, border security in these areas was tightened by Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego and Operation Hold the Line in El Paso in the mid-1990s.[86] As a result, a vast number of refugees and undocumented migrants started crossing the international border by walking through the Sonoran Desert, and many of them died in the desert. A local newspaper in Tucson reported that more than three thousand remains of migrants were found in southern Arizona from 2001 to 2018. Many remains were searched for and found by local volunteers working for humanitarian organizations in the area rather than by the US Border Patrol.[87] These shocking news reports attract the attention of people both nationally and internationally.

Some local people show concern about this situation. For example, in an article introducing a photo exhibit held at the Tucson Museum of Art by photographers who are members of Tohono O'odham and Hia-Ced O'odham, the concern was expressed as: "The desert has increasingly become the focus of political debates and issues related to immigration, disrupting the livelihood of its inhabitants and those who transit through

it."[88] The Sonoran Desert, as well as the culture and society built by the Indigenous peoples and immigrants, existed before the international border was drawn. However, they have been neglected, overgeneralized, and labeled negatively. Revitalization of the gastronomical traditions might not be the only solution, but it certainly helps to shed light on some aspects of the Sonoran Desert across the international border.

I am writing this article in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is hard to foresee the postpandemic world. The CCG initiative is not aimed at simply enhancing tourism. Instead, it is meant to encourage sustainable development of the city's economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects.[89] Still, the food industry and tourism play critical roles in activities related to the CCG, and these fields have been hit quite hard during the pandemic. Additionally, many nonprofit organizations are struggling to secure sufficient funds comparable to what they secured during the prepandemic time.

Moreover, the values and viewpoints of people will shift due to the pandemic. The situation could either increase or decrease people's interest in food and agriculture in Tucson. Furthermore, the Biden administration's reform of border control and immigration policy could impact tourism and local activities in Tucson and the US-Mexico borderlands. As a result, TCoG might need to modify its policy and strategy for the CCG initiative to better suit the postpandemic time.

The process of replanning the CCG initiative would serve as an opportunity to improve this wonderful initiative. In its mission statement, UNESCO states that the UCCN is meant to "strengthen international cooperation between cities that have recognized creativity as a strategic factor of their sustainable development."[90] As mentioned, two cities, San Antonio in Texas and Ensenada in Mexico, were also designated as CCGs. These CCG initiatives in the US-Mexico borderlands could start collaborating. Together, they can present a positive and diverse image of the US-Mexico borderlands to the world.

In fact, some activities happening in these cities seem similar. In San Antonio, the San Antonio Food Bank and the National Park Service collaboratively farm a section of Mission San Juan Capistrano, which is a UNESCO world heritage site. The farm is called Mission San Juan Community Farm, and it aims to show the regional food culture starting from the Spanish colonial time.[91] The presence of Indigenous people and their culture on this farm does not seem visible compared with Mission Garden in Tucson. However, although it is held separately from the farm

activity, the local Indigenous people conduct guided tours of the mission, which includes information on their food and agricultural traditions.[92] Knowing both cases of Mission Garden in Tucson and Mission San Juan Community Farm in San Antonio would help people realize the presence of Indigenous people and the food and agricultural traditions created by people of multiple ethnicities. Moreover, people would realize the differences between the regional issues in Tucson and San Antonio. If similar activities took place in Ensenada, it would enhance the profound understanding of the US-Mexico borderlands among the general public.

In addition, cities in the US-Mexico borderlands, which were designated as part of other types of initiatives under the UCCN, may be able to collaborate with Tucson, San Antonio, and Ensenada. Austin, Texas, which is located roughly 320 kilometers (200 miles) from the US-Mexico international border, is a Creative City of Media Arts of the UCCN.[93] The distance between the US-Mexico border and Santa Fe, New Mexico, is approximately 430 kilometers (260 miles). It might not be so close to the border, but the city is undoubtedly essential in the state of New Mexico and the US Southwest, and it is designated as a Creative City of Crafts and Folk Arts of the UCCN.[94] Through arts, organizations and individuals in these cities can present other diverse and positive aspects of the borderlands.

On the US-Mexico borderlands, Indigenous people have lived and thrived since time immemorial; immigrants settled there instead of passing through, and multiple regional cultures have flourished. It is about time to celebrate the rich regional heritages in the borderlands rather than clinging to monolithic and negative images.

Notes

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