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Love is Real and I Just Had Some For Dessert:
Legacies of Communal Care & Compassion in Asian Diasporic Women's Food Writing

An Honors Project for the Program of Asian Studies

By Miki Rierison

Bowdoin College, 2023

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Introduction

I had never cooked those dishes before, and had only my memory of having eaten them to guide me. They did not look or taste like the ones I meant them to be, but they tasted just as good.¹

- Buwei Yang Chao

Yi ge nu ren de zi zhuan

We can't recapture our past or change our destiny, but with my mother's recipes I truly feel that she has actually been with me, leading me through the maze of her recollection, stories, traditions, experiences and food that she once prepared.²

- Helen Chen

Helen Chen's Chinese Home Cooking

"I remember one time I was starving and I said, 'Priya, I'm hungry; let's go get something to eat.' And you said, 'Mom, I just cooked some zucchini sabzi and some raita. It's in the fridge.' And I said, 'what?'" So it just suddenly made me all warm and made me feel so good that, hey, I can go to my kid's place and eat what I eat at home.³

- Ritu Krishna

Where We Come From

Alongside their daughters, mothers, and aunts, each of these women enacts shared cooking practices drawing from, and advancing, a lineage of care through communal cooking. Embedded in each dish, recipe, and meal shared is the knowledge and histories of empowerment and

¹Buwei Yang Chao, *Yi Ge Nü Ren de Zi Zhuan* (Taipei: Zhuan ji wen xue chu ban she, 1969), 43.

² Helen Chen, *Helen Chen's Chinese Home Cooking* (New York: Hearst Books, 1994), 1.

³ Levine Ed, "Priya Krishna on Cooking and Being 'Indian-Ish' [2/2] – Special Sauce," Special Sauce, accessed April 9, 2023, <https://www.thespecialsaucepodcast.com/podcast/special-sauce-priya-krishna-on-cooking-and-being-indian-ish-2-2/>.

agency, born out of networks of support, solidarity, and communal identity prepared in the kitchen. Whether cooking banquets in community kitchens, stir frying Peking Raviolis in a soundstage, scanning a thumbbed-through cookbook, or watching from the countertop, diasporic women have accorded each other with authority, cultivated cultural identity, and imbued compassion through shared food practices, honoring their pasts to nourish their futures.

Reparative recipes

In this project I work to recover influential yet often erased Asian American female immigrant chefs and food authors from the mid-twentieth century to the present, situating their contributions in a deep-rooted tradition of diasporic women who used cooking as a means of communal agency and care. Immigrant Asian cookbook authors and chefs have long faced internal criticisms from their own diasporic communities of either inauthenticity or engaging in “food pornography,” to use writer Frank Chin’s term—a line of criticism that Lisa Lau has elaborated on as “re-Orientalism.”⁴ Though these criticisms should not eclipse the works themselves, I discuss and counter them in my project because they reflect broader challenges faced particularly by Asian female diasporic authors even today. Criticisms that decry ethnoracial inauthenticity, or conversely critique authors for exploiting or overgeneralizing their cuisines, adhere to very narrow definitions of what a “true” or authentic ethnoracial experience is and place an impossible burden of ethnoracial representation on female authors. As scholar King-Kok Cheung argued long ago in relation to Asian American literature in the 1970s, this opposition of ethnoracial authenticity to gender narratives risks invalidating Asian diasporic

⁴ Lisa Lau, “Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 2 (March 2009): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X07003058>; Frank Chin, “The Year of the Dragon,” in *The Chickencoop Chinaman / The Year of the Dragon* (University of Washington Press, 1981).

female experiences, further subordinating and erasing them within a narrowly masculine framework of cultural nationalism.⁵ Such a history uniquely haunts my cohort of female chefs and cookbook authors, as they practiced at the intersection of white commodification of ethnic foods and patriarchal norms within Asian diasporic politics of cultural representation. All the more so, then, we must turn to minor alternative archives to recover these women's lives and works and reread them in a more reparative light.

In focusing on food memoirs, writings, and narratives as primary sources, I build upon the work of feminist scholars such as Rosalyn Eves and Jacqueline Bobo, who see cultural sources that are often dismissed as lowbrow genres—like recipes, cookbooks, and songs—as equally rich archives of minority communities.⁶ In the absence of access to official records or modes of documentation, immigrant women of color have often depended on these alternative genres as a means for intergenerational knowledge sharing. As Virginia Sherman describes, “Cooking was the first of the modern arts to do entirely without classical sanction.”⁷ The parameters of such classical modes of cooking are often diametrically opposed to the informal and personal female food writings that drew from lived and communal memory rather than formalized training and expertise. Few non-professional male cooks or food writers share, or even engage, to the same degree as women, in an intimate search for identity through culinary traditions. Nawar Al-Hassan Golley surmises, “The traditional separation between domestic and professional cuisine tables questions of intimacy and self questioning.”⁸ This divorce of cooking

⁵ King-Kok Cheung, “The Woman Warrior versus The Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?,” in *A Companion to Asian American Studies*, ed. Kent A. Ono (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 158, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996928.ch10>.

⁶ Rosalyn Collings Eves, “A Recipe for Remembrance: Memory and Identity in African-American Women's Cookbooks,” *Rhetoric Review* 24, no. 3 (2005): 280–97.

⁷ Virginia Allen-Terry Sherman, “Diaspora and Displacement : The Evocation of Traditions, Origins and Identity in Culinary Memoirs, an Emerging Literary Genre” (phdthesis, Université Grenoble Alpes [2020-....], 2020), 78, <https://theses.hal.science/tel-02861616>.

⁸ Sherman, 61.

from its inherent intimacy has erased the powerful legacies of care and communal knowledge imbued within it.

Private archives “convey information not only for women, but about them,” as Bobo explains.⁹ Not only do these alternative sources provide insight into the experiences of communities erased from official records, but food writing itself uniquely compels readers to engage with the text and its history. As Eves writes, “monuments that record names and dates for us actually bear the brunt of memory work and allow us to forget the thing or person memorialized. But because cookbooks encourage interaction, consumption, embodiment, they may also encourage active remembrance.”¹⁰ Food writing is thus a living archive that privileges the experiences of diasporic female chefs, allowing readers to approach them in the terms of their own lived practices rather than through hegemonic standards of truth, accuracy, and exactness that for so long dismissed nontraditional sources and authors.

Recovering alternative archives is one way I seek to engage in a form of what Eve Sedgwick describes as “reparative reading.”¹¹ Reparative reading contrasts with the practice of what she discusses as “paranoid reading,” a mode of interpretation heir to the Marx-Freud-Nietzsche tradition that is always on the defensive, looking for inconsistencies and anticipating maliciousness or bad actors. This critical practice came into popularity as scholars began to critique hegemonic power structures and narratives that had long gone unchallenged, but it developed, Sedgwick argues, into a dominant and exclusive paradigm that became synonymous with critique at large, as marginalized authors came to be read with the same distrust and defensiveness. Sedgwick describes the phenomenon thus: “In a world where no one need be

⁹ Eves, “A Recipe for Remembrance,” 287.

¹⁰ Ibid, 286.

¹¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 169.

delusional to find evidence of systemic oppression, to theorize out of anything but a paranoid critical stance has come to seem naive.”¹²

Reparative reading is not an absence of critique but instead prioritizes empathy, pleasure, and love within the praxis of reading; even as we recognize our environment as hostile, we must know empathy and love to survive. This approach understands that merely amplifying pain does not solve existing problems, and that joy and empathy are crucial in a society seeking to eradicate marginalized communities. However, since Sedgwick’s 1997 coinage of the term and its subsequent popularity, scholars have critiqued the dichotomy of Sedgwick’s paranoid vs. reparative approach. As Patricia Stuelke outlines in her 2021 book, *The Ruse of Repair*, by exclusively focusing on practices of joy, we risk promoting an “ideological valorization” of ideals that have then been historically manipulated by Western neoliberalist forces.¹³ She discusses a number of examples, including the experiences of US agents in 1970s Central America, who initially participated in a “paranoid critique of their own complicity in counterrevolutionary violence,” later shifting to “more reparative readings of Central American life” humanizing the victims of US militarism.¹⁴ As time wore on, these Americans disproportionately mobilized reparative strategies, “infused by their desire to find relief, respite, and satisfaction in communal feeling and absolution from the guilt of their complicity.”¹⁵ Perhaps a more relevant yet controversial example comes in Stuelke’s examination of the transformation of white feminist values in the late Cold War era, where she concludes as “the state outsourced the responsibility for security and care, the nuclear family was revalorized by

¹² Ibid, 172

¹³ Patricia Stuelke, *The Ruse of Repair: US Neoliberal Empire and the Turn from Critique* (Duke University Press, 2021), 28, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478021575>.

¹⁴ Ibid, 60

¹⁵ Ibid.

the authors and architects of neoliberalism as the preferred vehicle of wealth redistribution and debt management.”¹⁶ This domestic turn was embraced not just by the promoters of hetero-patriarchal family values, but by feminists who defended this “private desire” by reimagining it as “a radical political act of feminist solidarity.”¹⁷ In these examples we see how an exclusive focus on the “good feelings” in modes of care and love can erase the very real impact these hegemonic forces have in these women’s lives. Stuelke argues that fulfilling “the wish that the violences of racial capitalism, neoliberal empire, and settler colonialism might be remediated is in fact part of their ordinary enduring operation.”¹⁸ Thus, an exclusively reparative approach can risk absolving these structures and their actors of the harm they sowed in presenting this harm as reparable.

However, Stuelke’s thoughtful analysis still relies primarily on a binary of the paranoid/reparative stance. My approach then lies somewhere in the middle, drawing from Derek Ruez and Daniel Cockayne’s writings. Instead of a dismissal of reparative reading, or a feel-good refusal of negativity, Ruez and Cockayne argue for a pluralistic and ambivalent engagement with an “inherently plural and uneven world.”¹⁹ They explain in “Feeling Otherwise: Ambivalent Affects and the Politics of Critique in Geography”: “Our emphasis on ambivalence provides one a way of acknowledging the importance of feeling in knowing, without privileging either positive or negative affects or assuming too singular a path between feeling, knowing, and acting. Researchers cannot inhabit a position of sameness either with relation to one another, to themselves, or to their objects. We are both within and without our objects, we form them and

¹⁶ Ibid, 124.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 224.

¹⁹ Derek Ruez and Daniel Cockayne, “Feeling Otherwise: Ambivalent Affects and the Politics of Critique in Geography,” *Dialogues in Human Geography* 11, no. 1 (March 2021): 88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2043820621995617>.

are formed by them.”²⁰ In their approach, elements of reparative analysis and critique are brought together, reducing the separate limitations of each.

To that end, I do spend significant time outlining how the broader forces of white supremacy and patriarchy, among others, presented challenges for each of my subjects and diasporic food writing as a whole. I do so in line with my hybridized approach that does not seek to erase the role of hegemonic structures or solely focus on them in lieu of the powerful care work of these marginalized women. Again, in support of my reparative reading I do not adopt a historicist approach to these women’s stories, as I do not seek to replicate the existing mutilated narratives that underwrite their impact. In my adoption of modern frameworks I attempt to write these women in the most powerful terms that recognize the complex significance of their work. I engage in macrocritiques of white supremacy to account for the struggles they endured to amplify the weight of their labor, and to contextualize the historic roots of the present day challenges contemporary diasporic female writers face. Without such acknowledgement I would then “remediate” and minimize the impact of these power structures in their lives, in many ways replicating existing historical narratives that ignore the forces of racism and sexism entirely. I discuss these challenges to best understand how we move beyond them to heal the scars from these violent forces that have distinctly marked and shaped the lives of the diasporic women before us and the practices they have passed on.

Scholar bell hooks elaborates on this framework in her groundbreaking work, *All About Love*: “Contrary to what we may have been taught to think, unnecessary and unchosen suffering wounds us but need not scar us for life [...] The choice to love is a choice to connect—to find ourselves in the other.”²¹ Within this reparative framework, my project resists long held

²⁰ Ibid, 107.

²¹ bell hooks, *All about Love: New Visions* (William Morrow Paperbacks, 1999), 15.

conceptions surrounding the value of food and cooking, as I illustrate the myriad ways Asian diasporic women have imbued shared culinary practices with powerful cultural and personal meaning. Alongside broad dismissals of informal female culinary practices, another central misconception surrounding the value of diasporic food is the aforementioned allegations of inauthenticity, as I demonstrate in the next section, have policed diasporic women from the first wave of non-European immigration through the present.

Beyond the limits of the lunchbox critique

With the rise of multiculturalism and globalization from the end of the twentieth century, there has no doubt been a marked rise in cultural representation of immigrant experiences. The seemingly rapid increase of such diverse stories has given way to a new criticism, one with historic roots: inauthenticity, cloaked as unoriginality. While earlier criticisms that policed food writing because of the limited modes of Asian cultural representation, contemporary criticisms now chide diasporic food writers for telling too many of the same story. This genre of critique, levied by members in and outside the diaspora, is crystallized in Jaya Saxena's 2022 article, aptly titled "The Limits of the Lunchbox Moment."²² Saxena, a biracial Indian and white author, opens,

The image of a child opening their lunchbox to reveal an "ethnic" lunch and immediately being bullied for that lunch is everywhere [...] It gained its own name around 2016, "the lunchbox moment," and has become the subject of endless personal essays. The lunchbox moment has become such a touchstone both because it's recognizable for many and because it's an editor's dream [...] The story of being bullied in the cafeteria for one's lunch is so ubiquitous that it's attained a gloss of fictionality. It's become metonymy for the entire diaspora

²² Jaya Saxena, "The Limits of the Lunchbox Moment," *Eater*, February 8, 2021, <https://www.eater.com/22239499/lunchbox-moment-pop-culture-tropes>.

experience; to be a young immigrant or child of immigrants is to be bullied for your lunch, and vice versa. Other food experiences have become almost as common in immigrant literature — the realization that your cuisine has become “trendy”; the moment when a white friend tries to explain your favorite food back to you; the decision to recreate your family’s signature dish, thereby shedding the shame you’ve carried over your culture’s cuisine — and can be sources of bonding across immigrant communities.²³

Saxena establishes the pervasiveness of the “lunchbox moment” acknowledging that its popularity is in part because it does convey real trauma, but also contends that the moment’s popularity is because it’s “an editor’s dream,” that it cleanly packages the challenges of assimilation into a digestible arc.²⁴ She goes on to argue that the story has become “metonymy for the entire diaspora experience; to be a young immigrant or child of immigrants is to be bullied for your lunch.”²⁵ This sweeping generalization is simply that, a generalization, that apparently replicates the very simplification Saxena decries. The central complaint in Saxena’s article is that the ubiquity of the lunchbox moment allows for “no nuance, it leaves no room for the people whose lives did not fit that template [...] it narrows the frames we can use to tell our stories.”²⁶ She rightly argues that diasporic communities should bond not only over trauma but all the other beautiful parts of their heritage.

Unfortunately, in decrying one literary “trope,” Saxena engages in another, which allows her to see a recent collection of diasporic stories as not only repetitive but harmful. In her attempts to elevate the experiences of those without a stinky lunchbox story, Saxena denigrates those who have as clichéd and repetitive. Throughout the history of the American canon of

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Saxena, “The Limits of the Lunchbox Moment.”

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

literature, diasporic stories have comprised only a fraction of those by white authors, whose retooling of shared-bordering-on-identical experiences are lauded as powerful, creative, and imaginative. But for diasporic and non-white authors, writing on a shared experience is tedious, dry and monotonous; even worse, Saxena argues, these parallel stories are damaging because they “narrow,” the frames in which diasporic stories can be told. White authors can tell the same story a hundred different ways, but their stories will never be extrapolated to be the truth for all white people. Saxena and Frank Chin’s criticism both operate from a type of scarcity mindset, from a fear of harmful misrepresentation in the few chances to tell diasporic stories. Though this seems paradoxical to Saxena’s cries of overabundance of the lunchbox moment, if diasporic writers were afforded enough platforms to share their stories, there would be room for all the lunchbox moments *and* all the other diasporic experiences we have yet to hear. As Saxena, Chin, and others who criticized diasporic food writing before them imply in their claims, diasporic food authors, not white audiences, must change, must rewrite their work to ensure it can somehow convey the entire realities of their communities.

Yet Saxena raises a number of valuable questions regarding the role of cultural narratives in identity formation. She openly writes of her own issues in self-identity:

In 2016, I wrote an essay about struggle and Pizza Hut’s stuffed crust. In the essay, I am ashamed of many things: of liking Pizza Hut (a chain, even though I was from the pizza capital of New York City), of the Indian food my grandma cooked, but also of not liking Indian food even though it was the food of my family. I wrote about the things that caused that shame, too, like seeing my classmates mocked in the cafeteria for eating “anything other than standard American food.” And upon rereading it earlier this year, I realized a lot of it wasn’t really true. The truth is I wasn’t ashamed of Indian food or my Indian-ness. I was curious about that part of my culture sometimes, but mostly indifferent. It wasn’t like I was consciously lying [...] Instead, not being a good

enough writer or deep enough thinker to identify what, exactly, had caused me such distress as a child, I resorted to illustrating my feelings with a more common narrative: the lunchbox moment. I didn't know how to write about being a mixed-race child of immigrants in a way that didn't involve shame or bullying.²⁷

Saxena uses this disclosure of false self-identification to argue that the pervasiveness of the lunchbox moment limited the types of narratives she viewed her identity with. Saxena's hyperfixation on the lunchbox moment obscures the fundamental problem at hand, the forces of white supremacy that cast real insult and shame to diasporic foods and limit diasporic narratives. The conclusion Saxena comes to both casts partial blame on diasporic food writers who fall into the lunchbox "trope", and ignores the legacy of joyful, compassionate diasporic food experiences in its generalization. In faulting diasporic authors for perpetuating the lunchbox narrative, Saxena engages in a paranoid reading of their work that sees their shared experience only as a repetitive oversimplification rather than a powerful testimony and collective witnessing of shared trauma and resilience. Her claims parallel those levied by Frank Chin thirty years prior that demanded authentic cultural representations from figures like Joyce Chen and Jade Snow Wong.²⁸ And just like those who came before her, Saxena's claims unfortunately task diasporic food writers to fix a problem white supremacy created. Are those who have experienced and written about their lunchbox moment meant to wait silently for white publishers and readers to finally develop a hankering for the stories of their "non-lunchboxed" peers? This line of criticism levied by Asian cultural nationalists of the past, and diasporic women of the present—like Saxena—reflects a surface level understanding of food's significance, seen only as a cultural commodity for white audiences to digest.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Chin, "The Year of the Dragon."

By focusing on the legacies of diasporic Asian female chefs and food authors, on their experiences and motivations as they communicated them, I hope to portray a fuller picture of their lives, their practices of survival, and their influence on immigrant identity, community, and writing. Tracing the history and challenges they faced in their food practices can allow for incredible healing and reparation for our understanding of present-day food writing. Additionally, I seek to address a broader scholarly gap through my project. Presently, much important work exists on the legacies of historical trauma and violence on marginalized communities, work that highlights the insidious ways violence manifests in academia, pop culture, and everyday lives. In my time as a student, most of my studies related to race, immigration, or ethnicity have drawn upon experiences of pain and grief like those my family and I have experienced. This project is a personal pursuit to focus on the healing and beautiful aspects of diasporic community and identity, an ode to the parts of us that are not defined by the pain and suffering but that seek self-affirmation beyond them. My reparative turn is indeed in line with larger discussions in reparative antiracism scholarship.

Chapter arcs

In the first chapter I focus on Nanjing-born Dr. Buwei Yang's life and her influential *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, which served as one of the first ever guides to Chinese cooking published in the U.S.²⁹ In her humorous and personal cookbook written with her daughter, she coined the widely accepted terms "potsticker" and "stir fry."³⁰ However, Yang's work was retranslated and often miscredited to her husband, linguist Yuenren Chao, contributing to her

²⁹ Mayukh Sen, *Taste Makers: Seven Immigrant Women Who Revolutionized Food in America*, First edition (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2022), 31.

³⁰ Buwei Yang Chao, *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, 3d ed. rev. and enl (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 9.

anonymity. *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese* opens: “I didn’t write this book [...] I must blame my husband for all the negative contributions he has made toward the making of this book [...] he has changed Rulan’s good English into bad, which he thinks Americans like better”; her autobiography notes, “my husband has not always been a well-behaved translator.”³¹ Moving across China, Japan, America, and back again as she was displaced by conflict, I argue that in using food to sustain the diasporic communities she inhabited, Yang engaged in a transgressive form of nontraditional activism, using food as a means of self agency and community support. There is considerable archival material on Yang due to her prominence as a doctor and her husband’s position as a renowned linguist. So, for my discussion of Yang in this chapter, I draw from both her original and translated autobiography, cookbook, her notes on her family, joint interviews, and Mayukh Sen’s archival research in *Taste Makers*.

The second chapter focuses on Joyce Chen, TV chef and cookbook author whose popular cookware line has eclipsed her powerful work in increasing accessibility of Chinese cooking, dedication to depicting a fuller picture of Chinese cuisine and culture, and commitment to creating a familiar space for the diasporic community in Cambridge. My second chapter seeks to reclaim Joyce Chen’s multidimensional legacy as a gastrodipomat and community advocate. Chen’s work has long been overshadowed by her successful product line and the career of her peer, Julia Child. I adapt Heather Ruth Lee’s use of the term “gastrodipomacy,” initially coined by Paul Rockower to refer to the ways food and cuisine are used by state officials as a form of soft power dipomacy.³² Lee has exported this framework to describe the social agency of Chinese immigrant populations in the nineteenth to early twentieth century who used Chinese

³¹ Chao, 1; Buwei Yang Chao and Yuanren Chao, *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman, Buwei Yang Chao* (1947; repr., Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1970), 2.

³² Charles Spence, “Gastrodipomacy: Assessing the Role of Food in Decision-Making,” *Flavour* 5, no. 1 (October 27, 2016): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13411-016-0050-8>.

cuisine to renegotiate race relations within Exclusion Era America.³³ Through this lens I argue Joyce was both an innovative gastrodipomat who used her representations of Chinese food to challenge and renegotiate American conceptions and relationships with China, and that outside this gastrodipomacy work she used food to sustain her family and her community through cultural preservation—an equally impressive task. I contend first that public narratives of Chen that either erase the challenges she faced or fault them on her personal failings assume neutral standards of success that do not account for the reality of living as a Chinese woman held to the newly created model minority standard. I do not seek to dwell on her challenges but rather illustrate how her story and so many others have been rewritten to adhere to white standards of success. Food scholar Allen Salkin says of Chen, “She failed in her mission [...] Julia succeeded in making French cooking accessible or at least giving the impression that it was accessible. Unfortunately, Chinese cooking still does not feel to most Americans like something they can do at home.”³⁴ In this chapter, I push against this judgment of Chen by establishing that she was successful not only in increasing the diversity and visibility of Chinese cooking in her gastrodipomacy, but also supported her local diasporic community: running her restaurant in Cambridge that served as a space of comfort for new immigrants and Americans alike, offering social and cultural nourishment for her family. In addition to her books, I draw from her show, *Cooking With Joyce Chen*, and her documentary, *Joyce Chen’s China*, and conversations with her niece and great nephew who is a current Bowdoin sophomore.

In the third and final chapter, I begin with a discussion on Indian actress and author Madhur Jaffrey’s extensive career to illustrate the transformation of her food writing from her

³³ Heather Ruth Lee, “Acquired Taste: Chinese Restaurants and the Business of Becoming Citizens” (Brown University, April 11, 2019).

³⁴ Mayukh Sen, “America’s Forgotten Television Chef,” *Food52*, October 2017 <https://food52.com/blog/20611-joyce-chen-television-profile>.

start in 1972 to the present. Jaffrey is hailed as the mother of Indian cooking in America, but perhaps her most notable contribution is in her impact within the Indian diaspora and its new generations of chefs and authors. Thus, in addition to covering her career I discuss her perspective and relationship with present-day diasporic chefs through joint interviews with cookbook author Priya Krishna, author of the 2019 *Indian-ish: Recipes and Antics from a Modern American Family*. Underscoring the privileges Jaffrey's unique sociocultural capital afforded in contrast to previous diasporic authors, I frame her career as a testament to the power that agency, longevity, and means can afford to diasporic female chefs, seeing her work in establishing regional diversity of cuisine and ability to revise and mentor future generations as a continuation of the work of diasporic women cooks before her. Jaffrey's popular debut cookbook, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, begins: "This book has been written as a gradual maneuver in self-defense [...] I have increasingly found myself approached at parties and PTA meetings by enthusiastic Americans who note my sari and ask, 'You wouldn't know of a restaurant where we could get some good Indian food?' [...] I begin to feel a familiar upsurge of guilt and patriotic responsibility [...] the only alternative is to invite the people in question home for dinner [...] justifying the expense and the effort by telling myself that someone had to let Americans know what authentic Indian food was like."³⁵ Jaffrey's obligation, fueled by "guilt and patriotic responsibility," to showcase "authentic," Indian cuisine reflects the larger onus on immigrant women to uphold representations of their culture. Fifty years later, Jaffrey spoke of the ethnic pigeonholing she faced in becoming the reference for all Indian cooking: "I was not allowed to write, say, about Italian food," and in describing Krishna and the younger desi chefs, she remarked, "they are brave, they are bold, and they know who they are. We are brown and we

³⁵ Madhur Jaffrey, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 1.

want in! We are American and we can write about anything we want to write about. They're writing books about what they eat.”³⁶ Her reflections on her own motivations versus those of the newer generation highlight the power of *Indian-ish* and other contemporary works. Jaffrey's popularity in the mainstream does not require archival recovery in the same depth as the other subjects. I plan to draw from her numerous cookbooks, memoirs, interviews on American Public Media and PBS, and her joint interviews and writings with Priya Krishna.

In the second section of this final chapter I transition to the contemporary, examining Krishna's *Indian-ish*, Michelle Zauner's *Crying in H-Mart*, and Angela Dimayuga's *Filipinx* to illustrate the unique healing and reparative power of these food memoirs for both the authors and the broader diasporic communities they are a part of. Contrasting the hybridized realities represented in their works against the linear and often static portrayals of identity in Jaffrey's memoir, I illustrate how these contemporary works portray a fuller picture of the diasporic experience and allow for potential healing between the immigrant child and parent. Within this chapter, I discuss the importance of these works in providing autonomy and narrative back to the often subalternized female immigrant home cook and the differing role of culinary nostalgia for first and second generation immigrants. Each of these works draws heavily from the author's relationship with the women who taught them to cook—Krishna and Zauner with their mothers, Dimayuga with her mother and grandmother respectively—and thus I plan to highlight the healing potential for the immigrant parent and child, alongside Yang's *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese* co-written with her daughter Rulan, and Joyce and Helen Chen's collaborative works.³⁷

³⁶ Francis Lam, “An Intimate Conversation with Madhur Jaffrey, Inspirational Icon of Indian Cooking,” *The Splendid Table*, 15:44, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.splendidtable.org/story/2019/06/14/an-intimate-conversation-with-madhur-jaffrey-icon-of-indian-cooking>.

³⁷ Priya Krishna et al., *Indian-Ish: Recipes and Antics from a Modern American Family* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019); Angela Dimayuga, Ligaya Mishan, and Alex Lau, *Filipinx* (New York: Abrams, 2021); Michelle Zauner, *Crying in H Mart: A Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021); Chao, *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*.

For Krishna, Zauner, and Dimayuga, who are in the midst of prolific careers, I use their memoirs and cookbooks, interviews and Youtube shorts as primary sources.

Finally, in the coda I close with personal reflections on the role of food and food writing in my own life. This chapter continues the discussion of the female immigrant home cook, including our own mothers, aunts, sisters and friends. Following the structure of a recipe, I write of my own journey using food to navigate cultural and communal identity. I weave my experiences with my peers from our diasporic potluck, where I asked each of them to bring a dish from home. Given that communal care is a central theme of this project, I end with an homage to the women and communities that have fed me, nourished me, and let me find home in their kitchens.

Chapter 1

Dr. Buwei Yang: Cooking for Community, Eating For Herself

No funeral services will be held for Dr. Buwei Yang Chao, physician and wife of Dr. Yuanren Chao, Professor Emeritus at University of California-Berkeley [...] She became headmistress of the Chungshih School in 1912, then went on to obtain a medical degree at Tokyo Imperial University in 1912. She founded the SenJen Hospital in Beijing and translated from English to Chinese Margaret Sanger's *What Every Girl Should Know* [...] she turned to cooking and writing in her later years, authoring *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese* and *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman*.³⁸

This brief obituary of Buwei Yang, printed in her local *San Francisco Examiner*, reflects how she is remembered in the public eye: in abbreviated form, preceded by and centered on her husband, with the narrative of her life shaped around the trajectory of his professional career. This obituary has more detail than most, likely based on information submitted by family members who resided locally in Berkeley at the time of her death. It highlights a few of her achievements in the medical field, in contrast to most obituaries of her, such as those in the *Associated Press* and *The New York Times* that say simply: “Buwei Yang Chao, wife of Dr. Yuanren Chao and author of *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, dead at 91.”³⁹

In a world that largely subordinated her to just a wife and cookbook author, Yang fought to gain recognition beyond her bestselling cookbooks that she, too, saw as secondary to her medical accomplishments. In her lifetime, Yang's continuous and groundbreaking work in

³⁸ “Deaths: Buwei Yang Chao”, *San Francisco Examiner*, March 1, 1981.

³⁹ “Obituaries” *The New York Times*, March 1, 1981.

For clarity, I refer to Buwei Yang Chao by her given name Yang, and Yuanren Chao by his given name Chao.

obstetrics received scant recognition, even though she wrote her *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* in an attempt to refocus public attention on her medical career after the success of her first cookbook, *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, in 1945.⁴⁰ Yang's husband's rewriting of her autobiography under the guise of translation further flattened her narrative. In fact, his translation—meant to tell readers “who she really was,”—omitted and rewrote portions of her life without discretion.⁴¹ This English translation was published in the United States in 1947, without mention of Yang's original Chinese manuscript that went into print only twenty-two years later in Taiwan.⁴² In the anglophone world, then, not only are Yang's achievements constrained to the culinary sphere, but even these culinary achievements are devalued, written off alongside her other forms of nontraditional labor and activism.

Though Yang is remembered more fully in China, her accomplishments are often touted there in relation to her husband: she is praised above all as the model wife of China's New Culture era, pursuing a career while still dutifully following her husband. A 2001 article from Tsinghua University, where Chao taught and Yang worked as an obstetrician's assistant, describes their marriage as the “first example of a modern day marriage.”⁴³ A commemorative article published in 2021 on the anniversary of Yang's death likewise praises how she “earned money to support her family, but never made a show of it. She believed her husband's research was the most important.”⁴⁴ Her life's work is hence recognized, but only insofar as it supports her wifely responsibilities to her husband. Zhang Yihe, daughter of politician Zhang Bojun,

⁴⁰ Buwei Yang Chao and Yuanren Chao, *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman*, Buwei Yang Chao (1947; repr., Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1970), 3.

⁴¹ Ibid, 6.

⁴² Buwei Yang Chao, *Yi Ge Nü Ren de Zi Zhuan* (Taipei: Zhuan ji wen xue chu ban she, 1969).

⁴³ “赵元任、杨步伟——‘神仙伴侣’-清华大学,” accessed April 11, 2023, <https://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/info/2032/79038.htm>

⁴⁴ 网易, “嫁旷世奇才恩爱60年, 育4个精英女儿, 杨步伟一生只有一黑点,” April 26, 2021, <https://www.163.com/dy/article/G8GFIH6T0543NPPS.html>.

Reclaiming Yang from these patriarchal narratives, I argue in this chapter that her cooking was no less valuable than her medical career. As a Chinese diasporic woman forging a community through food, Yang made cooking a powerful assertion of her own agency as well as a medium of nontraditional activism that sustained her community. This chapter seeks to redeem both Yang's relative anonymity in the anglophone world, where Chao erased her words and ultimately her legacy, as well as her domesticated status in the sinophone world, where she receives recognition largely as a supportive working wife. Indeed, this chapter seeks to do the opposite of what Yang herself did in retelling her life: instead of subordinating food as a minor character in the life of a pioneering obstetrician, I recognize the enduring and powerful role of Yang's cooking in commanding agency and fostering community throughout her lifetime—both in and outside of the medical world. Her cooking was not a minor activity, though she frames it as such in her writings, but rather a major and lifelong undertaking that enriched myriad aspects of her life. I do so not by omitting or rewriting her words as Chao did, but by drawing from the vast number of episodes she herself wrote about in both her autobiography and her later *Miscellaneous Notes on the Chao Family*, and by highlighting and reframing the value of her cooking and cookbook authorship. For Yang, cooking was a means of enacting agency for herself in unfamiliar spaces as well as a tool in community building in times of chaos and violence for other displaced people around her. To subordinate this meaningful work is to devalue the forms of labor, activism, and community building, oftentimes enacted by women, that fall outside traditional, and traditionally male-coded, modes of political agency such as policymaking and protesting. Though she did not see it as such, Yang's cooking was a prime example of alternative agency. By reversing the devaluation of cooking, I enrich the broader goal of this project: to recognize and uplift the value of minoritized genres and female labor such as

cookbooks and cooking by diasporic women, in their unique and powerful pursuit of immigrant community and identity building.

“I am a doctor,”: understanding Yang’s perception of her cooking

In narrating her own life, Yang repeatedly centered her medical breakthroughs instead of her cookbook authorship, a role she felt pigeonholed into. The rigid molds others sought to contain her in—doting housewife, passive Chinese bride—compelled her to cast her cooking abilities and their widespread impact as secondary to her career feats. Yang had fought her whole life to be taken seriously in the face of gender prejudice. She would not allow cooking—what she saw as a skill expected of her as a woman—to become her legacy. Her debut cookbook opens: “I am ashamed to have written this book. First, because I am a doctor and ought to be practicing instead of cooking.”⁴⁸ Though she never mentions it in explicit terms, the burden of representation weighed heavy on Yang. As an educated, wealthy Chinese woman, she was compelled to make something of her life beyond the “silly” household practices she was expected to complete.⁴⁹ In her autobiography, the frequent mentions of food are quickly interrupted by more pressing descriptions of her work or family. Her later cookbook and notes on her family follow suit, using her visibility as a cookbook author to draw attention to medical causes she saw as more pressing.

Rey Chow explicates some of the consequences constraining definitions of proper Chinese womanhood bear on Chinese women: “The millstone around our necks—‘China’, ‘Chinese tradition’ and ‘the Chinese woman’—is huge and crippling; as it weighs us down it also gives shape to our movements [...] it becomes, for many, their only attitude towards the

⁴⁸ Chao, *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, 1.

⁴⁹ Chao and Chao, *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman, Buwei Yang Chao*, 9.

world.”⁵⁰ In her self-writing, Yang clearly internalized those attitudes that saw her cooking as silly and secondary to the important work she was doing in the medical field. In a world that barely valued her as a cookbook author, much less a doctor, Yang fought to receive recognition for her medical career. But in doing so, she was compelled to diminish the importance of her cooking, writing it off as a menial activity for housewives.

My reading of Yang’s work is not from a historicist approach. Rather, to reclaim her in the most powerful terms possible, I adopt a number of contemporary frameworks from feminist, diasporic, and postcolonial studies. Yang, alongside my later subjects, existed during a period without the language to recognize a full weight of their work. I do not confine myself to a purely historicist reading because I do not seek to replicate past dismissals and devaluation of food labor. This contemporary feminist rereading of Yang’s work accords her a type of micro agency of the work she did engage in throughout her life. It is impossible to know how Yang’s views of her own food work would have changed if she existed in the present, but she was never given the opportunity to craft a narrative beyond the singular one allowed during her era. My contemporary reading provides an alternative arc that does not carelessly erase or ignore the power of her work across disciplines.

“She ought to write a book!”: the autobiography

The English version of *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* came out in 1947, after the success of *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*.⁵¹ Yang’s original Chinese text, however, did not go into print until 1969 in Taiwan, twenty-two years after Chao’s English version.⁵² Yang had been

⁵⁰ Rey Chow and Anne Firor Scott, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Indiana University Press, 1993), 199.

⁵¹ Mayukh Sen, *Taste Makers: Seven Immigrant Women Who Revolutionized Food in America*, First edition (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2022), 31.

⁵² Chao, *Yi Ge Nü Ren de Zi Zhuan*.

working on an account of her life since 1913 but had abandoned the project until her friend Lin Tsui-feng approached her about her life.⁵³ When she told Chao of the idea, he informed her that he had been writing her biography for nineteen years. It was all wrong, though. Only forty pages long, his manuscript skipped entire years of her life while detailing moments she deemed unimportant.⁵⁴ She offered to edit his work, but instead he prompted her to start anew. The final impetus came from the urgings of John Day and Pearl Buck, the publishers of *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*. They cited one piece of praise for her cookbook: a Baltimore newspaper that exclaimed “this woman ought to write a book!”—as if *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese* was somehow not a “real” book.⁵⁵ The pair pushed to print her autobiography as the inaugural work of their Asia Press. And Chao, they felt, was “the only candidate” for the book’s translation.⁵⁶

The published English version of Yang’s autobiography was relatively well-received among American critics. *New York Times* reviewer Harry Wedeck wrote, for example: “She is amazingly sui generis, mercurial in temperament, endowed with an immense gusto for living, plunging into challenging experiences, confronting the immediacies even when they are far from diverting.”⁵⁷ Still, the book failed to achieve the broader readership of Yang’s cookbook. More successful than her autobiography was the second edition of *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, printed in 1949.⁵⁸

Her original Chinese autobiography and *Miscellaneous Notes on the Chao Family* are the only available texts on Yang’s life in her own words. To better understand the arc of Yang’s

⁵³ Chao and Chao, *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman, Buwei Yang Chao*, 9.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Anne Mendelson, *Chow Chop Suey: Food and the Chinese American Journey* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 54.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 55.

⁵⁷ Harry Wedeck, “Reviews”, *The New York Times*, 1945.

⁵⁸ Sen, *Taste Makers*, 38.

relationship with food throughout her life, I draw primarily from these texts alongside her cookbook and the scant archival scholarship available on her life. Her husband's English translations of her autobiography and two cookbooks largely erase her voice, as I explain in more detail below, compelling me to use the original Chinese texts to better discuss her experiences as *she* wrote them. Through this partial translation of her own words, I hope to recenter Yang's voice and experiences instead of continuing to misrepresent her life based on her husband's inaccurate accounts and voiceovers.

“Mrs. Zhao, your English is so good!”: retranslation and rewriting

“I’m white among Chinese people and colored among Americans.
I’ve become a go-between: explaining Chinese things to
Americans and American things to my Chinese friends.”⁵⁹
(translation mine)

“I have become a popular consultant on things American for my
Chinese friends and on things Chinese for my American friends.”
(Chao’s translation)⁶⁰

The minor changes between these two sentences are perceptible, but they can be barely noticeable if one is skimming through an entire autobiography. The first is my translation of Yang’s original text, the second is her husband Yuanren Chao’s English translation. Yang’s reflection on her changeable racial status provides a window into her otherwise intensely private experience as a member of the Chinese diaspora. In Chao’s translation, however, whole sections are omitted, removing what little vulnerability Yang allowed herself to share.

⁵⁹ Chao, *Yi Ge Nü Ren de Zi Zhuan*, translation mine.

⁶⁰ Chao and Chao, *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman*, Buwei Yang Chao, 2.

The egregious rewritings continue. The “About Myself” chapter in Chao’s English translation reads: “When I first met my American-educated husband, a typical contemplative Oriental [...] he said that I was a typical American. I do want to do things just for the fun of doing them.” A closer translation of her original writing reads: “When I first met my American educated husband, he still was the Chinese scholar who sat all day thinking about one thing [...] he said I was just like an American. I do things for the love of it: [我就是为着爱做事而做事.]”⁶¹ Instead of describing her motivations of love in contrast to her preoccupied husband, Chao’s translation flattens Yang, erasing one of the complexity of her personality. However, this retooled narrative was not a result of Yang’s inability to learn English but her conscious choice not to. She focused her energy on things she found meaning in: her medical career, raising her children, and ensuring they and the Chinese immigrant community had a space to speak their mother tongue and remember the dishes that reminded them of home. As she wrote, “Patriotism is your mother tongue. The reason why I am so thoroughly Chinese is because I speak nothing but the Chinese language.”⁶²

Though this translation was not born out of Yang’s ineptitude, without her original words her story suffers dramatically. The many changes in Chao’s retelling lead to a flattened, mangled depiction of Yang in what was meant to be her own record of her life. The meaning is indelibly changed to erase her, rendering her a passive object. Susan Xu Yan writes of these issues in her 2017 work *Transition of Autobiography: Narrating Self, Translating the Other*. Examining the causes and effects of stylistic differences between Lee Kuan Yew’s Chinese autobiography *Li Guang Yao, Wo Yisheng de Tiaozhan: Xinjiapo Shuangyu zhi Lu* and its English counterpart *Lee*

⁶¹ Chao, *Yi Ge Nü Ren de Zi Zhuan*, 16.

⁶² Chao, 44.

Kuan Yew, My Lifelong Challenge: Singapore Bilingual Journey, Yan presents a multi-pronged argument.⁶³ First, the autobiography as a genre holds unique power in self- and world-making, with readers often attaching referential status to the text. This authorial power of the autobiography is reified in what she describes as the “commonly perceived conflation of the narrator, the author, and the implied author.”⁶⁴ She notes how, in the English counterpart to Lee’s autobiography, the group of translators engaged in a consistent and tactful empathizing or ironizing of characters depending on the translators’ perception of them.⁶⁵ Further, this discursive presence was at odds with the parts not subject to such rewriting, ultimately portraying an alternate persona of Lee. Yan concludes that the only way to prevent such inaccurate portrayals is to distinguish translations as rewritings authored by the translator and not as first-person narrations of the actual author.⁶⁶ Yan’s framework both highlights the shortcomings of Chao’s English text and provides a framework for my re-translation of Yang’s original text. Yan’s case study, however, was based on a group of translators working under professional constraints and the impending publication date of Lee’s original Chinese text. Chao, by contrast, did not face such obstacles. He had allegedly been working on a manuscript of Yang’s autobiography for almost two decades, and his translation was published without the looming publication of the original text.⁶⁷ The resulting differences between Chao’s work and Yang’s text are considerably less nuanced than the stylistic differences Yan examines in her case study, so significant that Yan would certainly delineate Chao’s text as an entirely different work from Yang’s.

⁶³ Susan Xu Yan, *Translation of Autobiography: Narrating Self, Translating the Other* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017). 23.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 145.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 168.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 207.

⁶⁷ Sen, *Taste Makers*, 36.

In explaining the conflation of the translator and author in the autobiography, Yan adapts Wayne Booth's definition of the implied author in fiction: in the fictitious world of the novel, we likely read from the protagonist's perspective, a character that readers are able to distinguish from the actual author.⁶⁸ In the autobiography, however, Yan explains the implied narrator as "the personality readers attribute to the author, which differs from that of the real author as in the case of a more attractive persona emerging from work than the actual persona of the author."⁶⁹ Thus, the implied author, the persona of "Yang" portrayed in Chao's mistranslated version, is conflated with and ultimately erases Yang's actual voice. This conflation holds more consequence in the autobiography genre, due to what Yan describes as "the tendency of critics to take a narrative told in the first person at its face value and to confuse the narrator's consciousness with the author's."⁷⁰ Additionally, as in the case with Yan's case study, translations are often published simultaneously with the original, whereas in the case of Yang's autobiography, Chao's translation was published unaccompanied, further congealing the two distinct works into one.⁷¹ Furthermore, narrative inconsistencies due to translation render the actual author unreliable in a genre often subject to stringent and empirical standards of truth. Because of the conflation of author and translator, readers attribute inconsistencies to the implied author persona rather than as a result of rewriting or translation errors.⁷² And finally, because of Chao's close proximity to Yang as her husband, there is even more authority afforded to his version. As her editors too assumed: who better to translate Yang's words than her husband? His closeness softened any potential question of translation errors.

⁶⁸ Xu Yan, *Translation*, 169.

⁶⁹ Xu Yan, *Translation*, 169

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 140.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 177.

⁷² *Ibid*, 240.

Under the guise of translation, then, Chao allowed himself creative agency over Yang's text that she was not afforded. Moreover, in speaking for her in a language she did not speak fluently, Chao engaged in a further subalternizing of Yang and her experience, erasing her original work by presenting his changed version as its identical English counterpart. In doing so, he participated in a larger minoritization of Asian women's writing, cherry-picking parts of her experience while deauthorizing her from her own work. Much scholarship exists on the legacy of erasure of Asian American women's narratives. As Laura Kang aptly puts it: "a remarkable detail of the originary moment of Asian/American women in U.S. history is scored not by their presence but their striking absence."⁷³ In her thorough dive into the myriad enfigurations of Asian womanhood, Kang establishes the insidious institutional formations that profit off of problematic and inaccurate constructions of Asian womanhood in her 2002 *Compositional Subjects*: "there emerge four rather stock figures—writing self, desiring body, national citizen, and transitional worker."⁷⁴ Indeed, transnational capitalism, mass media, and the white majoritarian state all engage in the rewriting and ultimate erasure of Asian American women. But how such rewriting occurs is of unique importance for Asian diasporic women. As members of the diaspora, they are constantly reconfigured in the context of their racial identity. As Rey Chow writes in relation to Chinese diasporic women, "the understanding [and definition] of Chinese women must [...] take place within the parameters of accepted Chinese texts and Chinese history. Returning the natives to their natural habitat, perhaps?"⁷⁵

I want to note that this critique of Chao does not seek to oversimplify the remarkable challenge of translation and particularly translation of a loved one—a challenge I have

⁷³ Laura Hyun Yi Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (Duke University Press, 2002), 128.

⁷⁴ Chow and Scott, *Writing Diaspora*, 196.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 204.

encountered in my personal life and in my translation of Yang's work. My initial approach to Yang's story did not center these translation rewritings, and only after reading Yang's original text alongside Chao's translation and seeing the stark gap between them did I realize how much of her story had been lost. I did not assume malicious intent from Chao and even now do not see his rewriting as a maliciously motivated. But Chao did actively ignore Yang's requests and subordinated her voice. The second edition of *Miscellaneous Notes on the Chao Family* opens:

While he tries to render my simple Chinese into Basic English, he constantly lapses into his academic style of involved qualifications. I have tried to catch him doing these things and registered my protests in the form of footnotes, but I won't guarantee that I have not let some slip by. In a number of places, my husband has changed things around, what he calls 'fictional technique.' But this is no fiction! I still like the straightforward way better. I can summarize my feelings about this English version of my autobiography by comparing it with a portrait of a Chinese woman in oil painting. An oil painting looks inescapably foreign to a Chinese eye. But if I have to be done in oil on canvas, I think this picture is closest— next to the original in colors on Chinese silk. But I still prefer silk."⁷⁶

This passage, alongside Yang's description of Chao as "not always a well behaved translator," indicates that she was aware of at least some of the liberties Chao was taking and attempted to curb them however unsuccessfully. "Prefer[ring] silk," Yang evidently wished for her voice to be centered rather than Chao's "oil," version of her.⁷⁷

Chao's erasure of Yang's voice thus participates in a larger historical erasure of Asian women's voices in the diaspora even as he rewrites her female autobiography, a genre plagued by historical exclusion and devaluation in contrast to the "legitimate" canon of male

⁷⁶ Buwei Yang Chao, *Za Ji Zhao Jia* (Taipei: Zhuan ji wen xue chu ban she, 1985) 1.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

autobiography. As Chow emphasizes, “In writing [autobiography], women have had to confront power and control. Because this has been declared unwomanly, and because many women would prefer (or think they would prefer) a world without evident power or control, women have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots, or examples, by which they might assume power over—take control of—their own lives.”⁷⁸ Chao participates in such deprivation of female narrative, writing from a masculine perspective of “a female ideal which is largely a fantasy of the masculine, not the feminine, imagination.”⁷⁹ My reading, in this context, is not so much a rewriting of Yang’s own words as a rewriting of Chao’s masculine imaginations of Yang. Moreover, his considerable rewriting of her cookbooks compels me to analyze them with a critical eye, more as a secondary than primary source, as I examine broader themes such as the inclusion and exclusion of certain dishes, stylistic notes and details, and so forth. For this reason, I center the primary sources of Yang’s autobiography and notes as the organizing texts in reclaiming her life. In my retranslation, as a move to recenter Yang’s agency, I bring to light themes of food and cooking *already* present in her original autobiography to underscore how she used food to assert her agency in a myriad of ways.

Not a “silly” chore: inaugurating a hybrid diasporic female genre

In my readings, I hope to convey Yang’s extraordinary impact across disciplines and paint a fuller picture of a woman who was not just a physician, just a cookbook author, or just a mother. Through a retranslation of her original Chinese works *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* and *Notes on the Chao Family*, as well as her two cookbooks *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese* and *How to Cook and Order in Chinese*, I thread together a narrative from her own

⁷⁸ Chow and Scott, *Writing Diaspora*, 201.201

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 210.

words to illustrate how Yang used cooking to assume agency and cultivate community in unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environments.

Aside from its role in enacting agency in her own life, *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese* redefined what an immigrant cookbook could be, in large part because of Yang's characteristically unique contributions. The book's informal tone, coauthorship with her daughter, asides to family discussions of dishes, and Chao's scattered postscripts, were unusual.⁸⁰ Framing cooking as an assertion of female agency makes this inclusion of personal experience and cultural context, her acknowledgment of the inherent changeability of recipes, an even more powerful inaugural work of the hybridized cookbook-memoir genre. Moreover, in its unwavering acknowledgement of the diversity of Chinese cooking and its refusal to homogenize dishes into a digestible "other," *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese* encouraged future diasporic women to assert their agency to take up space and share the complicated, messy parts of their cooking that white chefs had been doing for decades.

Food as Memory in Displacement

Yang did not set out to become a chef, as she makes abundantly clear in her autobiography. Born Yun'ching Yang in 1889 Nanjing to a large and wealthy family, she was called Chuan'er, literally "to bring along little brother."⁸¹ Her mother was concerned her attitude and aversion to household duties (which were attributed to incompetence) would stymie her marriage prospects. Yang was able to clean and cook but "looked down upon food and things,"

⁸⁰ Mendelson, *Chow Chop Suey*, 78.

⁸¹ Chao, *Yi Ge Nü Ren de Zi Zhuan*, 11.

prioritizing instead her medical career, “believing in science for the welfare of mankind.”⁸²

Perhaps this initial aversion makes her turn to cooking all the more impressive.

Just after the 1911 Revolution, with the support of her father and grandfather, she chose to attend Tokyo Medical School over school in England, a decision she attributed to close proximity to her family and easier acclimation—in Japan she could at least use her written Chinese.⁸³ It was in this unfamiliar place that Yang’s interest in cooking was born out of necessity, shaped by her memories of her childhood dishes. She found the meager Japanese meals in her boardinghouse terrible and so began to cook “by trial and error” for her and Yi Wu, another Chinese medical student in the house. She describes the experience thus: “the only thing guiding me was my memory of how a dish should’ve tasted after it was done. How truly necessity was the mother of invention! I had to invent many strange dishes before I discovered one that was familiar.”⁸⁴ Cooking became a way for Yang to create home, find agency in an unfamiliar and often inhospitable place. This episode became the first example of food serving as a commemorative practice for Yang’s dislocated memory.

To better understand the importance of food in Yang’s navigation of a variety of spaces as a member of the Chinese diaspora, I adopt the dislocated/relocated memory framework as used in Holocaust Studies. As Tina Fruhauf and Lily Hirsch outline in *Dislocated Memories: Jews, Music, and Postwar Culture*, for displaced peoples who experience dislocation as an ongoing process, commemorative practices—such as cooking, singing, and oral storytelling—serve as “complex, symbolic forms of memory transmission” that allow for displaced peoples to

⁸² Ibid, 22.

⁸³ Ibid, 25.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 19.

relocate their sense of place and comfort.⁸⁵ Commemoration “bridges time and space as actual events that preserve memory for the future while serving as a link to the [lost] home” while also allowing a creative “reimagining” of the lost home.⁸⁶ This “reimagining” has been elaborated on at length in food studies discussions of the creative hybridizations and adaptations of home cuisines by migrant communities seeking to create home and comfort in a foreign space. I discuss the power of these reimagined dishes in immigrant placemaking in my later analysis of the contemporary memoirs *Indian-ish* and *Filipinx* in Chapter 3. In the realm of collective memory for diasporic groups, hybridized and even “bastardized” dishes like chop suey allow immigrants to “reclaim agency” in the traumatic process and place they reside, as Anita Mannur explains in her 2009 essay collection, *Culinary Fictions*.⁸⁷ Such hybridization is a testament to the resilience and creativity of diasporic communities as they nourish and comfort themselves without access to ingredients of the homeland. Though Fruhauf and Hirsch’s case studies focus on music as a form of commemoration and relocation, their framework has since been adopted to other cultural practices, prime among these cooking.

In *Cooking up food memories: A taste of intangible cultural heritage* (or ICH), after a fifteen-month qualitative study of eight different families from various migrant backgrounds, Kai Seeng Lee finds that food holds unique significance in contrast to other ICHs because of the inherent “ritual, cultural, and social expressions of a community” that are associated with food.⁸⁸ As Lee suggests, food is a cultural inheritance commemorated in the everyday rituals of cooking, “a form of cultural expression that transcends the food’s physical properties to include the

⁸⁵ Tina Frühauf and Lily Hirsch, *Dislocated Memories: Jews, Music, and Postwar German Culture* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 32.

⁸⁶ Frühauf and Hirsch, 44.

⁸⁷ Anita Mannur, *Culinary Fictions*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009) 12.

⁸⁸ Kai-Sean Lee, “Cooking up Food Memories: A Taste of Intangible Cultural Heritage,” *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 54 (March 1, 2023): 1. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.11.005>.

cultural symbolic properties of narratives, traditions, embodied knowledge, and memories that thread past to present.”⁸⁹ Yang’s foray into cooking to find comfort in an unknown space can be understood within this framework—as a commemorative practice to recollect the traditions and memories of the homeland, particularly for her and for other immigrants she was in community with. In recreating food from her memories of home, Yang was able to bridge the physical and temporal space between her past home and her present, enacting relocation amid dislocation as well as intentional community-making.

As Yang’s cooking skills improved, her meals became a source of comfort for her and Yi Wu. In 1919, Yang returned home to China for the funeral of her father, who had passed away before she could say goodbye.⁹⁰ Yang requested to cook the memorial dinner without telling her family: her aunt had told her her food was only fit for dead people.⁹¹ Again, her cooking was based on memory, serving as a comfort for herself and those around her. She recalls, “I had never cooked those dishes before and had only my memory of having eaten them to guide me.”⁹² It was customary to participate in ceremonial crying as the meal was offered. But Yang’s food was so good they forgot to cry. Here, food allowed Yang to both relocate herself in her home space of Nanjing through domestic practice and also commemorate the loss of her father. Yang’s cooking served as both commemoration and comfort amid the loss of her father, compounded by her loss of a final farewell with him given her displacement in Japan, an example of the powerful creative reimagining of the “home” memory. As she writes, her dishes “did not look or taste like the ones I meant them to be, but they tasted just as good.”⁹³

⁸⁹ Ibid, 3.

⁹⁰ Chao, *Yi Ge Nü Ren de Zi Zhuan*, 41.

⁹¹ Chao and Chao, *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman*, Buwei Yang Chao 40.

⁹² Chao, *Yi Ge Nü Ren de Zi Zhuan*, 43.

⁹³ Chao, *Yi Ge Nü Ren de Zi Zhuan*, 44.

Less than two years after her father's death, Yang met and married her husband—renowned linguist Yuanren Chao—in a short and modest ceremony, where she prepared the wedding meal for their two witnesses and only guests.⁹⁴ The pair sailed to Honolulu on their way to Massachusetts. The former city was more familiar than Yang had anticipated; there was a larger Asian population and more availability of Chinese ingredients than the scores of American movies had advertised.⁹⁵ But how Americans ate was still foreign. Used to the Chinese style of multi-course meals, she piled on appetizers, fish, steak, salad, and a dessert: “I had not overestimated my appetite. I had simply tried to reconstruct a regular da can (large meal) from a buffet. It had not occurred to me that in the busy American life variety had to be compensated by quantity.”⁹⁶ Here, her attempt to use food to relocate herself in America fell short. In trying to reconstruct the familiar da can, Yang was reminded only of how different her new environment was.

In Cambridge, cooking was one of the few places where she was deferred to, as she writes plainly of Chao's abilities: “Chao cooked rice and boiled cabbage in water. At most, he only added some salt and lard, and cooked them if they were cold, because he could only eat but not cook.”⁹⁷ Outside of the kitchen, the new environment and Chao's superior English skills obliged her to him: “Chao would not trust me with myself on the street, lest I should get lost.”⁹⁸ But she did not need to know English to order lunch at their local deli, where she would point at what she thought looked good and trade her twenty dollar bill for an array of New England

⁹⁴ Chao, *Za Ji Zhao Jia*, 33.

⁹⁵ Chao and Chao, *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman, Buwei Yang Chao*, 60.

⁹⁶ Chao, *Za Ji Zhao Jia*, 21.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 42.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 52.

staples.⁹⁹ Limited by her sexist and Anglo-centric environment, food became a means of relocating and placemaking in Cambridge.

The pair's small electric stove was not suited to Chinese cooking. Nonetheless, Yang prepared Zhangzhou-style rice from Chao's birthplace, to his delight: "When Chao [...] got a whiff of the flavors he said 'Mm—this smells like home!'"¹⁰⁰ Again, cooking serves as a commemorative practice for not only herself but also her immigrant husband, a means for him to reconceptualize the "smell [of] home," in this foreign space. Yang had already begun to use her food as self-sustenance for her burgeoning diasporic community.

Food as Activist Community-Making

Though she did not narrate it as such, Yang's use of food as a form of mutual support and community-making for the diasporic community she inhabited serves as an example of nontraditional activism, whereby a diasporic subject engages in the overlooked but crucial practice of self-sustenance and self-maintenance. Drawing from theoretical frameworks in feminist, ethnic, and food studies, I briefly discuss the historical devaluation of nontraditional activism that largely occurs in the "private sphere," in contrast to traditional modes of public boycotting or protests, to ultimately argue that Yang's cooking exemplifies nontraditional activism. I draw further from Audre Lorde's framework of radical self-care as well as Fabio Parasecoli's writing on immigrant cultural reproduction to establish the incredible and unique power of cooking for immigrant communities. Yang's cooking, far from mere housework, was an act of nontraditional activism that held special significance in her diasporic community-making.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 42.

“Self preservation as political warfare”: seeing community-making as activism

Misogynistic devaluation of women’s work and modes of communication in favor of traditional forms of labor and knowledge transfer has ignored the powerful activism that occurs outside these rigid definitions. In explicating the role of storytelling in Yxta Maya Murray’s and Felicia Lemus’s work, scholar Anahi Ponce argues that oral storytelling and testimonios are not just a Chicana practice but an overlooked form of nontraditional Chicana activism.¹⁰¹ Ponce explains that larger-scale modes of traditional activism such as boycotts, protests, and marches are valued over nontraditional modes of activism due to both the devaluation of “individual,” activism conducted in private spheres and the unfortunate application of respectability politics in governing female activism.¹⁰² To explain the former, Ponce describes how the personal experiences of injustice in Chicanas’ everyday life are often devalued because of their limited nature. She counters this devaluation by highlighting that “people of working-class backgrounds who often only have access to enacting change within the scope of their personal interactions, with limited recourse to resources such as scholarly language or networks.”¹⁰³ In detailing the role of respectability politics—the term adapted from Evelyn Higginbotham’s original use to describe how Black women distanced themselves from negative stereotypes by embracing more “refined,” middle-class virtues of purity—Ponce argues that the expectations of “respectable,” womanhood are responsible for this narrow view of what female activists and female activism can and cannot be.¹⁰⁴ For women of color who face both the burden of ethnic representation and the obstacles of sexism, private activism is disregarded because “they are not fighting for the

¹⁰¹ Anahi Ponce, “Traditional and Nontraditional Activism: Literary and Political Pedagogies of La Chicana,” *Pathways: A Journal of Humanistic and Social Inquiry* 1, no. 3 (February 17, 2021): 2, https://repository.upenn.edu/pathways_journal/vol1/iss3/2.

¹⁰² Ibid, 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 4.

betterment of the overall community equivocally, and their resistance is conducted in the private sphere and for seemingly personal reasons.”¹⁰⁵ Through this framework, we can understand Yang’s cooking, conducted in the home or relatively private community sphere, as a valid mode of activism, even though she did not identify it as such. Ponce’s detailed explanation allows us to see the private and the nontraditional as deeply impactful. To further understand the particularly radical power of cooking as activism, I turn to self-described “black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet,” Audre Lorde.¹⁰⁶

In discussing the difficulties of self-preservation for black women, Lorde writes, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”¹⁰⁷ Though Lorde’s words describe the particular struggles of black women navigating an inherently anti-black world, her sentiments provide a framework to understanding the innately radical nature of self-sustenance. Cooking, and the sharing of food Yang engaged in, are literal modes of self-care: even at the biological level, cooking and eating remain crucial in sustaining life. Throughout her life and through various displacements from war, for work, or for family, Yang repeatedly faced not just inhospitable environments but environments that fundamentally sought to exterminate her personhood. When she arrived in America for the first time in 1921, the Chinese Exclusion Act was still in full force after its renewal and permanent status in 1902.¹⁰⁸ The Driving Out period of the late 1800s had come just a few decades prior, with large-scale violence stemming from anti-Chinese sentiments forcing Chinese immigrant communities to flee their homes.¹⁰⁹ Later, Yang would flee the Japanese invasion and massacre of her native

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light: And Other Essays* (Courier Dover Publications, 2017), 1.

¹⁰⁷ Lorde, 130.

¹⁰⁸ Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 9.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 18.

Nanjing.¹¹⁰ Indeed, Yang's self-care and preservation through food were radical, resolute acts of political warfare in a world that sought to eradicate her.

Yet I seek to advance this framework by situating it in the diasporic context Yang herself resided in. As discussed earlier, food holds even greater significance in displaced/diasporic communities because of its ability to help "expand and reshape their culinary competence to make sense of new situations," as Fabio Parasecoli writes in *Food, Identity, and Cultural Reproduction in Immigrant Communities*.¹¹¹ Communities that might not exist beforehand are forged when they "rediscover" elements of their material culture, like food, as central to their shared identity. As Parasecoli elaborates, "The personal understanding and use of foods—how, where, and from whom they can be obtained, how they can be stored and for how long, and, above all, how they can be processed, cooked, and consumed—is enriched by the contribution of others who share the same or a different background, which establishes the 'communal' aspects of the experience. The rediscovery, protection, and promotion of 'traditional' foods and foodways, together with the construction of historical narratives around them, actively contribute to the creation of a sense of a shared experience among migrants."¹¹² Through created foodways, communities can open to outsiders on their own terms, thus attributing even more power to food in displaced communities' pursuit of home and place making.

Using the unique role of food, Yang established a diasporic community of mutual support during the traumas of displacement and assimilation. I argued earlier that Yang used food to relocate herself throughout her displacement. Even more importantly, food allowed her to assert

¹¹⁰ Chao and Chao, *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman, Buwei Yang Chao*, 78.

¹¹¹ Fabio Parasecoli, "Food, Identity, and Cultural Reproduction in Immigrant Communities," *Social Research* 81, no. 2 (2014): 156.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 231.

agency not only through individual practice but in the communal sharing and connections it fostered.

“Let’s still eat,”: cooking and community building

In Cambridge, Yang turned to cooking to reassert agency: without a medical career, she searched for other ways to spend her time, to engage with her new community. Yang sold her embroidery to the wives of faculty and shared leftovers with her neighbors and landlord to ease the financial pressures from Chao’s missing stipend.¹¹³ Even as she and Chao struggled to make ends meet, Yang still forged a community for herself through her cooking. She became close with the Chinese students in the area, as she remembers: “Ji Zhi and Hu Zhengxiang were basically a part of our family. Every Saturday afternoon, I went to Chinatown to buy vegetables, and Zhengxiang always waited for me at the entrance of the tunnel to cook a meal together. Sometimes he brought a rabbit back from the laboratory to pickle it and share it with us.”¹¹⁴ In return for the care Yang had provided through food, Zhengxiang reciprocated in these acts of mutual care.

The arrival of her first daughter, Rulan, in 1922 doubled Yang’s burden.¹¹⁵ Not only was she trying to acclimate to a new country and her new role as a housewife, she now faced the task of motherhood. But the small community she had forged now took care of her: her landlord visited her every day while she was on bed rest, moving the crib and a phonograph for Yang’s enjoyment while Chao taught. The students helped her with the dishes that began to pile up, and Zhengxiang taught her how to make Wuxi and Zhangzhou dishes like the ones Chao had enjoyed in his youth. Though she loved Rulan—as she wrote, “if I had known our child would be so

¹¹³ Chao, *Za Ji Zhao Jia*, 36.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 20.

¹¹⁵ Chao and Chao, *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman, Buwei Yang Chao*, 25.

beautiful, I would've stopped using contraception long ago!"—Yang was not fulfilled in her duties as a housewife.¹¹⁶ Yang pushed for a return to China, where she could advance her medical career, instead of the "irrelevant" pursuits she focused on: "Ever since I arrived in America I hadn't studied, just had children and done mother's work. I had an hour or two [when the babysitter watched Rulan] but I just spent it on meaningless tasks. It was worthless."¹¹⁷ And though she had cultivated relationships with some, the Chinese students she grew close to moved frequently, some back to China, where they wrote to Chao and Yang of their studies. Moreover, the other American housewives did not make an effort to know Yang; she attributed their "disinterest" to her lack of English.¹¹⁸ Yang longed for her family too: her widowed mother had written, asking to see Yang and her grandchildren.¹¹⁹ In 1924, after much prodding, Chao finally accepted a position at Tsinghua University in Beijing.¹²⁰

When the couple returned to China in 1925, Yang engaged in her own pursuits, food threading through and supporting all of them. After seeing inequity of obstetric care in America, Yang sought to address the problem at home.¹²¹ However, Yang and most of the university families lived in a town outside of Tsinghua, two hours from Beijing's center, where she presumed she'd have access to a broader client population.¹²² Yang was undeterred and focused her efforts locally, using a professor's brother's house as a clinic in exchange for general upkeep of the home. Her clinic was sliding scale: for every client that paid the full twenty yuan, she could take on three clients who could pay nothing. The clinic wasn't as successful as she'd

¹¹⁶ Chao, *Za Ji Zhao Jia*, 30

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Chao, *Yi ge nü ren*, 40.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 41.

¹²¹ Ibid, 44.

¹²² Chao, *Za Ji Zhao Jia*, 32.

hoped, but she was undeterred and continued to independently offer care to those who needed it.¹²³

“I could not just sit at home,” Yang wrote, and quickly moved her attention to connect with wives of professors.¹²⁴ “I took the cause of the Chinese ladies and tried to turn it into more of a community,” she recalls, explaining how English fluency provided advantages to both faculty and their spouses: “Wives of the faculty who did not speak English were rarely invited to the most important social functions.”¹²⁵ She applied her medical skills too, seeing wives for obstetric appointments, as the college physician was both overworked and underqualified. Yang and the other women organized a handicraft fair and then a “community kitchen”.¹²⁶ The women found the university cooks had no knowledge or ability to recreate the regional dishes they longed for; those from Jiangsu particularly missed the xiaolongbao of their home. The kitchen was by no means a formal restaurant but was envisioned as a collaboration between the wives and local chefs. Yang explained plainly, “Some can cook dim sum, and we can also teach each other how to cook different dishes and dim sum from different provinces. There will be a lot of different things to eat, and the family saves the trouble of using a cook.”¹²⁷ Yang rented the house and fronted the costs of the remodel herself. As construction began, students asked to be customers at what was intended to be a space for faculty and their families. School rules stipulated that students pay for meals at the cafeteria and not leave campus to eat as the gate locked during the day. Undeterred, Tsinghua students sent countless letters to the university

¹²³ Chao, *Za Ji Zhao Jia*, 33.

¹²⁴ Chao, *Yi ge nü ren*, 44.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid 50

¹²⁷ Chao, *Za Ji Zhao Jia*, 36., 39.

president, who finally agreed to a student petition requesting Yang to have the kitchen as a dining option for students in addition to the university cafeteria.¹²⁸

Chao, however, was livid. He ran home to demand she close the kitchen, claiming Yang “was just bored at home and had no idea how much trouble [she] could cause.”¹²⁹ She told Chao all the trouble would be hers, and all he had to do was eat, privately noting, “there was already too much momentum to stop.” Their clientele expanded into the community—they had 200 customers on their first day alone.¹³⁰ The restaurant was packed until midnight, with faculty and their wives serving as waitstaff. She recalls each of them by name, remembering that enthusiastic customers would often get up and help the waiters themselves. Yang ensured every dish someone missed from home would be served. There was no fixed menu, and she suggested reducing portion size to decrease food costs while maintaining variety. Yang leveraged her increased visibility for her cause, discussing issues of healthcare inequity and convincing high-end clientele to donate to underfunded clinics across China.¹³¹ Lin Yutang, a customer outside the city, encouraged Yang to give lectures in Xiamen, and the Women’s Association of Beijing invited her to speak to their members. But Yang still had no way to get there, and so, with the women, both those wed to Tsinghua faculty and those who frequented the restaurant, she organized the first bus from their town to Beijing.¹³² Finally, Yang and the other “restless” women had a way to access the resources and opportunities Beijing offered.

This unequivocal success gets just one page in Chao’s translation of Yang’s autobiography, where his attempt to stymie her venture is omitted. In her original text, his

¹²⁸ Ibid, 41.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 42.

¹³⁰ Chao, *Yi ge nü ren*, 44.

¹³¹ Ibid, 47.

¹³² Chao and Chao, *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman, Buwei Yang Chao*, 61.

intervention alone gets half a page, sandwiched in-between extensive discussions of her birth control clinic, inequitable access to reproductive healthcare, and the struggles of her family. Her restaurant was an active space for community building where students, faculty, and their families (and the countless patrons from afar) could connect and commemorate their lost homes through food.¹³³

In 1931, when Japan invaded Manchuria, the family opened their home to a number of friends, family, and colleagues that fled Mukden. Yang gracefully managed their growing household: “our hallway could now be put to full use as a dining hall. I used my technique of increasing the quantity rather than the number of dishes for an increased number of people [...] I did not find the job of entertaining four families overwhelming. Instead, I rather enjoyed it.”¹³⁴ Though she would never let it overtake her duty to medicine, Yang again used her cooking to cultivate joy for herself and her loved ones in a dire environment.

When Japanese forces set fire to the Shanghai publishing press holding Chao’s unpublished manuscripts, the family sailed to America, then back to Nanjing in the spring of 1937 to care for Yang’s family. The war displaced the family to Changsha shortly before the fall of Nanjing. Yang grieved in silence: “Nobody thought Nanjing could be defended. But it was my Nanjing. It weighed so heavily on me that it absorbed the shock of subsequent news that my home had been burned to the ground.”¹³⁵ A few days later, families of faculty from Tsinghua, Peking, and Nankai University coalesced in a large house south of Changsha. Yang had everyone pitch in to purchase a ham for dinner and jerky for later, finding “light in the chaos.” An administrative official they invited to dinner was shocked to see such a meal from Yang after

¹³³ Chao and Chao, 62; Chao, *Yi Ge Nü Ren de Zi Zhuan*, 48.

¹³⁴ Chao, *Yi Ge Nü Ren de Zi Zhuan*, 48.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 50.

hearing her home had been destroyed. Though Yang felt a pain in her heart she simply responded, “Let’s still eat. Material things will come and go but we’ll always have to eat.”¹³⁶ Before she ever put recipe to paper, Yang had already been using food to comfort and cultivate community for other immigrants and for herself.

Food as Agency and Reconfiguration

Yang asserted agency through cooking, both as a means of personal relocation in displacement and as radical mutual care in the act of diasporic community building. However, Yang’s impact was not limited to those close enough—and lucky enough—to eat her food. Her debut cookbook, *How to Cook and Eat In Chinese*, inaugurated a lineage of diasporic Asian cookbook writing for future female chefs and authors, and I position her at the forefront of this genre to both reclaim the incredible power of the immigrant cookbook genre and her unique contributions that set an important precedent for diasporic female cookbooks to come.

“Fall under its spell,”: Chinese cookbooks before Yang

Prior to Yang’s 1945 publishing of *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, there were scant cookbooks on foreign cuisine aside from French and Italian, and even fewer for the home cook. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the prevailing xenophobic attitudes of the era account for the absence of guides on non-white and particularly Chinese cuisine.¹³⁷ In 1911, Jesse Louise Nolton, a white food writer for the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, published the unpaginated *Chinese Cookery in the Home Kitchen*.¹³⁸ The volume haphazardly attempts to define a wok as a

¹³⁶ Ibid, 53.

¹³⁷ Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 113.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 121.

“Chinese Chop Sooy kettle” and focuses on luring readers to “fall under the spell” of mysterious Chinese cuisine: “these Chinese dishes possess an intangible something which no other cooking can approach.” The most successful contribution to the immigrant cookbook genre before Yang came in 1938 from Henry Low, chef at New York’s prestigious Port Arthur restaurant.¹³⁹ The prominent Macmillan Publishing House printed Low’s *Cook at Home in Chinese*. Low’s professional background colored the work; though he provided explanations on several Chinese pantry staples, most of the recipes required equipment inaccessible, by price or convenience, to the non-professional cook. Low also mostly omitted personal comments, delivering a closely edited manual on a select number of relatively extravagant Cantonese dishes.¹⁴⁰

By contrast, Yang, as an actual home cook writing for other home cooks, both increased the accessibility of Chinese cooking for other home cooks and legitimized the female home cook as an authority in cooking. Why did it matter for the woman home cook to feel seen, capable and authoritative in these works? To appreciate the unparalleled impact of Yang’s text in this arena, we must first recognize the unique power of cooking for women and diasporic women.

“To achieve their own ends,”: cooking and cookbook genre as tools of agency

Cooking itself is indeed a form of female empowerment and agency. As I contended earlier in my discussion of nontraditional activism, feminist works such as Arlie Hochschild’s *The Second Shift* established housework as labor. Advancing this framework, feminist food scholars like Ravia Parveen see the kitchen as a space for women to assert agency and engage in subversive feminism. Women who reconfigure their relegation to the kitchen are in fact able to “see cooking as an evolution of themselves, as a time for celebration, self-expression and

¹³⁹ Ibid, 124.

¹⁴⁰ Sen, *Taste Makers*, 34.

creativity [...] and an investment in their family and community.”¹⁴¹ In “Power and Pleasure Around the Stove,” Theresa Devasahayam contends that, even in such gender-subjugated positions, women derive personal gains as producers and creative consumers of food to ultimately “achieve their own ends [...] women who cook are not necessarily mere producers [...] Food is a tool they themselves creatively consume—in a symbolic sense—as it can be manipulated according to the wishes of these women, and cooking is conceived as a means for creating their identity as women [...] In other words, through giving of themselves in cooking, women are securing gains for themselves.”¹⁴² Thus, food is a distinct means for women relegated to the kitchen to assert themselves through identity-creation, creative expression, or other personal gains.

In line with this dismissal of cooking, cookbooks and recipes fall under the subalternized genre of nontraditional archives, such as songwriting or storytelling, that are typically written off as secondary to dominant modes of documentation that minority communities often do not have access to. Recipes, songs, quilts can all serve as modes of communication and knowledge transfer in the absence or in response to the failings of traditional modes of discourse. Particularly, as we have seen, for displaced or diasporic communities, recipes and cooking allow women to reconstitute the comforts of homelands. As Rosalyn Collings Eves explains in the context of collective memory, cookbooks and recipes uniquely “encourage interaction, consumption, and embodiment, they may also encourage active remembrance.”¹⁴³ Eves argues

¹⁴¹ Razia Parveen, *Recipes and Songs: An Analysis of Cultural Practices from South Asia* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 55, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50246-5>.

¹⁴² Theresa W. Devasahayam, “Power and Pleasure around the Stove: The Construction of Gendered Identity in Middle-Class South Indian Hindu Households in Urban Malaysia,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2005.02.001>.

¹⁴³ Rosalyn Collings Eves, “A Recipe for Remembrance: Memory and Identity in African-American Women’s Cookbooks,” *Rhetoric Review* 24, no. 3 (2005): 286.

that African American cookbooks encourage cooking as an act of countermemory against dominant cultural memory that represents African American women as “self-effacing, strident, lazy, or immoral.” Recipes, she argues, are a “rich source for countermemory and self-identification [...] contrary to externally imposed gender and racial definition.”¹⁴⁴ For diasporic women of color in particular, then, recipes allow for positive countermemory and self-identification with the women they cook with and from, in a rebuffing of dominant cultural memory that misremembers and misrepresents them.

If we see cooking as a form of female agency, the cookbook becomes a means to enact and reproduce female agency for diasporic women readers. In line with this communal power of cooking, Yang’s coauthorship with her first daughter, Rulan—a partnership she describes as innate—cemented the power of family, particularly of women, in diasporic cooking. This partnership set a precedent for the hundreds of mother-daughter/aunt-niece/sister-cousin co-authored immigrant cookbooks to come, two of which I discuss in Chapter 3, Priya Krishna’s *Indian-ish* and Angela Dimayuga’s *Filipinx*, coauthored with their mother and aunt respectively. This collaborative style countered conceptions of authors as a singular agent holding knowledge, as we saw in earlier discussions of the autobiography readings that hold the author as the only all-knowing authority on their life. Instead, these coauthorships opened up the limited definition of what it meant to author, and to cook, embracing many voices as equally legitimate authorities in the written and culinary realms. Understanding the partnership between Yang and her daughter through this lens advances this project’s larger pursuit to see the food writing genre as the product of a dynamic, intergenerational, intimate collaboration among countless diasporic women contributors.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 287.

The previous section of this chapter intentionally relied on Yang's original Chinese texts of her autobiography and notes on her family because, unfortunately, the only versions of Yang's cookbooks are those rewritten by Chao. Ironically, the culinary space where Yang held most legitimacy is also where Yang is most erased. All the more then, without her original Chinese texts, we must turn to this space to reclaim her authority in inaugurating the diasporic cookbook genre and empowering countless diasporic female cooks to come.

“A home cookbook by a Chinese home cook”: Yang's written choices

Though audiences and publishers had demonstrated interest in Chinese cuisine, previous volumes from immigrant cooks had done little, through no fault of their own, to enrich notions of Chinese cooks beyond chop suey, chow mein, and the mysterious, exotic, and inaccessible delicacies of the East. Elaborate yet clinical recipes from professional chefs mystified Western audiences and reified foreign cuisine as just that: foreign, too complex to be adapted into American homes.

Before Yang and Rulan's cookbook was published, a preliminary reader—a Miss Mills—did not care for their asides. She was irritated by the idiosyncratic turns of phrases and English translation, dubious about the title “How to Cook and Eat in Chinese” and new terms like “stirfrying”.¹⁴⁵ Despite these concerns, Yang and her editor Pearl Buck held steadfast to the manuscript and all of its quirks.¹⁴⁶ Previous nonwhite-authored cookbooks assumed that white audiences held no interest in the history from which these dishes emerged, so information aside from measurements and precise instruction was omitted.¹⁴⁷ Yang, however, spoke freely in her cookbook: “We tell children ‘you can't have Mid-Autumn festival everyday and yuanxiao every

¹⁴⁵ Sen, *Taste Makers*, 28.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 29.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 30.

night’ but actually even the grown ups like the dumplings so well that they eat them all year round. So you *can* have yuan xiao every night!”¹⁴⁸ Her quick-witted observations are ubiquitous: “Noodle stretching is a difficult art. What usually happens is like this. You start swinging your dough. Before you reach 32, some of your noodles break apart on you. You get mad and make a mess of your dough. You start again but don’t dare go beyond 16. So you eat your door-hinge-thick noodles, which are nice, but more like bars of dough than noodles,” and “nothing annoys the hostess more than a guest just talking away and noticing the beautiful Grown Eggs until the dish has shrunken cold.”¹⁴⁹ This informality embedded into her recipes showcases the messy and honest life these recipes had been born out of. Contrary to the sterile and precise cookbooks of the time, Yang included details that rang true to the experiences of immigrant home cooks. These informal, animated, details and Yang’s coauthorship with Rulan cemented family and all its messiness as a crucial aspect of diasporic food writing for future authors.

The recipe testing and writing was meaningful too. As Yang narrates, “I began talking and Rulan started to write. That was three years ago. I don’t know how many scoldings and answering back and quarrels Rulan and I went through [...] You know how it is with modern daughters and mothers who think we are modern. And it is even more delicate with a mother and a daughter, both having had mixed experience of eating, cooking, speaking, and writing. Now we have not neglected to do the making up with each other after our last recipe.”¹⁵⁰ Yang refuses to shy away from the difficult and laborious process of coauthorship. The “mixed experiences” of Rulan and Yang speak to how their varied cultural and culinary backgrounds informed their complex intergenerational relationship dynamic: the push-pull between immigrant parent and

¹⁴⁸ Chao, *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, 54.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 41.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 3.

second generation (in this case immigrant child) in maintaining cultural heritage is a fraught one. But she also frames their coauthorship as innate: she “began talking and Rulan started to write.”¹⁵¹ Limited information is available on their coauthorship and the writing process, but a few footnotes from Rulan provide a window into their relationship. Underneath a recipe for stirred spinach, Rulan wrote, “This is one of the few things I first learned to cook from mother, when I was only ten when I went to grade school in Washington and made this dish in my cooking class, my schoolmates liked it better than their teachers or their mothers’ spinach.”¹⁵² Even in this brief note, the learned practice of cooking gave Rulan a sense of ease and placemaking in one of her many homes. Below ingredients for thinned out congee drink, Rulan notes, “This was my favorite drink mother made when I ate lunch at school in Changsha because all the dishes in Changsha tasted so hot!”¹⁵³ These additions, while sparse, nonetheless inaugurated a tradition of intergenerational coauthorship in the diasporic cookbook genre, one that recognizes the inherent and powerful role of second and third generation children in the creation and memory of food. Other unique features, such as the inclusion of Chinese calligraphy, regional delicacies, and informal family notes, were pioneered further: cultural features were important and necessary to include even if they were unusual in the white cookbook canon.

Much of American Chinese cuisine and thereby American Chinese cookbooks was dominated by Cantonese cooking, a reflection of the initial wave of Cantonese immigrants that arrived in the 1830s. Yang’s book did not just distinguish Cantonese cuisine in contrast to her own but attempted to illustrate the rich diversity of cuisine across China, including recipes from

¹⁵¹ Chao, *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, 3.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 58.

her husband's Fujianese hometown to her own in Nanjing, Yunnan. As Yang writes, "styles of food differ a good deal from place to place [...] Sichuan cooking has a fine balance of flavors except that hot pepper is added freely [...] Jiangsu cooking is sweeter, even in savory dishes," as she continues describing the Four Great Traditions.¹⁵⁴ The book was by no means an encyclopedic volume of Chinese cuisine, nor did it claim to be. Yet in taking care to explain just some of the regional distinctions and cuisines, Yang actively rebuffed the monolithic Chinese "Other" that defined Chinese cuisine in America at the time. As Anne Goldman argues, the publication and subsequent reproduction of culturally specific recipes within cookbooks engage in the powerful "work [of] maintaining cultural specificity in the face of assimilative pressures."¹⁵⁵

We can best appreciate the radical power of Yang's choices by situating her work in the context of representation and reenactment for other diasporic women cooks. Simply put: Yang made it okay to be Chinese, to be "Other," for the thousands of other diasporic female home cooks who read and recreated her recipes as they asserted power in their own kitchens. For Yang and perhaps for the Chinese diasporic female cooks who drew from her, *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese* was part of a radical and communal act of care, agency, and resistance against forces that sought to erase these women and their cultural practices.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 12.

¹⁵⁵ Anne E. Goldman, "1. 'I Yam What I Yam': Cooking, Culture, and Colonialism in New Mexico," in *I. 'I Yam What I Yam': Cooking, Culture, and Colonialism in New Mexico* (University of California Press, 1996), 35, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1525/9780520916364-003/html?lang=en>.

Chapter 2

Joyce Chen: Chef, cultural ambassador & community advocate

For many, Joyce Chen does not exist past the etched insignia on a wok from her successful cookware line. Living on the undersides of handles, ends of spatulas and mixing spoons, Joyce Chen's legacy to the general public is limited to the products she created. Remembered for patenting America's first wok, and less frequently for her syndicated cooking show on Boston's WGBH station, *Joyce Chen Cooks*, Chen does not suffer the anonymity of Yang. However, Chen is rarely centered in her own narrative, her story edited, erasing the true scope and nature of her work.

The limited public narratives on Chen generally follow one of two arcs: an abridged, shiny story of a good Chinese immigrant who ran a successful restaurant, got a tv show and through hard work founded a Chinese cookware empire. A 1973 *Time Magazine* feature entitled "Entrepreneurs: Fortune's Cookie" wrote, "The wizard of the wok is an entrepreneur of major proportions. Her 400-seat restaurant overlooking the Charles River grosses \$1,000,000 a year; a second Joyce Chen's will open next month [...] Joyce Chen's activities have earned her a personal fortune of more than \$1,000,000."¹⁵⁶ Though the feature details a few of her diplomatic achievements, particularly her role as an export adviser to the Chinese Board of Trade, the piece's broader focus is Chen's awe-inspiring journey from China to America. If she is not held as an exemplar of the model minority, Chen is written as a series of failures: a unsuccessful television chef who never reached the heights of her peers with a career cut short by a tragic accident, Alzheimer's diagnosis and an "uncharismatic," personality, disappeared from cultural

¹⁵⁶ "ENTREPRENEURS: Fortune's Cookie," *Time*, January 29, 1973, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,903789,00.html>.

memory.¹⁵⁷ Both narratives simplify Chen's life into a tidy, digestible story centered around her success or lack thereof. I argue that first, such characterizations assume a neutrality of standards of success that do not account for the reality of living as a Chinese woman held to the rigid bar of the newly created model minority standard. I highlight the challenges that are erased from public narratives of Chen that either ignore them entirely or fault career setbacks on her personal failings rather than prejudice. I do not seek to dwell on her challenges, but rather illustrate how her story and so many others have been rewritten to adhere to white standards of success. I work to explore Chen's life beyond these limiting narratives to convey the impact of her work across disciplines. To that end, I argue that Joyce was both an innovative gastrodipomat as she used her food to challenge and renegotiate American conceptions and relationships with China; and that outside this gastrodipomacy work she used food to sustain her family and her community through cultural preservation: an equally impressive task.

I first establish the limited discourse Chen currently exists in, overviewing the criticisms and assumptions made of her life, not to center such claims but rather use them as a tool to understand the truly transgressive nature of Chen's work and bring to light the innumerable challenges she faced that are erased from current discourse. I then overview the model minority myth as it existed during Chen's lifetime, framing the white criticism Chen faced as an outgrowth of such stereotypes. Subsequently, I turn to Asian American criticisms of Chen and her era of food writers, focusing particularly on claims of inauthenticity and race traitorship from writers like Frank Chin.¹⁵⁸ I then outline how Chen used food in the public sphere by framing her work as a form of gastrodipomacy, discussing Chen's criticisms alongside those faced by her

¹⁵⁷ Mayukh Sen, *Taste Makers: Seven Immigrant Women Who Revolutionized Food in America*, First edition (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2022), 2.

¹⁵⁸ Frank Chin, *The Chinaman Pacific & Frisco R.R. Co: Short Stories* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1988), 87.

Cold War contemporary and “soft diplomat” Jade Snow Wong, to illustrate the policing of their public cultural personas that belittled the private, domestic lives of Asian American women.

Moving away from such dichotomies, I highlight how Joyce used food in both the public and private sphere of her home and establish the incredible power of food in the domestic sphere, particularly in cultivating relationships and cultural heritage amongst diasporic women. I discuss how Joyce used food to support her community and her home, drawing from her daughter Helen Chen and interviews with family friends to retrieve Chen in her entirety. Finally, I conclude on the powerful role of food in female familial relationships as culturally and personally reparative to lead into my final chapter on the familial food memoir/memoir-cookbook genre.

I must note that there is very little writing from Chen on what she hoped the arc of her career to be; unsurprisingly she was provided few public avenues to assert agency over the way her story was shared. This absence compels me to read between the lines of her work, using modern frameworks to guide this reclamation of her narrative.

This argument does not solely value the diplomatic impact of her work thereby ignoring the personal and community power of cooking, nor does it simply see her career as a public failure to integrate Chinese cuisine and herself into American culture. Instead, I reclaim Chen’s cooking as meaningful across dimensions: as a tool to reshape limited American definitions of Chinese cuisine and culture, and a means of everyday agency in community building in the face of rising pressures to conform to “model minority” standards. She existed in-between and across the restrictive definitions of American, Chinese, housewife, chef, and diplomat, drawing from each of them throughout her life. Ultimately, I argue that this transgressive liminality is both her superpower and a cause of the middling public reception she received during her lifetime.

“Uncharismatic”: surveying white discourse

Contemporary white discourse on Chen paints her as a failed Julia Child, a chef who left little legacy to speak of, largely due to her personal lackings. Much of existing scholarship on Chen comes from historians focused on Child, framing Chen’s story as subordinate to Child’s. Chen and Child’s relationship began when Child patronized Chen’s Joyce Chen Restaurant in Cambridge in the early 1960s after Chen had already published her popular cookbook, *Joyce Chen Cook Book*, and managed two establishments that frequently hosted a number of celebrity guests.¹⁵⁹ Station producer Ruth Lockwood accompanied Child to Chen’s restaurant, and as historical accounts vaguely recall, “it is not absolutely clear who hit initially on the idea of Joyce Chen doing a cooking show.”¹⁶⁰ In terms of station motivations, however, WGBH station manager Dave Davis wrote in 1966, “After *The French Chef*, it must begin to look like we’re trying to specialize in cooking shows. We feel this one is quite different, and should actually appeal to a larger audience — especially in the lower socio-economic classes where we currently have not much audience.”¹⁶¹ Seven months later, in September of 1966, *Joyce Chen Cooks* made its debut on Boston’s Great Blue Hill television station.¹⁶²

Almost every advertisement for *Joyce Chen Cooks* featured Child: a 1966 write up from the *Boston Globe* opens with “Joyce Chen is about to become the Julia Child of Chinese Cooking,” another reads, “Joyce Chen is the Chinese Julia Child, in fact when Child dines out, she is likely to be found at Joyce Chen’s.”¹⁶³ Despite, or perhaps because of such constant comparison to *The French Chef*, *Joyce Chen Cooks* was canceled after one season. The show

¹⁵⁹ Sen, *Taste Makers*, 2.

¹⁶⁰ Dana Polan, “Joyce Chen Cooks and the Upscaling of Chinese Food in America in the 1960s” (Boston: GBH Open Vault Series, 2014), 3.

¹⁶¹ Polan, “Joyce Chen Cooks”, 2.

¹⁶² Ibid 2.

¹⁶³ “Joyce Chen Cookbook Ad,” *The Boston Globe*, November 2, 1963, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-boston-globe-1963joyce-chencookboo/101030733/>.

held steady numbers and received a Reader's Digest Award for educational TV. An article on the prize from North Adams Transcript exemplifies the discrepancies in their treatment, reading, "*Reader's Digest Foundation* has awarded the station \$1000 for the production of '*Joyce Chen Cooks*'. The National Educational Television honors went to *The French Chef* [...]. In fact, the very first award given was the special citation to *The French Chef*, which hailed the series for helping 'thousands of devoted followers not only to master the art of French cooking but become loyal viewers of television.'"¹⁶⁴ Reasons for cancellation remained vague even to Chen. Her daughter, Helen Chen, assumed that Child was more profitable.¹⁶⁵ Dana Polan, who wrote the accompanying scholarly exhibit for WGBH digitization of episodes of *Joyce Chen Cooks* and one of few historians to write on Chen, put motivations for the cancellation bluntly. He argues plainly, "Chen just didn't have the same charisma as Child," and that alongside sponsorship challenges, Chen's "modesty and restrained professionalism." did not captivate audiences the way Child did.¹⁶⁶ What was so lacking in Chen's performance that made her uncharismatic? Perhaps it was her accent, which she worked tirelessly to perfect with lessons from station managers.¹⁶⁷

The early cancellation of her show, and her departure from the public eye due to a cooking accident and an Alzheimer's diagnosis, compelled historians to frame her career as a failure. In a 2017 *Food52* article on Chen's impact, food historian Allen Salkin asserts, "Joyce failed in her mission. Julia succeeded in making French cooking accessible or at least giving the impression that it was accessible. Unfortunately, Chinese cooking still does not feel to most

¹⁶⁴ Polan, "Joyce Chen Cooks", 4.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Anne Marie Seltzer, "Helen Chen Remembers Her Mother," *Patch*, September 3, 2019, <https://patch.com/massachusetts/lexington/helen-chen-remembers-her-mother>.

Americans like something they can do at home.”¹⁶⁸ Following the 1998 sale of Chen’s product line, the *Boston Business Journal* wrote, “the long march of the Joyce Chen dynasty has reached another milestone in its descent into oblivion.”¹⁶⁹ Such bleak characterizations of Chen’s legacy continued in stark comparison to her famous white peers. Salkin elaborates, “Joyce Chen has not been rediscovered and celebrated like Julia Child. No one has made a movie about her.”¹⁷⁰ Without a movie title to her name, contemporary scholars have written Chen off as unsuccessful and entirely forgettable.

Yet some scholars argue that Chen’s legacy suffers more than anonymity but rather as an affront to “authentic” Chinese cuisine. In her 2016 book, *Chow Chop Suey and the Chinese American Journey*, Anne Mendelson examines the history of Chinese American food, narrating Chen’s journey: “No more welcoming community could have been imagined [in Cambridge]. The restaurant rapidly drew crowds [...] exposed hundreds if not thousands of young people to presumably ‘authentic’ Chinese food. (The cookbook that Chen produced in the wake of the restaurant’s success does not inspire confidence in the presumption).”¹⁷¹ A single line recounting the “welcoming community” Chen immigrated into erases the struggles in her journey of assimilation, of her divorce in America and raising her children alone as she ran Joyce Chen Restaurant.

Moreover, Mendelson repeatedly chides Chen’s supposed bending to the “preferences and prejudices,” of her “happy white patrons,” in her 1962 cookbook.¹⁷² This narrative elucidates

¹⁶⁸ Mayukh Sen, “America’s Forgotten Television Chef,” Food52, October 3, 2017.

<https://food52.com/blog/20611-joyce-chen-television-profile>.

¹⁶⁹ Jim Miara, “Last Pieces of Joyce Chen Empire Fall to Creditors,” *Boston Business Journal*, March 30, 1998, <https://www.bizjournals.com/boston/stories/1998/03/30/story1.html>.

¹⁷⁰ Sen, “America’s Forgotten Television Chef.”

¹⁷¹ Anne Mendelson, *Chow Chop Suey: Food and the Chinese American Journey* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 166.

¹⁷² Ibid.

the frequent yet damaging retelling Chen's story suffers, where Chen proliferates an inauthentic representation of Chinese food to her white customers. However, in 1961, when Joyce sought to publish her book, she approached publishers explicitly requesting the printing of Chinese characters alongside English recipe titles and ingredients as well as photographs.¹⁷³ When no one agreed, she produced and published her book independently, and finally getting the Lippincott Publishing company to distribute it in bookstores.¹⁷⁴ Yet simultaneously, Mendelson laments that "the inexperienced author's naive overconfidence undercut her" in the publishing of her "rough-edged and clumsy" title.¹⁷⁵ In the eyes of her critics, Chen was both too accommodating to white audiences *and* too committed to her Chinese identity.

Such seemingly paradoxical criticism illustrates the impossibility of Chen's position as a Chinese American woman in the public sphere. These singular definitions of success and failure, as applied both during her lifetime and in the present, are symptomatic of the model minority myth surrounding Asian Americans and particularly Asian American women. I draw from Ellen Wu's 2014 *The Color of Success* to clarify how these assertions are rooted in the racist origins of the model minority myth to both counter such claims and illustrate the true nature of the challenges Joyce faced and largely overcame, ultimately to enrich our understanding of just how powerful she was for her time.

"Don't make waves": the model minority & countering criticisms

The model minority myth, as Wu explains, came out of a number of arenas: primarily as a "seductive" solution to the issues of systemic inequality the civil rights movement had raised,

¹⁷³ Ibid, 167.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 168.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

one that promoted individual achievement and assimilation, implying Asian American success was a result of their innate cultural values and work ethic, while deflecting attention from larger scale violence of white supremacy.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, in a post-WWII America, the myth of the model minority legitimized the exclusion of Asians from immigration restriction and made their subsequent incorporation into the American polity seem natural and unproblematic.¹⁷⁷ And as I discuss in foregrounding Chen's gastrodiploacy, the myth enabled the United States to engage in a "Cold War Orientalism," projecting an image of racial harmony and progressiveness to the world while locked in a global ideological struggle with the Soviet Union.¹⁷⁸

On the surface, the image of the polite, smart, and above all rule-abiding Asian American seemed positive. As Wu notes, the stereotype did allow for upward mobility and economic opportunity for some.¹⁷⁹ But their acceptance was conditional on compliance. Select Asian ethnic groups, in particular Southeast Asian refugee communities, who experienced disproportionately high rates of welfare dependency and unemployment alongside disproportionately low levels of income, were faulted for their individual laziness in comparison to their more affluent peers.¹⁸⁰ Broadly, working-class Asians were grouped together with the more affluent and blamed for their own obstacles or ignored entirely. Functioning as intended, the myth transferred responsibility for any failures from America's systemic inequities onto the individual.

For those who did fit the mold—often wealthier East Asians—the burden to uphold model minority standards governed every action. Central to the model minority myth was the polite and unassuming nature of a "good" Asian.¹⁸¹ Such strict behavioral conventions discouraged

¹⁷⁶ Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 65.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 66.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 211.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 222.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 341.

disruptive conduct in any form like the protests of “troublemaking” African-American communities. In his 1969 book, *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Subculture*, professor Harry Kitano wrote, “Japanese Americans are good because they conform—they don’t ‘make waves’—they work hard and are quiet and docile [...] by not inviting “trouble” and “keep[ing] in their place.”¹⁸² Anne Mendelson’s retelling of Chen as an “inexperienced author [whose] naive overconfidence undercut her” exemplifies the consequences Asian Americans faced if they did not “keep their place.”¹⁸³ In attempting to get Chinese characters and color photos in her cookbook, Chen overstepped, overconfident and much too self-assured in her Chinese identity.

We can then understand what Polan calls Chen’s “restrained professionalism,” not as a result of her lack of charisma, but of self-policing, one that knew if she “made waves” as Child did with her wacky persona it would not be regarded as endearing but as a threat.¹⁸⁴ Chen is by no means dull. She peppers in personal anecdotes, jokes: when making meatballs she warns, “if you grind the meat too fine, the meatball will become so hard you can throw it at a person and kill him!”¹⁸⁵ When making dumplings—what she termed Peking Raviolis—Chen quips, “If something goes wrong, it’s not my fault!”¹⁸⁶ Despite pressures to behave otherwise, Chen managed to cultivate an exuberant, witty, public persona.

Evidently, white discourse has penalized Chen for her alleged adherence to behavioral standards Asian Americans adopted to survive and succeed under the model minority myth. Yet it is not only Chen’s persona that suffers such constant judgment but her cultural representations. Mendelson’s sarcastic description of Chen’s food as “authentic,” far too tailored to the

¹⁸² Ibid, 268

¹⁸³ Mendelson, *Chow Chop Suey*, 166; Wu, *The Color of Success*, 113.

¹⁸⁴ Wu, 113.

¹⁸⁵ “Joyce Chen Cooks; Peking Ravioli” (WGBH, April 3, 1967), https://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_DF5C02255A2A4063B41D3DBDEB58557A.

¹⁸⁶ “Joyce Chen Cooks; Peking Ravioli.”

preferences of her “happy white patrons,” converges with the criticisms of cultural exploitation levied by Asian Americans, providing a fitting introduction to the criticisms Chen later faced from her own community.¹⁸⁷

“Food pornography”: Surveying Asian American criticism

We must have known it as Almond Float, thanks to Joyce Chen.

Indeed, it floated in the fruit cocktail, the maraschino cherries
as treasured as the tender white cubes that have so many names
I no longer know which we used, the nomenclature muddled further
by my later learning to say xingren doufu, which translates
to Almond Tofu, a reference not to what it is, but to how it appears.

Meanwhile, restaurants may have offered it as Almond Junket
for its likeness to the English dessert [...]

it was also known as Almond Curd, which confusingly implies
that almonds can curdle, that somewhere lies an Almond Whey.

In any case, pudding lacks shape and makes a poor reference
for a Chinese audience. Perhaps to erase all cultural confusion,
the dessert also went by Almond Lake [...]

Looking back, Almond Junket is the only name
we never used, surely because it sounded like an illicitly
funded cruise or evoked the notion of junk, which made us feel
foreign, pertaining to trash.¹⁸⁸

Adrienne Su’s 2017 poem “That Almond Dessert” makes pointed reference to Joyce Chen’s use of Almond Float, as both an origin of the “muddled nomenclature,” used to erase “cultural confusion,” and a result of such assimilatory pressures. Chen’s Float, which would make “poor

¹⁸⁷ Mendelson, *Chow Chop Suey*, 166.

¹⁸⁸ Adrienne Su, “That Almond Dessert,” *New England Review* (1990-) 38, no. 1 (2017): 87–87.

reference for Chinese audience,” is implied to be an Americanized, sanitized dessert, one that is both a symptom and perpetrator of the erasure of “authentic,” Chinese foods. Though Su acknowledges the broader racism that made the term Almond Junket “feel foreign, pertaining to trash,” she still opens with a jab at Chen's contribution to the many—implied to be incorrect—names of the dessert. The criticism levied in the poem is unfortunately not unique but illustrates how the practice of faulting Asian American women for cultural misrepresentation and exploitation pervades even into contemporary Asian American women's discourse.

To contextualize these criticisms we can turn to perhaps the most infamous proponent of such ideology. In his 1988 short story “Railroads of Standard Time” Frank Chin writes his impression of the popular food memoirs in almost direct reference to Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and Virginia Lee's *The House That Tai Ming Built*: “Part cookbook, memories of Mother in the kitchen slicing meat paper-thin with a cleaver. Mumbo jumbo about spices and steaming. The secret of Chinatown rice. The hands come down toward the food. The food crawls with culture. The thousand-year-old living Chinese meat makes dinner a safari into the unknown, a blood ritual. Food pornography. Black magic. Between the lines, I read a madman's detailed description of the preparation of shrunken head.”¹⁸⁹

Chin's mordant satire is certainly harsher than Su's, yet the undergirding judgment is the same: these public representations of Chinese food, whether in memoir or in cookbook, are inauthentic, written by women too eager to exploit their culture for the whims of white America. In Chin's 1981 play *Year of the Dragon* protagonist Frank Eng berates his sister, a cookbook author, for inventing the new genre of “food pornography.”¹⁹⁰ Wendy Sau Ling Wong defines

¹⁸⁹ Chin, *The Chinaman Pacific & Frisco R.R. Co*, 8.

¹⁹⁰ Frank Chin, “The Year of the Dragon,” in *The Chickencoop Chinaman / The Year of the Dragon* (University of Washington Press, 1981), 67.

this food pornography as “making a living by exploiting the ‘exotic’ aspects of one’s ethnic foodways.”¹⁹¹ Though Chin has created one of the more robust bodies of work that advances such beliefs, he is not alone in his message. These criticisms come as an outgrowth of longstanding burden placed on Asian women to uphold “authentic,” representations of their home culture in the public fear lest white America sees their “inauthentic,” China as an excuse to further subjugate Asian Americans. As Elaine Kim describes in *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*, in response to white erasure of Asian patriarchy and masculinity, Asian American men “attempted to reassert male authority over the cultural domain and over women.”¹⁹² In their 1972 essay “Racist Love” discussing the stereotypes of Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan, Jeffrey Paul Chan and Frank Chin criticize this degradation of Asian men: “The white stereotype of the Asian is unique in that it is the only racial stereotype completely devoid of manhood. Our nobility is that of an efficient housewife. At our worst we are contemptible because we are womanly, effeminate, devoid of all the traditionally masculine qualities of originality, daring, physical courage, creativity.”¹⁹³

In attempting to reassert their masculinity, Chan and Chin disparage the feminine domestic efficiency, placing traits of creativity and daring as masculine. As King-Kok Cheung asks in her 1990 essay, “Is it not possible for Chinese American men to recover a cultural space without denigrating or erasing ‘the feminine’?”¹⁹⁴ Asian womanhood, and the domestic practices it oversaw, became a hindrance to male reconfigurations of national Asian identity.

¹⁹¹Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 256.

¹⁹²Elaine H. Kim, *Asian American Literature, an Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 131.

¹⁹³ Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan, “Racist Love,” in *Seeing Through Shuck* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 4.

¹⁹⁴ King-Kok Cheung, “The Woman Warrior versus The Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?,” in *A Companion to Asian American Studies*, ed. Kent A. Ono (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 136, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996928.ch10>.

If femininity was an obstruction to Asian liberation, Asian male “cultural nationalists” took it upon themselves to clear any such obstacles by policing and slandering female creators for straying from their acceptable, masculine definition of Asian identity. In summarizing the infamous conflict between Maxine Hong Kingston (and Amy Tan and David Henry Hwang) and Chin over her representation of Asian misogyny in Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, King Kok Cheung writes, “For a minority author to exercise artistic freedom is perilous business because white critics and reviewers persist in seeing creative expressions by her as no more than cultural history. Members from the ethnic community are in turn upset if they feel they have been misrepresented by one of their own.”¹⁹⁵ Cheung highlights the impossible position white and Asian American critics create for Asian American female authors, but also for Asian American women broadly, to serve as perfect cultural ambassadors for the “authentic” or acceptable representations of their home culture and identity. White supremacy homogenizes any Asian narrative into every Asian’s narrative, and for fear of an inaccuracy, cultural nationalists like Chan and Chin attempt to govern Asian narrative production to adhere to their ideal. Such self policing ignores the simple truth that any homogenized narrative of Asian American identity, curated by Asian Americans or whites, is inherently inaccurate. Ignoring the nuance and range of experience across the incredibly expansive and diverse community—even if it is to allegedly repair the racist representations of the past—flattens and silences many, and in fact caters to white expectations of a singular Asian American narrative.

Thus, we can see denigration of domestic food work and food writing as an outgrowth of yet another form of Asian American behavioral policing. Instead of adhering to the standards of the model minority, cultural nationalists oblige Asian American women to adhere to their

¹⁹⁵ Cheung, 165.

standards of the “true” Asian American cultural narrative. Food writing and sharing is not authentic, but exoticizing the palatable elements of Asian cultures for white consumption. Who determines what is pornographic and is not? Sau Ling Wong observes, “If an Asian autobiographer writes in English at all, the intended audience must have white readers, so that accounts of ethnic foods and eating habits may well be seen as an exercise of authorial responsibility.”¹⁹⁶

The aforementioned consequences of a singular Asian American identity become apparent in this policing of food. If an Asian American reads or writes in English—disregard diasporic Asians who were unable to learn their mother tongue—her writing is assumed to be cultural authority whether she likes it or not, and so the work must uphold the authentic and right definition of Asian Americanness. Categorizations of food writing and production as inherently pornographic assumes creation for a white audience and severs the inherent power in the making and sharing of food. As Anita Mannur surmises in her short essay “Food”: “For Chin [and his proponents], writing about food can only be pornographic.”¹⁹⁷ I counter this view of food as merely a consumable, exploitable cultural export, drawing from food studies scholars to reframe Chen’s cooking as a means to reaffirm cultural ties between family, community and homeland and a diplomatic tool to renegotiate and improve one’s social status in a new society. In showcasing the depth and magnitude of Chen’s work, I resist such devaluation of domestic work and the private lives of Asian American women and bring to light the power of these culinary practices.

¹⁹⁶ Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature*, 288.

¹⁹⁷ Anita Mannur, “Food,” in *Keywords for Asian American Studies* (New York University Press, 2015).

“I did not work hard enough”: Cold War Orientalism & the model minority ambassador

Before we turn wholly toward her domestic achievements, I highlight Chen’s gastrodipomatic pursuits, arguing that the Cold War period and its reconfiguration of Asian Americanness uniquely positioned Chen to reshape American understandings of China in her gastrodipomatic work. Moreover, I draw out the challenges Chen and other female cultural ambassadors faced as they deftly worked to portray an acceptable, but true image of their Chinese culture at home and abroad.

As Wu explains in *The Color of Success*, American geopolitical imperatives for global dominance instigated a convergence and transformation of the position of Asians residing in America, with President Johnson claiming, “the promise of Asians at home boded well for the new surge of promise in Asia, especially Vietnam, to modernize under the tutelage of the United States.”¹⁹⁸ The new category of Asian Americans, once composed of distinct ethnic groups of Chinese and Japanese, were remade into the “innovative racial identity” that distinguished them simply by their “not-blackness”.¹⁹⁹ But as Wu elaborates, the “Chinese question” was more than a matter of racial identity, but rather “about the future of American society, and about whether the country would remain a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant nation or become something more diverse and cosmopolitan.”²⁰⁰ The Chinese question, then, became intimately connected to debates about American identity and the country’s shifting role in the world.

As the U.S. attempted to contain the spread of communism externally by presenting an Asian-friendly image to appeal to smaller Asian nations, domestically it simultaneously engaged

¹⁹⁸ Wu, *The Color of Success*, 189.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 67.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 361.

in violent containment policies. Chinese immigrants were subject to constant, unwarranted raids for alleged affiliations with communist organizations. Yet American policy goals had little effect on the nation's attitude towards the Chinese population; the threat of the yellow peril had only been reified during Japanese internment, and waves of anti-Filipino violence through the 40s made clear that Americans still saw Asians as a foreign threat. Excluding them, many believed, was necessary to preserve American values and institutions.²⁰¹ In her 2002 book, *The Good Immigrants*, Madeline Hsu, reiterates that this Containment Era was marked by a climate of suspicion and hostility, explaining, “during the 1950s, Chinese Americans were presumed guilty until proven innocent in terms of their loyalty to the United States.”²⁰² Such attitudes were not limited to foreign policy. A 1967 publicity release for Joyce Chen Cooks reads, “Remember, you can watch Joyce Chen and still be faithful to Julia.”²⁰³

Caught between competing pressures of American imperialism and Chinese nationalism—not to mention Asian American cultural standards—Cold War ideals of model minority created a particularly impossible position for female cultural ambassadors like Chen and her fellow Cold War diplomat Jade Snow Wong. To best understand the challenges Chen underwent in her gastrodipomatic pursuits, I discuss the goodwill diplomacy career and treatment of author Jade Snow Wong. As discussed earlier, Asian diasporic women face particularly onerous standards of cultural representation from their own ethnoracial communities. In “Racist Love” Chan and Chin argue that “each racial stereotype comes in two models, the acceptable model and the unacceptable model ... the unacceptable model is unacceptable because he cannot be controlled

²⁰¹ Madeline Y. Hsu, *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 9.

²⁰² Ibid, 40.

²⁰³ “Joyce Chen Materials for Distribution” (WGBH Archives, 1967).

by whites. The acceptable model is acceptable because he is tractable.”²⁰⁴ The dichotomy they present is flawed, as Celeste Schenk writes minority women inhabit a liminality in “a precarious operation, which requires working on two fronts at once, both occupying a kind of center, assuming a subjectivity long denied *and* maintaining the vigilant disruptive stance speaking from the margin.”²⁰⁵

However, the either/or scenario Chan provides reflects the world and the limitations Chen and Wong existed under. If we apply this acceptable/unacceptable framework to the model minority stereotype, and more specifically the model minority women, we are able to see the parameters of acceptability that Chen and Wong were governed by.

Simultaneously, the model minority woman, as Wu outlines, was to be both “exotic, sexually desirable, and American” and “virtuous maternal nurturer of family and nation.”²⁰⁶ Jade Snow Wong exhibited the acceptable, the dutiful woman with her 1945 memoir, *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, which showcased “the best points of both systems, presents a favorable picture of American institutions with which Miss Wang [sic] comes into collision in the process of growing up” as Walter McConaughy, Hong Kong’s US consul general, contended.²⁰⁷ *Fifth Chinese Daughter* painted a picture so favorable that Department of State officials recommended it be translated and distributed overseas as a means to promote American--style liberal democracy among ethnic Chinese minorities throughout Asia.²⁰⁸ Wong was recruited on a “goodwill” mission that the American consulate Hong Kong celebrated: “the appearance of a Chinese American whose artistic achievements have been recognized by the American public

²⁰⁴ Chan and Chin, “Racist Love”, 3.

²⁰⁵ Cheung, “The Woman Warrior versus The Chinaman Pacific”, 171.

²⁰⁶ Wu, *The Color of Success*, 91.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 171.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 169.

would be a much needed testimonial to the opportunities our society offers to citizens of the so called ‘minority races.’”²⁰⁹ She agreed to participate, motivated by “patriotism,” a desire “to contribute towards East-West understanding,” and “a moral obligation to interpret what she knew of the United States to fellow Asians.”²¹⁰ Wong’s message throughout Asia celebrated the promises of cultural diversity in America, covering conflicts in her upbringing between the “old world” Chinese values such as patriarchy and conformity and the “new world” of her American life, which prioritized “individuality, self expression, and analytical thought,” according to Wu.²¹¹ Wong became an exemplar of the model minority that had excelled because of her hard work and merit as she recounted, “How easy it would be to say, “I was discriminated against” instead of ‘I did not work hard enough.’”²¹²

Despite presenting as the perfect model minority, Wong faced her own criticisms, questions of her “Chinese-ness.” In Singapore, Wong was subjected to the suspicions of journalists who questioned whether or not she was “Chinese “truly,” or Chinese in “face,” only.²¹³ Julian Harrington of the US consulate in Hong Kong explained that “Hong Kong Chinese, who saw themselves as ‘true’ Chinese who through some force of circumstance are living outside China,” considered Wong to be a ““white Chinese’— a Chinese who has found it possible to divorce herself from the land of her fathers and take up a new and successful life in the land of her adoption.”²¹⁴ This distinction, Harrington surmised, prevented Hong Kongers from “feel[ing] proud of Miss Wong as a Chinese girl and developed into the normal feeling of envy and even bitterness.”²¹⁵

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 171

²¹⁰ Ibid, 172

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid, 175.

²¹³ Wu, *The Color of Success*, 175.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 176

²¹⁵ Ibid

Compelled to both present the American exemplar of individual merit-based success while using her Chinese-ness to connect with Asians overseas, Wong grew weary of such managed cultural performances. She reported trying her best to “be all things to all people,” over the course of seven “exhausting,” days.²¹⁶ Though Wong certainly participated in America’s promotion of the minority success story, she later expressed a disdain for such narratives and desire to focus on the personal, “I tried to skirt myself clear of politics, and simply limited myself to being a girl of Chinese ancestry who had grown up in America, was now traveling as an artist, and the former author of one book which Burmese were reading.”²¹⁷ Under such competing expectations, it was Wong who suffered as she tried to protect herself and her identity. Again, singular cultural narratives left little room for the lived, personal experiences of those they described.

Chen, who immigrated to America on the penultimate boat out of Shanghai during the Communist Revolution, emerged just as white America was deciding what type of Asian was acceptable and what was not. As Wong’s treatment elucidates, this precarious era posed an impossible task for female cultural diplomats in particular. However, as Wu notes, Chinese immigrants developed their own forms of community and identity, working together to resist discrimination, “Their fight against exclusion, and their work to build a sense of community and identity, laid the groundwork for the broader movement for racial equality in the United States.”

²¹⁸It is in this fight, where Chinese immigrants constantly found themselves in opposition to white America or to their homeland, that I situate Chen’s work. With the violent yellow peril era at her heels and the “quiet dignity” model minority stereotype in front of her, Chen used her

²¹⁶ Ibid, 177

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 100

cooking to deftly reconfigure the ever-changing American conceptions of China and Chinese Americans.

“Cultural exchange center”: reconfiguring China & Chen’s gastrodiplomacy

For Frank Chin and critics like him, Chinese food in the public sphere was an inherent race traitorship, available only as a tool for whites to exploit and consume Chineseness. I push back against such singular notions of food’s significance, first adapting Heather Ruth Lee’s application of gastrodiplomacy in her forthcoming book, *Gastrodiplomacy: Chinese Exclusion and the Ascent of Chinese Restaurants in New York*, to argue that Chen’s public use of food was a means to renegotiate conceptions and the statuses of Chinese Americans. Lee modifies Paul Rockower’s original definition of gastrodiplomacy, which focuses on the use of food as a “diplomatic tool to help build bridges between cultures, promote understanding and ease tensions between nations,” primarily in a foreign policy context where actors are states or state organizations.²¹⁹ Lee expands this definition to examine the role of food in “building transnational communities [...] challenging dominant cultural narratives.”²²⁰ I follow a similar approach to discuss the cultural and community implications of Chen’s food within their historical and foreign policy context. Lee’s work centers on how new Chinese American restaurateurs renegotiated their legal, cultural, and sociopolitical statuses and the statuses of immigrants in America broadly through their intentional, community-wide efforts.²²¹ She outlines how food became a means for Americans to experience Chinese culture, ultimately

²¹⁹ Charles Spence, “Gastrodiplomacy: Assessing the Role of Food in Decision-Making,” *Flavour* 5, no. 1 (October 27, 2016): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13411-016-0050-8>.

²²⁰ Heather Ruth Lee, “Acquired Taste: Chinese Restaurants and the Business of Becoming Citizens” (Brown University, April 11, 2019): 1:31.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 37:01.

reshaping American conceptions of China. I focus on a select few examples to contextualize similar efforts from Chen.

In her 2019 book talk, Lee explains, “[Servers] showed readers how to experience Chinese restaurants, what to order. They told you dishes and also where to eat, they give you addresses. Knowledge of Chinese food then expanded from Chinese banquets as a fanciful event to Chinese restaurants as an accessible entry point. Chinese food then became something that people read about and recognized.”²²² Through food, these restauranteurs provided an opening for cross-cultural learning that challenged the threatening foreign other plaguing Chinese Americans. Though restaurants may appear to be a seemingly exploitative venture, seeking out external patrons of Chinese cuisine, as Fabio Parasecoli writes in *Food, identity, and cultural reproduction in immigrant communities*, immigrant restaurants become a means to assert agency over who and how immigrants interact with the outside world: “Migrants can, around food, establish spaces and experiences that they can open to outsiders on their own terms, thus experiencing a stronger sense of control over their choices. In the case of ‘ethnic’ restaurants and food manufacturers-as embattled as that definition may be-migrants develop tactics that employ their culinary know how to occupy social and economic positions in the territory of the Other by transforming the members of the host community into consumers of their products.”²²³ We can then see Chinese restaurants not as some attempt to pander to white consumers but an intentional reconfiguration of power and cultural access by restauranteurs. Further, Lee highlights how Chinese restaurants themselves served as unique cross-cultural spaces and “important sites of negotiation between people who rarely interacted.”²²⁴

²²² Ibid, 7:54.

²²³ Fabio Parasecoli, “Food, Identity, and Cultural Reproduction in Immigrant Communities,” *Social Research* 81, no. 2 (2014): 436.

²²⁴ Lee, “Acquired Taste: Chinese Restaurants and the Business of Becoming Citizens”, (8:43).

Chen, too, fostered such cross-cultural interactions in her establishment. In Chen's 1972 feature documentary, *Joyce Chen's China*, her daughter Helen notes, "the restaurant was really a cultural center, not just a place to eat."²²⁵ In a *Times Magazine* article on Chen's success, former Harvard President Nathan Pusey called Joyce Chen's Restaurant "not merely a restaurant, but a cultural exchange hub."²²⁶ Her 1962 cookbook, *Joyce Chen Cook Book*, opens: "I hope our restaurant is not only a place to enjoy truly authentic Chinese food, but may also serve as a cultural center. I have the honor of being an American citizen and share the freedom and opportunity this country offers. In return I would like all Americans to enjoy my food. [...] Love to my new country for the freedom, wonderful friendships and good opportunities which my family and I have enjoyed since we came here."²²⁷ Presenting herself first as an American citizen and a grateful one at that, Chen skillfully makes an appeal to key values of freedom and illustrious opportunity, concepts that underwrite both the model minority myth and the American Dream. Even in her own community, Chen still managed to engage in such cross-cultural pursuits. For a 1962 charity cruise, The Boston T Party's Call of the 7 Seas, Chen represented the "fabled," port of Hong Kong in food and decor.²²⁸ Later, Chen and art student Lily Ng cohosted a Chinese buffet and fashion show in 1963, showcasing "Mandarin delicacies and practical Chinese fashions for Americans."²²⁹ Nationally or locally, Chen's was committed to providing a fuller representation of China through her food.

Perhaps her clearest diplomatic venture was her 1973 documentary, *Joyce Chen's China*, which came on the heels of Nixon's 1972 visit and served as the first ever American

²²⁵ Ibid, 6:22.

²²⁶ "ENTREPRENEURS."

²²⁷ Joyce Chen, *Joyce Chen Cook Book* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1962), 9.

²²⁸ "Events", *The Boston Globe*, Sep 22, 1962.

²²⁹ "Arts showcase for charity", *The Somerville Journal*, Nov 4, 1963.

documentary to come out of a post-revolution China. As her son Stephen recalls, Chen paid for the film's equipment out of her own pocket and promptly "took me up to the Chinese Embassy in Ottawa and she explained what we wanted to do and who we wanted to visit."²³⁰ The film opens with Chen outlining her visa request letter to the embassy: "I hope both countries can understand more and build better friendship."²³¹ Chen showcases a number of Chinese industries and practices, from sandalwood fan making in Suzhou, to live footage of Chen receiving acupuncture and her daughter Helen taking traditional Chinese medicine for a cold. All go out of their way to highlight the overlaps between Chinese and American culture. Helen showcases the offerings of a Chinese grocery store, narrating, "They have pre-packaged food just like an American store, even moo shu pork!"²³² Helen makes note of Chen's request to "say goodbye the American way" to their family with a hug—a more subtle display of Chen's cultural hybridization.²³³ When a festival performance showcases a staged defeat of a dummy U.S. soldier, the Chens are quick to curb any fears of anti-American sentiment: "As Americans, we felt uncomfortable, but this was truly the only type of experience we had during our whole trip [...] we felt welcomed every place."²³⁴

The film closes with a roundtable on several questions on China-US relations, with the Chen family alongside former U.S. Ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith and *Newsweek* foreign editor Edward Klein. Chen does more to assuage American concerns over the permeation of the "old"—implied to be distasteful—practices of mass obedience and authority, and what Galbraith calls "Chinese traditional male chauvinism."²³⁵ Chen affirms that, "women are the

²³⁰ *Joyce Chen's China* (Great Blue Hill, 1973), <https://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip-15-x921c1tx91>.

²³¹ *Ibid*, 3:01.

²³² *Ibid*, 22:17.

²³³ *Ibid*, 38:19

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 31:54.

²³⁵ *Joyce Chen's China*, 46:23.

same as men now, they are encouraged to work and are now even in the army [...] now everyone is equal.”²³⁶ Though not the entire reality of Chinese gender hierarchy, Chen uses her characterization to appeal to American ideals of equality and liberalism.

Despite her efforts to frame *Joyce Chen Cooks* and her display of Chinese food as a gastrodipomatic exchange, the American public struggled to accept the hybridized chief-diplomat-Chinese American Joyce saw herself as. A *Boston Globe* ad for the documentary reads, “You’re invited along on this fascinating personal travelog and family reunion!”²³⁷ Another review in the *Fitchburg Sentinel* describes, “[It’s] a good family show in more ways than one.”²³⁸

Nonetheless, Chen’s intentional framing of her cooking as a cross-cultural measure indicates she sought to use her cooking as more than an exploitative, superficial display. Rather, she embedded Chinese culture into food, weaving the two together in contrast to American attempts to commercialize food without the complicated cultural context. In doing so, Chen carved space for a fuller, richer image of Chinese culture and China, using her food to reshape a historically violent relationship between Chinese immigrants and white Americans.

“Just as she gave to me”: Chen’s personal legacy at home, in community

Though Chen made an incredible impact in the more public-facing gastrodipomacy sphere, I also seek to spotlight the underwritten and erased work she did in supporting her family and community. However, Chen did not divorce her public and private pursuits, straying from the sanitized narratives of public Asian-ness, white or Asian American, that saw private,

²³⁶ Ibid, 47:52.

²³⁷ “Joyce Chen’s Return.”

²³⁸ Howard Thompson, “TV Review; ‘Joyce Chen’s China’ Is Diverting Program,” *The Fitchburg Sentinel*, June 15, 1973.

domestic engagements as irrelevant or worse, degrading. In calling attention to both her private ventures and her ability to hold them alongside her public pursuits, I push back against narratives that devalue the personal lives of women and see them as disparate and unrelated to their public undertakings.

First, I wish to highlight that despite public facing appearances, immigrant restaurants serve as an important part of an immigrant's own cultural network. Parasecoli describes,

For immigrants, locality is experienced through the production, preparation, and consumption of foods, the performance of practices, and the reproduction of cultural categories that reinforce their connection with their places of origin and with other migrants in other countries, with friends, family members, and with other nearby or far away migrants. Their cognitive map spans from their block to their place of work, from the importing companies that provide them with familiar ingredients to the stores where they shop, from the kitchens where traditional dishes are prepared to the restaurants they patronize. Community is then experienced as a network of food producers, distributors, consumers, physical spaces such as malls, supermarkets, and markets, as well as means of transportation, phones and the Internet, the banking system, cash money, and mailing lists. Migrant consumers may be a part of networks whose other members they do not know directly but toward whom they may feel a strong emotional connection, leading to various degrees of personal involvement. In some cases their understanding of connectedness may be limited to occasional encounters with other migrants, rare trips to the mother country, or even the perusal of an ingredient's origin on product packaging and restaurant menus. In these cases, familiar food practices and dishes can counteract the sense of distance from one's community.²³⁹

²³⁹ Parasecoli, "Food, Identity, and Cultural Reproduction in Immigrant Communities," 432.

Thus, for the immigrant restaurateur, cook, or patron, these restaurants are not merely venues for foreigners to share their cuisine, but a means of placemaking and cultural identification in the traumatic process of assimilation. Chen took more pointed measures to support her diasporic community, too. In Cambridge, Chen used her cooking to comfort homesick Chinese students, recalling, “We invited a good many Chinese students at Harvard, M.I.T., and Boston University to dinner at our home. I enjoyed cooking for them [...] I had my reward in seeing their pleased faces and hearing their appreciative comments. I made them feel at home and they made me feel the same in this new country.”²⁴⁰ Just as Buwei Yang had done decades prior, Chen used her cooking to support and cultivate her diasporic community. Though unlike Yang, there is not an account of Chen’s private life in her own terms; such personal events get scant mention in her books, coming from those close to her. Helen Chen remembers, “Many of us ate regularly in Chinatown where the food was southern—mainly Cantonese—there was nowhere to get our hometown specialties. My parents had become acquainted with a handful of northern Chinese students [...] also homesick for their regional foods. My parents often played hosts to these students. [My mother] would cook wonderful meals for everyone, and they would talk and reminisce about China and sometimes play mah-jong into the night.”²⁴¹ In creating space for cultural memory transmission and fostering a sense of belonging, Chen provided crucial sustenance for her burgeoning diasporic community.

Even more impressive is how Chen deftly navigated the public and private spheres to cultivate her passions in both. Chen’s second niece Elta recalls how Chen had hired her parents, Chen’s cousins, at her first restaurant, and lived together in Cambridge. She wrote in an email interview, “WaiGong didn’t know much about MIT, it was Joyce who had told him he needed to

²⁴⁰ Helen Chen, *Helen Chen’s Chinese Home Cooking* (New York: Hearst Books, 1994), 3..

²⁴¹ Ibid, 2.

go and encouraged him to apply. WaiGong knew that she had many influential patrons and believed that she put in a good word for him for his MIT application.”²⁴² In her support of her family, Chen harkened to the Chinatown restauranteurs who used their businesses to sponsor family immigration—both using their food and its success to cultivate their diasporic community. Elta notes that Chen “was a legend to me because my parents revered how she helped them,” her legacy of community support remaining years later.²⁴³

Chen continued combining her public and personal missions; though Chen prioritized *Joyce Chen’s China* as a diplomatic pursuit, it held personal impact for her daughter Helen. In the documentary, Helen reflects, “For so long [my mother] held the key to marvelous information and stories that [now] we could actually see [...] finally I realized that this place was not strange, it’s my country, and my people, with real relatives in the flesh, not photographs.”²⁴⁴ This homegoing allowed Helen, who had been born in Shanghai before leaving for America as an infant, to actualize the stories and traditions she had been raised on. Helen elaborates, remembering, “My cousin held my hand and I felt very warm and close to her, not as a tourist would, but I was home.”²⁴⁵ The trip was a crucial opportunity for Helen’s configuration of home and cultural identity as a member of the diaspora.

After recalling her mother’s dinners, Helen later writes in her cookbook, “I remember having houseguests every weekend, and it is interesting that my childhood memories are of parties, guests, and food—just like my mother’s.”²⁴⁶ This memory highlights the community where perhaps she had the biggest impact, the one she lived with and ate with everyday. In these

²⁴² Elta Ratliff and Owen Ratliff, Interview with Elta and Owen Ratliff, November 11, 2022.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ *Joyce Chen’s China*, 17:53.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 24:01.

²⁴⁶ Chen, *Helen Chen’s Chinese Home Cooking*, 2.

dinner parties, Chen fostered connection with Helen, allowing them to hold shared childhood memories centered around the sharing of food. Chen herself opens *Joyce Chen Cook Book* with an ode to her parents, “When I was a young girl, my parents encouraged me to stand on my own feet. They trained me to do things myself. Whenever I entered the kitchen, my mother never forgot to remind me that I should learn how to cook so I wouldn't eat rice raw in case I couldn't afford a family cook in the future [...] I have appreciated and treasured their influence and training all the time. The publication of this book is to express my indebtedness to them.”²⁴⁷

Long before and long after she ventured into the public culinary sphere, Chen used her cooking to create shared cultural memories with her family. Razia Parveen details the cultural significance of cooking for diasporic communities in her study of South Asian domestic practices in northern England, writing, “Food production allows women to be empowered and build relationships by telling their stories in a space they know is custom built for an exchange of female dialogues. This is a space and time which repeats with women through generations [...] in which the women are able to have some control. These recipes are significant conduits of intergenerational cultural transmission between women. They provide a link to the homeland and the past, as well as being part of creating an identity for a diasporic community.”²⁴⁸ Thus Chen’s home cooking served as a powerful conduit of intergenerational cultural transmission, preserving the cultural knowledge that is crucial in the creation of a diasporic community.

Parasecoli suggests that such shared practices allow for both those around the migrant chef and the chef herself to strengthen their cultural identity and sense of place: “Personal understanding and use of foods—how, where, and from whom they can be obtained, and, above

²⁴⁷ Chen, *Joyce Chen Cook Book*, 4.

²⁴⁸ Razia Parveen, “Food to Remember: Culinary Practice and Diasporic Identity,” *Oral History* 44, no. 1 (2016): 53.

all, how they can be processed, cooked, and consumed—is enriched by the contribution of others who share the same or a different background [...] as immigrants collectively expand and reshape their culinary competence to make sense of new situations, communal practices such as meals strengthen a sense of belonging between immigrants.”²⁴⁹ But perhaps there is no better argument on the reparative power of cooking in the home than Helen’s words as she opens her first cookbook:

Many years ago, before the illness manifested itself, my mother used to talk to me about her wish that one day we would write a mother-daughter cookbook. As the weeks became months and the months became years, our busy lives never brought us together in the kitchen to accomplish this collaboration. With the advance of my mother’s illness and dementia I thought that dream was gone forever. I was wrong. One morning I awoke with the realization that my book was the collaborative effort my mother wished for after all. Instead of having my mother beside me, I had her thoughts, her philosophy, her recipes, and her stories as my guide. My mother’s cookbook, which has been out of print for many years, contains many recipes from our family meals—those hot and noisy dinners with our Chinese friends, simple family meals [...] I am happy to be able to bring some of those recipes together with my own [...] We can’t recapture our past or change our destiny, but with my mother’s recipes I truly feel that she has actually been with me, leading me through the maze of her recollection, stories, traditions, experiences and food that she once prepared.”

We cannot know how Chen saw her own legacy but know the invaluable cultural knowledge and memories she passed to her family: an irreplaceable, intangible legacy that outlives her. In a 2009 blog post entitled “Peking Ravioli: One of My Mother’s Most Treasured Recipes,” under a photo of her and her goddaughter Sophie, Helen writes, “Making jiao zi is a social occasion for

²⁴⁹ Parasecoli, “Food, Identity, and Cultural Reproduction in Immigrant Communities,” 428.

the whole family and a tradition during Chinese New Year. Here I am with my goddaughter making jiao zi for the new year. I will give you my mother's recipe for the dumplings just as she gave to me.”²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Helen Chen, “Helen’s Asian Kitchen by Helen Chen,” accessed April 9, 2023, <http://www.helenchen.com/search/label/Chinese%20New%20Year>.

Chapter 3:

Madhur Jaffrey: Transnational home cook

The “high priestess of Indian culinary arts”: the arc of Madhur Jaffrey

If Buwei Yang and Joyce Chen are erased, underrecognized pioneers in the cooking field, Madhur Jaffrey is a rare example of an Asian diasporic female chef who has received the acclaim and cultural capital to center herself and reclaim her narrative. Though Yang and Chen received modest recognition in their respective fields, their fame does not approximate that of actress and prolific cookbook author Madhur Jaffrey. Delhi-born Jaffrey, who is still alive as of writing, has written over thirty cookbooks and, in, 2004 received the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in recognition of her services to cultural relations between the United Kingdom, India and the United States, through her achievements in film, television and cookery.²⁵¹ In this final chapter, I situate Jaffrey in a long lineage of diasporic female cookbook authors, arguing that in order to achieve Jaffrey’s level of success, Asian diasporic women must hold an incredible amount of existing sociocultural capital, and even in such cases are still compelled to make concessions in their cultural presentations. I read Jaffrey’s repeated naming of herself as “never a chef, but a trained actress,” as a defensive mechanism in response to a world that prohibits women of color from succeeding in multiple dimensions, and I attempt to tell the narrative she could not articulate because of stereotypes limiting her, paralleling the treatment of diasporic

²⁵¹“Honorary CBE for Madhur Jaffrey,” *The Economic Times*, March 20, 2004, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/honorary-cbe-for-madhur-jaffrey/articleshow/572215.cms>.

female chefs before her.²⁵² Moreover, I use Jaffrey's powerful conversations and impact on contemporary diasporic chefs to illustrate the incredible reparative power that is possible when diasporic women have the space and means to reflect and revise their previous work. Shifting to the present-day, I outline Jaffrey's as well as Chen's and Yang's role in shaping the works of contemporary authors Priya Krishna, Angela Dimayuga and Michelle Zauner, with particular focus on Jaffrey's 2005 food memoir *Climbing the Mango Trees*. Following a discussion of the new and powerful conceptions of identity in these present-day works, I trace the lineage of their criticisms and counter with a reparative centering of food as compassion in diasporic women's spaces.

It is worth noting that there is an incredible wealth of resources in Jaffrey's own words on almost every aspect of her career—a stark contrast to those available on Yang and Chen. I will discuss the implications of this abundance in Jaffrey's ability to reclaim and revise her work on her own terms.

“A new immigrant”: sociopolitical factors and migration patterns

Though Jaffrey's work spans to the contemporary moment—her most recent title debuting in 2019—she began her career just a few years after Chen.²⁵³ Jaffrey, too, left her homeland during incredible political upheaval, joining what would become one of the largest waves of emigration from former British colonies in the post-World War 2 era. This changing sociopolitical landscape and subsequent eruption of new diasporic communities set the stage for Jaffrey's ascent as a global force.

²⁵² Francis Lam, “An Intimate Conversation with Madhur Jaffrey, Inspirational Icon of Indian Cooking,” *The Splendid Table*, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.splendidtable.org/story/2019/06/14/an-intimate-conversation-with-madhur-jaffrey-icon-of-indian-cooking>.

²⁵³ Madhur Jaffrey, *Climbing the Mango Trees: A Memoir of a Childhood in India*, 1st Vintage books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 87.

Born into a wealthy family in 1933 Delhi, Jaffrey attended the private Queen Mary Secondary School, entering Year 9 during the Partition of India.²⁵⁴ As Jaffrey recounts, massacres began in Delhi: “All the men, our fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, oiled and polished their guns with no sense of adventure or enjoyment.”²⁵⁵ Though Jaffrey remained in Delhi with her mother, her sisters and peers moved alongside millions of other Indians displaced during Partition. Finishing her undergraduate degree in 1953, Jaffrey immigrated to England to attend the Royal Academy of Drama and Arts after receiving a scholarship to pursue acting.²⁵⁶ In this postwar period, England was experiencing significant immigration from former Commonwealth countries, particularly South Asia and the Caribbean following the end of British rule abroad.²⁵⁷ Though initially, the English government welcomed immigrants from the Commonwealth to aid in rebuilding the country after World War 2, as the number of immigrants increased, nativist sentiments arose, as natives feared immigrants would dilute national culture and take jobs away from English citizens.²⁵⁸ Jaffrey speaks of her time in such a hostile environment as cause for homesickness, which ultimately compelled her to learn to cook. In an *NPR* interview Jaffrey recalls, “I would look at [British food] and say, 'How can I eat this?!' I began ‘the other dream’. Not the dream of coming to the West, but the dream of somehow re-creating that Indian food that I wanted so badly. So I started writing letters to my mother.”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ Jaffrey, 44.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 139.

²⁵⁶ Michele Kayal, “From Actress to Cookbook Author: The Lives of Madhur Jaffrey,” *The News Journal*, January 6, 2016, 2, <https://www.delawareonline.com/story/life/food/2016/01/06/actress-cookbook-author-lives-madhur-jaffrey/78351750/>.

²⁵⁷ Will Somerville and Amar Dhudwar, “Indian Immigration to the United Kingdom,” 44, accessed May 4, 2023, http://lib.jnu.ac.in/sites/default/files/pdf/imds_p/IMDS_Mar_2010_WP_21.pdf.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 55.

²⁵⁹ Kayal, 1.

Marrying fellow actor Saeed Jaffrey in 1958, Jaffrey accompanied him to America to costar in the off-Broadway production of *A Tenth of an Inch Makes a Difference* in 1962.²⁶⁰ The pair arrived in America into a rapidly changing Indian American community, just before passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that abolished the quota system based on national origin and provided a path for highly skilled non-Europeans to immigrate.²⁶¹ Prior to the act, the Luce Celler Bill of 1946 established a yearly quota of one hundred Indian immigrants which, though exceeded, only totaled just under 6500 Indian immigrants until the passage of the 1965 act, and almost entirely composed of men.²⁶² The United States Immigration Commission estimated that, of the Asian Indian immigrants who entered America from 1903 to 1932, just 3.6% were women.²⁶³ By 1947, before the Jaffreys arrived, the number had improved, hovering under 18%.²⁶⁴ But the ratification of Immigration and Nationality Act dramatically transformed Indian American immigration patterns and communities. The family and employment based system increased the number of Indian female immigrants to 42% by 1978, quickly diversifying the almost entirely male community Jaffrey had immigrated into.²⁶⁵

Moreover, the 1965 act instituted an employment-based visa category, which granted visas to individuals with skills and qualifications in high demand in the US.²⁶⁶ The system measured the individual's occupation and level of education, with highest preference given to those with extraordinary ability or advanced degrees in certain fields.²⁶⁷ Thus, as Jaffrey

²⁶⁰ "The Long View: Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Kitchen," *NPR*, December 27, 2010, sec. Food, <https://www.npr.org/2010/12/27/132207213/the-long-view-madhur-jaffreys-indian-kitchen>.

²⁶¹ Sudipta Das, "Loss or Gain? A Saga of Asian Indian Immigration and Experiences in America's Multi-Ethnic Mosaic," *Race, Gender & Class* 9, no. 2 (2002): 135.

²⁶² *Ibid*, 134.

²⁶³ *Ibid*, 137.

²⁶⁴ Das, "Loss or Gain?," 135.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 138.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁶⁷ Singh 6 2022

experienced, majority of Indian immigrants in America were highly skilled professionals—doctors, scientists, and engineers.²⁶⁸ In Western creative fields, Indian immigrants were still largely underrepresented.²⁶⁹ Moreover, the influx of highly skilled Indian immigrants cemented the model minority stereotype for the American public, further contributing to the absence of Indian creatives.²⁷⁰

The rapidly changing landscape of the Indian diaspora in the West set a unique stage for Jaffrey, who was catering to audiences of those who, like herself, were constantly renegotiating their conceptions of identity and food. Jaffrey emerged as what Gayatri Spivak defines as a “new immigrant” one produced “not by the old transstate and transregional diasporas of slavery, indenture, imperialism, trade, and war”, that often involved forms of sub-alternalization.²⁷¹ Rather, new immigrants are produced through the westward-looking transnational movement of the post-WWII period; with transnationality made possible by “postcolonial class entitlement,” in a multiculturalist, neoliberal era of global investments.²⁷²

It was on the cusp of this era of globalized investments, as new Indian immigrants across the Western hemisphere configured their communities and identities and white Westerners grappled with their diversifying presence, that Jaffrey and her transnational domesticity rose to fame.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 7.

²⁷⁰ Das, 144.

²⁷¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World,” *Textual Practice* 10, no. 2 (June 1996): 251, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502369608582246>.

²⁷² Ibid, 261.

“A Star in the Kitchen, Too”: emergence as a chef

Though emigration trends provided an audience for Jaffrey’s cooking, she still faced the issue of reaching those eager to cook her food. Jaffrey’s cultural status as an actress enabled her quick ascent to stardom, though not without concessions. Shortly after coming to America, she began what would be a lifelong partnership with prolific filmmaker James Ivory, bonding over Jaffrey’s elaborate dinners hosted at her Manhattan apartment, later starring in his 1965 *Shakespeare Wallah*.²⁷³ Her performance earned her a Silver Bear for Best Actress at the Berlin International Film Festival—the first non-white woman to do so—and launched her into the public eye.²⁷⁴ In search of income after her divorce from Saeed in 1965, Jaffrey was hired by *Holiday Magazine* to write a piece on the food she had eaten as a child in India.²⁷⁵ In an oral history interview she recalls, “So now I had these three kids and I feel they are my responsibility. I have to earn enough money to send them to school, and being brought up the way I was, they had to be not just any school, they had to be the best schools. And how was I going to do this? So I started writing.”²⁷⁶

The same year, co-director of *Shakespeare Wallah*, Ismail Merchant, in search of publicity for the film, convinced influential *New York Times* Food Editor Craig Claiborne to profile Jaffrey.²⁷⁷ The profile appeared in the July 7th edition of the *Times*, with the headline “Indian Actress is a Star in the Kitchen, Too.”²⁷⁸ Other initial forays into the culinary world

²⁷³ Kayal, “From Actress to Cookbook Author,” 2.

²⁷⁴ Sam Worley, “How Madhur Jaffrey Made the World Fall in Love with Indian Food,” *Epicurious*, April 13, 2015, 2, <https://www.epicurious.com/expert-advice/how-madhur-jaffrey-wrote-an-invitation-to-indian-cooking-cookbook-article>.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Kayal, “From Actress to Cookbook Author,” 2.

²⁷⁷ Anne Mendelson, *Chow Chop Suey: Food and the Chinese American Journey* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 43.

²⁷⁸ Craig Claiborne, “Indian Actress Is a Star in the Kitchen, Too,” *The New York Times*, July 6, 1966, sec. Food.

continued to capitalize off of Jaffrey's fame as an actress. Another piece on Indian spices by Claiborne reads, "Madhur Jaffrey, the actress and Indian food expert."²⁷⁹ It was not enough to be just an actress or a cook, to launch her career, Jaffrey had to excel at both.

"You still act?": reclaiming multidimensionality

Though initially Jaffrey's success capitalized on her public persona as an actress, her title quickly shifted from "actress who can cook" to "cook who can act (on occasion)."²⁸⁰ As she recounts, "Some people say, 'Oh you still act?' They're not aware of that aspect of my life."²⁸¹ Jaffrey herself, however, was reluctant to adopt the "cook" title entirely. In a 2000 interview on her cookbook *World Vegetarian*, Jaffrey maintained, "I'm subsidizing my acting [...] when I'm on a film location, I don't want people to think of me as the cook!"²⁸² Her hesitation remained even after attaining success in the culinary sphere. In 2016 she commented plainly, "I always say, 'I'm an actress who cooks. I see myself as an actress.'"²⁸³ Though Jaffrey's hesitance to name herself as a cook appears as a dig devaluing food work, I read her responses similarly to Yang's as a self-defensive mechanism she adapts to reclaim her multidimensionality. This simplification of Jaffrey in the public eye exemplified the paradoxical position imposed on women of color in midcentury America: Jaffrey had to be able to do it all but publicly could only succeed in one dimension, as one role: actress or cook. The singular sphere Jaffrey was limited to

²⁷⁹ Craig Claiborne, "Coffee Is Used to Baste Lamb," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, September 5, 1978, NYS Historic Newspapers, <https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn88074337/1978-09-05/ed-1/seq-20/#date1=01%2F01%2F1725&sort=date&date2=12%2F31>

²⁸⁰ "The Long View."

²⁸¹ Worley, "How Madhur Jaffrey Made the World Fall in Love with Indian Food," 3.

²⁸² Jan Hoffman, "She Also Cooks Just a Trifle, This Actress," *The New York Times*, March 14, 2000, <http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/http://arch-timesmachine-fe-prd-40741-2-575473780.us-east-1.elb.amazonaws.com/timesmachine/2000/03/14/259330.html?pageNumber=26>.

²⁸³ Lynne Rosetto Kasper, "Madhur Jaffrey: 'Nobody Can Be an Expert on Indian Food,'" accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.splendidtable.org/story/2016/01/08/madhur-jaffrey-nobody-can-be-an-expert-on-indian-food>.

echoes the predicament of Yang, who opened *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese* thus: “I am ashamed to have written this book. First, because I am a doctor and ought to be practicing instead of cooking.”²⁸⁴ Both women were unable to receive recognition for their incredible careers outside of their later culinary pursuits—Yang opening the first reproductive health clinic in China, and Jaffrey the first woman of color to receive the prestigious Silver Bear for Best Actress.²⁸⁵ Chen, too, had her gastrodipomatic efforts stymied and trivialized.

Jaffrey elaborates on this overshadowing, noting,

I feel that I'm acting the part of this cooking person. I don't feel somehow that that's me really. Just don't. Because I'm not convinced. I never call myself a chef. If somebody says, chef, I say, no, no, no. I just cook. That's all I do because I never learned. I don't know how to chop fast. I never learned technique or anything like that. I'm not a trained chef. I'm a trained actress. When you are on television, say cooking, you need all your acting bits [...] That comes from training for an actress [...] I feel in many ways I'm an amateur who always has been hardworking, and always goes to learn as much as I can [...] I've always been like that, but I'm not trained to do it.²⁸⁶

Jaffrey's words give a twofold explanation to her resistance to the term “chef” or “cook”—it is both a counter to the erasure of her work as an actress and a result of a formalized view of cooking which I discuss in the following section on her revisions. Jaffrey intentionally illustrates how her training as an actress undergirds her cooking work, that despite public understanding otherwise, her cooking is really a means to showcase the “acting bits” she knows so well. Jaffrey outlines how maintaining this duality, this fullness across her careers was a deliberate and lifelong endeavor: “I rock the boat. It's in my nature. [I did so] when I persisted in many careers

²⁸⁴ Buwei Yang Chao, *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, 3d ed. rev. and enl (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 1.

²⁸⁵ Kayal, “From Actress to Cookbook Author,” 4.

²⁸⁶ Rosetto Kasper, “Madhur Jaffrey.”

at the same time, and people said I would wear myself thin. Well I'm thin and I'm still here! I have had trouble taking cooking seriously, but I consider both of them to be my professions now. But one was the one I sought and studied for, and the other dropped from heaven.”²⁸⁷ Thus Jaffrey’s continued self-description as an actress can be understood as a means for her to “rock the boat,” to hold out against those who sought to confine her into one role.

“The queen of Indian cooking”: singularity as erasure

Unfortunately, Jaffrey’s notoriety as the singular Indian food expert, unintentionally or not, has erased the lineage of Indian cookbook authors that came before her. *Saveur* deemed her “the queen of Indian cooking,” and later editions of *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* describe it as “the book that introduced the rich and fascinating cuisine of India to America.”²⁸⁸ Even today, an *Epicurious* article opens an interview with her thus: “the high priestess of the Indian culinary arts explains how she introduced the world to Indian food.”²⁸⁹ Though the pre-1965 Indian diasporic community, particularly in the Western hemisphere, was considerably smaller, a number of diasporic Indian women worked to share their culinary practices before Jaffrey.

In 1932, Savitri Chowdhary, a Punjabi teacher, arrived in Britain to reunite with her husband. Very little scholarship is available on her, less so than any other woman in this project. Making Britain, an archival database on South Asians in Britain, briefly describes her: “Chowdhary sought to immerse herself in community life. However, she also remained in touch with her Indian self, wearing saris for evening engagements, cooking curry at home, and socializing with the middle-class Indian community in London. Not only did she and her

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Sam Worley, “How Madhur Jaffrey Made the World Fall in Love with Indian Food”; Pashman Dan, “Live: When Will Indian Food Be American?,” The Sporkful, accessed April 9, 2023, <https://www.sporkful.com/live-when-will-indian-food-be-american/>.

²⁸⁹ Worley, “How Madhur Jaffrey Made the World Fall in Love with Indian Food”

husband help establish early British Hindu organizations such as the Hindu Association of Europe and the Hindu Centre, but Savitry Chowdhary, on the encouragement of an English friend, Miss Cresswell, also became involved with the India League, attending and occasionally speaking at political meetings in London.”²⁹⁰ In 1953, Chowdhary published *Indian Cookery*, a short book that showcased the recipes she adapted to her British kitchen. Little else is available on Chowdhary, but she published two later works, including a 1954 memoir where she wrote, “It wasn’t easy to belong to two countries... Was it possible, or even wise for a person like myself, who had been born and brought up in India, a country which had its own strong culture and traditions, to get completely absorbed in this country?”²⁹¹

Less than twenty years later, Goan Devika Teja and Santha Rama Rau made significant contributions to early representations of Indian food in America with their 1969 *Cooking of India*, packing in details relating to a region’s geography and customs that ineluctably influence its culinary traditions.²⁹² Rau begins the book by describing the spotless kitchens maintained by both her grandmothers. Later, Teja and Rau detail the cultural significance of spices: “Through the choice of spices, through their proportions and blending, a good Indian cook expresses imagination, ingenuity, individuality, subtlety, adventurousness. So important are the masalas and so vital is cooking among the talents of a Hindu girl that in some parts of India a bride stands on a grinding stone for some of the preliminary wedding ceremonies while prayers and blessings are intoned and formal offerings of flowers and spices on silver trays are made to her.”²⁹³

²⁹⁰ “Savitri Devi Chowdhary | Making Britain,” accessed April 11, 2023, <https://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/savitri-devi-chowdhary>. (“Savitri Devi Chowdhary”, 2012)

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Santha Rama Rau and Devika Teja, *The Cooking of India* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1969):44.

²⁹³ Ibid, 78.

Weaving in cultural and personal narratives, their inclusion of broader contexts within their cookbook paved the way for Jaffrey's future works.

These women represent just a fraction of the diasporic Indian women who used food to convey and negotiate their own cultural identities. Teja and Rau, like Jaffrey, were “cosmopolitan”: English speaking wealthy women.²⁹⁴ Vast majority of this labor was conducted in the home by subalternized Indian women who engaged in the crucial work of nourishing their communities, but as this project attempts to convey, it is this labor that is both most essential and most underwritten in culinary cultural narratives. One such example includes Jaffrey's own mother, who taught her to cook, a woman who compared to Jaffrey's aristocrat father, “either kept few records or humbly kept accomplishments under wraps,” a truth evidenced by the elaborate family tree preceding Jaffrey's memoir that details only Jaffrey's paternal lineage. Her mother, Kashmiran Rani, was rarely given the chance to narrate her experiences in her own words.²⁹⁵

Though Jaffrey's cultural capital as an established actress removed barriers that unknown chefs such as Chen and Yang faced, Jaffrey still suffered an enormous level of racial prejudice and pigeonholing. Repeatedly, Jaffrey was restricted to writing solely about Indian food as she remembers, “When I came to this country I said I'm going to write what I feel like,” but [opportunities] just weren't there. I was not allowed to write, say, about Italian food. No, no, somebody else can write about it. I wanted to do a world vegetarian book. They said, no, no, somebody else is doing it. A *New York Times* writer could go to India for one day for the first time and write two pages in *The New York Times* about Indian food, but I couldn't go to Italy,

²⁹⁴ Anu Kumar, “Delicious Memories: How a Cookbook Published in the US in 1969 Left Its Mark on Indian Food Writing,” Text, Scroll.in, September 23, 2018, <https://scroll.in/magazine/891240/delicious-memories-how-a-cookbook-published-in-the-us-in-1969-left-its-mark-on-indian-food-writing>.

²⁹⁵ Jaffrey, *Climbing the Mango Trees*, 2.

where I'd been 50 times to write about Italian food. There were these inbuilt pigeonholes, prejudices."²⁹⁶ Jaffrey's fame and status among the New York glitterati gave her a platform and access but could not overhaul outside expectations of what an Indian chef could be—Jaffrey would have to do that herself.

“This is how we sell”: challenges in ascension and concessions in presentation

Jaffrey's debut cookbook, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, reminds one of *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, intended to serve as a primer for what Jaffrey recognizes as the incredibly diverse world of Indian cuisine, introducing core ingredients, standard techniques and brief descriptions of varying regional climates and practices. Like those who came before her, Jaffrey was compelled to create a singular answer to the question of Indian cuisine. Her cookbook opens: “This book has been written as a gradual maneuver in self-defense. Let me explain [...] I have increasingly found myself approached by a fresh breed of enthusiastic Americans who note my sari and ask ‘You wouldn’t know of a restaurant where we could get some good Indian food?’”²⁹⁷ Advertisements for the book call Jaffrey “the Indian cuisine authority,” and “the great expert on Indian food.” In response to questions about the book’s subtitle, *Classic Indian Dishes, mostly the subtle spicy cooking of Delhi, carefully worked out for American cooks in American kitchens*, Jaffrey recalls the limited ownership she held over the presentation of her food in a 2019 interview: “I have never had anything to do with any of the covers, when I have, they’ve failed. I left to my editors everything. They told me, ‘Everyone associates India with somehow drapery, can you put [the dish] on a sari?’ I said no! You’ll get oil spots on the sari and ruin the beautiful sari! I love Indian handwoven cloth and I have always championed Indian handwoven

²⁹⁶ Pashman, “Live.” 35:17.

²⁹⁷ Madhur Jaffrey, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 1.

cloth, so I had some that I let them use. The title was not chosen by me. It was chosen by Judith Jones, my editor.”²⁹⁸ Though Jaffrey held less sway over how her food was displayed, her inclusion of handwoven cloth held special significance; as a child in pre-Partition India, Jaffrey adhered to Mahatma Gandhi’s instruction to boycott British-made textiles that had decimated the Indian hand loom industry. As she remembers, “[My father] just taught us to walk out when the God Save the King or God Save the Queen played. So, we did that. It was our own form of protest against the British Raj. And then I also learned because Gandhiji was teaching all of us don’t buy British fabrics, don’t buy British anything. Weave your own cloth. Make your thread, weave your own cloth. So I learned how to weave. I got a little spinning wheel, I think I was 10 years old at that time, and followed Gandhi’s instructions and I wove thread which was sent then to be made into cloth, and we were all trying to wear homemade stuff.”²⁹⁹ Jaffrey continues supporting handwoven fabric today, wearing her signature elaborate saris woven by Indian weavers.³⁰⁰ So even in situations where her autonomy over her cultural presentation was limited, Jaffrey still managed to assert a degree, however minor, of her cultural truth.

This type of concession-based progress continued, expanding Jaffrey’s reach and influence while simultaneously requiring constant renegotiation of her acceptability. In *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, Jaffrey asserts, “To me the word ‘curry’ is as degrading to India’s great cuisine as the term ‘chop suey’ was to China’s. But as Americans have learned, in the last few years, to distinguish between the different styles of Chinese cooking and between different dishes, I fervently hope that they will soon do the same with Indian food instead of lumping it all under the dubious catchall title of ‘curry’. Curry is just a vague inaccurate word which the world

²⁹⁸ Pashman, “Live.” 10:30.

²⁹⁹ “Madhur & Padma Re-Air Transcript,” *Cherry Bombe*, 15:06, accessed April 9, 2023, <https://cherrybombe.com/madhur-padma-reair-transcript>.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 17:08.

has picked up from the British who in turn got it mistakenly from us [...] Whatever the source, the word is obviously a British oversimplification for what is universally recognized as a richly varied cuisine.”³⁰¹ Her resistance was a bold stance for an Indian cookbook to promote in a time where “curry” was one of few, perhaps only, Indian foods that Americans consumed. Yet in 1996, Jaffrey authored *Madhur Jaffrey Cooks Curries*—a title seemingly at odds with her stated disdain for the term. In an interview on her apparent shift in opinion, Jaffrey covers her ears as the title of *Cooks Curries* is read, explaining, “In England I got to the point ‘if you can’t beat’ em join’ em.’ The term [curry] never went away. It stayed behind me all the time. [Publishers] always presented it to me, ‘This is how we sell the book.’ I brought out my usual arguments, but marketing is not my strong suit. So I said, ‘if this is what you think will sell the book, sell the book.’ I felt terrible, but the book sold.”³⁰² In 1996, by then an established cookbook author, Jaffrey was still compelled to make concessions to make Indian food digestible for white audiences. The content of the book itself did not solely contain so-called “curry,” dishes, opening with a lengthy history of the term’s use and adaptation, with further explanations for specific “curries,” in chapter openers. Underneath names such as “Thai Beef Curry Soup,” she lists the dish’s name in its language of origin.³⁰³ I do not seek to absolve Jaffrey of the oversimplification or misconceptions her work has potentially promoted, but rather I read them as the result of well-intentioned attempts to write about Indian cuisine in its fullness, a means for her to carve space for a vast canon of Indian food writing.

Jaffrey recognizes her limitations, as she writes in *An Invitation*: “Someday, I hope, books will be written about all of Indian cuisines—Gujarati food, Malayi food, Assamese food,

³⁰¹ Jaffrey, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, 3.

³⁰² Pashman, “Live.” 17:16.

³⁰³ Madhur Jaffrey, *Madhur Jaffrey Cooks Curries* (London: BBC Consumer Publishing, 1996). 54.

Punjabi food, Maharashtrian food, Sindhi food, Bengali food, Goan food, Kashmiri food, Hyderabad food—just to name a few. But until that happens, my book can introduce you to the smells and tastes which *I* grew up with as a child in Delhi and which I have struggled over the years to recreate in my American kitchen.”³⁰⁴ She resists notions of her as a sole representation of Indian food, noting that she only writes from “the smells and tastes I grew up with.”³⁰⁵ But of course, Jaffrey could not stray too far from the Indian expert persona that made her work accessible, digestible and successful. She, too, perpetuated this image of a somewhat pan-Indian culinary virtuoso. In her 1993 *Madhur Jaffrey’s Cookbook*, she writes, “Being Indian, I’m naturally familiar with a vast spectrum of spices and the simple tricks and techniques that can draw out many almost contradictory flavors in the same spices.”³⁰⁶ As I discuss in the following section, though she engaged in forms of self-elevation to establish her own expertise at the cost of the complexity or value of other cooks, Jaffrey’s understanding of food, and of cooking as an enacted practice, has undergone crucial transformation over the course of her career.

Claiming space: the power of revision

The length of Jaffrey’s career and her continued success has allowed her the unique and important opportunity simply not possible for her peers with shorter or seemingly less prolific arcs: the power to revise and amend her previous work. As previously discussed, nonwhite women’s work is measured against seemingly impossible standards. With Yang’s autobiography, I highlighted the challenges empirical standards of truth pose in the complex, changeable process of remembering. Yang, Chen, and Jaffrey all faced adversity after being burdened with another

³⁰⁴ Jaffrey, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, 4.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Madhur Jaffrey, *Madhur Jaffrey’s Cookbook*, 1st ed (New York: C. Potter, 1993). 12.

impossible task of creating “authentic” representations of their respective cultures from their own communities while adhering to white standards of acceptability. Such concurrent influences strictly policing these women’s behavior and work then unsurprisingly left little room for error. With the burden of cultural representation on their backs, a single mistake could impact how their cultures were understood and treated. Moreover, food writing when viewed through the paranoid and masculine frame, as Rosalyn Collins Eves explains, is held to particular standards of exactness, meant to churn out identical products time and time again.³⁰⁷ Thus, in creating space for flexibility and revision that for so long was only afforded to white creators, Jaffrey defies the history of rigid policing and standards of perfection for nonwhite women.

One powerful example of revision comes in the transformation of Jaffrey’s views on the validity of Indian home cooks and meals. In *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, Jaffrey explains her response to pleading white Americans in search for a good Indian restaurant, commenting,

My answer is always an apologetic, “I am afraid there is no place in New York or anywhere in America where top quality Indian food can be found—except of course in private Indian homes.’ I try to explain about Indian restaurants. It isn’t as if there aren’t any. [...] Instead of specializing in food from a particular state or district, [Indian restaurants] serve a generalized Indian food from no specific area whatsoever; a restaurant may call itself ‘Kashmir’ but will serve no Kashmiri food; another calling itself ‘Punjab,’ you will be unable to get those Punjabi mainstays, cornbread and mustard greens. There are several reasons for this. One is timidity – the fear that diners’ unfamiliarity with regional specialties will make certain dishes unpopular. Another is the caliber of cooks: most are former seamen who left their ships with the hope of making a living, somehow or other, in America, and as cooking seemed to require no unusual skills, a great

³⁰⁷ Rosalyn Collings Eves, “A Recipe for Remembrance: Memory and Identity in African-American Women’s Cookbooks,” *Rhetoric Review* 24, no. 3 (2005): 287.

many became restaurateurs, copying the standardized menus of other Indian restaurants and refusing to experiment with dishes from their own villages which they perhaps knew much better. The result of all this is that the sauces in such eating places inevitably have the same color, taste, and consistency [...] appetizers are suggested not because Indians eat them, but because it is felt that Americans cannot do without them.³⁰⁸

Jaffrey's sweeping characterization of Indian restaurants is diametrically opposed to the fundamental arguments of this project, that there is a right way to cook your culture's food, that it requires formal training, and that someone who does otherwise is not truly cooking and not truly cooking their culture's food. Though Jaffrey acknowledges the exceptional quality of Indian home cooking, she does so to denigrate the quality of food from restaurants owned by those very same home cooks. Such "generalized Indian food from no specific area," could not possibly reflect the actual food of these cooks; in her view, rather, it is a result of timidity and lack of skill.³⁰⁹ If a Punjabi restaurant does not serve what Jaffrey deems to be the true regional specialties of cornbread and mustard greens, how could such an establishment truly be Punjabi? Unfortunately, in attempting to demonstrate her expertise, Jaffrey establishes artificial standards of regional authenticity to govern who is and who is not truly cooking their own food. She dismisses the idea of appetizers in Indian restaurants, for all Indians do not eat them, and their presence is another demerit, a bending to American tastes—reminding one of Anne Mendelson's sarcastic description of Joyce Chen's food as "authentic."³¹⁰ These cooks are not up to caliber, without the skills required to be a true restaurateur and motivated, insufficiently, by the hope of making a living rather than a dedication to the craft.

³⁰⁸ Jaffrey, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, 1.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Mendelson, *Chow Chop Suey*, 166.

But, afforded the time and space to develop her views, her 1995 *Madhur Jaffrey's Flavours of India* demonstrates a significant shift: "When I was preparing for a trip to Kerala on India's southwestern coast, I received a detailed letter from a Keralite friend [...] she casually mentioned a 'boatman's curry' that I should try and find. It was something made and sold by boatmen who ply Kerala's Venice like network of inland waterways [...] I found it this year on a rice boat in the middle of Lake Vembanad. You will find the recipe on page 30."³¹¹ No longer deriding the unskilled seamen and home cooks for their lack of formal training, Jaffrey instead spotlights the diversity and beauty of such creativity. Jaffrey's 2015 *Vegetarian India: A Journey Through the Best of Indian Home Cooking*, reflects a further change in her previously limited definition of cooking. As she narrates here:

I stayed in palace hotels to collect the recipes of the powerful former rulers, the Nizams; in private homes, watching dishes cooked by aristocratic Muslim housewives, I spend a whole morning with D. Lalitha, a weaver [...] busy making a lunch of a saaru, dosakai pacchadi. Some dishes in this book were found quite serendipitously. The woman setting up my travels in Andhra mentioned a clothing designer in Hyderabad, Vinita Pittie, who lived in a 230-year-old family mansion in the heart of the old city. Her food turned out to be utterly delicious [...] As we traveled along, I would call a halt at the sign of a good roadside food stand. "What, a pesarattu stand! Let us get out! In Bombay, I followed two very successful vegetarian jewelers to see what they ate for lunch and how they ate it. Both have shops at the Taj Mahal Palace. One, who comes from Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, left his office every day around noon and went home to his family for lunch. This was the main meal of the day for the family. He spent about an hour and a half eating and then went back to his office. His father, who had replaced

³¹¹ Madhur Jaffrey, *Flavours of India* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1995). 2

him in the shop for that time, then took his car and went back to the same home to have his lunch. You will find the details of that meal, as well as the full menu.³¹²

Jaffrey's 2015 introduction tells a very different story of Indian cooking than that of *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*. Housewives, weavers, designers, and roadside cooks are all praised for their delicious food. She delights in the "serendipitous," meals prepared not at a restaurant but in the homes of community members who developed their own specialties.³¹³ She details the informal, daily practices she previously derided, appreciating the changeability and reality of a fuller range of cooking.

Claiming space: representing regionality

Alongside enabling impact on diasporic communities, the span of Jaffrey's career and her success allowed her to bring to light the regional diversity historically absent from depictions of ethnic food, the very same absence Jaffrey noted in her first cookbook, where she "[hoped] someday books will be written about all of the Indian cuisines."³¹⁴ Chen and Yang too had wanted to represent the diversity of Chinese cuisine; Yang took time to note how "styles of food differ a good deal from place to place," briefly describing regional distinctions in cooking practices, and her book's focus on Eastern Chinese cuisine added much needed diversity to the Cantonese-dominated Chinese-American cuisine of her time.³¹⁵ Chen did the same with her larger platform, taking time in her restaurant, show, and cookbooks to delineate culinary differences between regions. The inside cover for *Joyce Chen Cook Book*, where Chen discusses

³¹² Madhur Jaffrey, *Vegetarian India: A Journey Through the Best of Indian Home Cooking: A Cookbook* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2015), 6.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Jaffrey, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, 4.

³¹⁵ Mayukh Sen, "America's Forgotten Television Chef," *Food52*, 00:00 400AD, 34, <https://food52.com/blog/20611-joyce-chen-television-profile>.

the Four Great Traditions, reads: “It has been justly said that there are two great national schools of cooking: the French and the Chinese. In this unique book, Mrs. Chen supplies the key to the world of Chinese cuisine. Exquisite, subtle, different recipes are here, but this book provides much more than that [...] Here you will learn about the three great regional schools of cooking within China: Cantonese, Mandarin, Szechuan.”³¹⁶ Bit by bit, these women carved out space for fuller representations of their cuisines.

So then, we can see Jaffrey’s accomplishments in publicizing the regional diversity of Indian cuisine as a continuation of earlier female diasporic chefs’ work to do the same, accomplishments made possible largely because of the longevity and publicity of Jaffrey’s career. In a 2018 interview on the writing of her *Vegetarian India*, Jaffrey remarks,

There are so many vegetarian foods that I don't know in India. I don't know India. People call me the great expert on India. Nobody can be an expert on Indian food because it's such a large country [...] This time I thought, How are people eating vegetarian food? Who is eating it? How do they serve themselves? How do they eat lunch? If they're working, do they eat in their workplace? Do they go home? And if you're in an ashram and serving vegetarian Indian food in India, what do you serve? Is there a philosophy behind what you're serving?" I thought, "I'm going to get all the answers and present Indian vegetarian food in a very intimate manner.”³¹⁷

Here, Jaffrey brings a new level of care to the varied culinary practices so often ignored in mollified presentations of Indian cuisine. As previously noted, in her emergence Jaffrey was limited to writing about “authentic” Indian food—no more, no less. The alleged Indian food expert—like Chen, the “Chinese Julia Child” before her— could not possibly write about cuisines

³¹⁶ Joyce Chen, *Joyce Chen Cook Book* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1962), 1.

³¹⁷ Meera Sodha, “Madhur Jaffrey’s Sesame Seed Potatoes Recipe,” *The Guardian*, November 9, 2018, sec. Food, <https://www.theguardian.com/food/2018/nov/09/madhur-jaffrey-sesame-seed-aloo-potato-recipe-meera-sodha>.

outside her place of origin. Yet as her career progressed, Jaffrey began incorporating the variety of food that reflected her globalized reality. Her book *World Vegetarian*, as the title implies, covers vegetarian dishes from across the globe. Shameem Black articulates the ramifications of Jaffrey's increasingly globalized writings, arguing, "In refusing to limit herself [...] Jaffrey encourages her readers to consider the significance of culinary otherness. Since, in the West, the privilege to write about others has been fully normalized only for white subjects, Jaffrey's cookbooks represent an important refusal of the limitations placed on writers of color."³¹⁸ In situating herself as shaped by and alongside transnational domestic practices, Jaffrey promotes a type of modern global domesticity that is defined and strengthened by its engagement with intimate domestic practices from around the world, a cosmopolitanism that insists on rather than severs its ties to its geographic, diasporic, and often female origins.

Claiming space: Indian diasporic visibility

In this project thus far I have aimed to illustrate how Yang, Chen, and Jaffrey have each had enormous influence both during their lifetimes and on the lineage of diasporic female cookbook authors who follow them. With Jaffrey's enduring career to the present, we are better able to see her direct impact on these later generations. The clearest example of her impact is in the work of journalist and food writer Priya Krishna, a second-generation Indian immigrant who co-authored *Indian-ish, Recipes and Antics from a Modern American Family* with her mother, Ritu Krishna. Priya Krishna's experience elucidates the remarkable visibility and cultural knowledge transmission Jaffrey's work has enabled in diasporic Indian communities. In a 2019 interview with the food podcast *The Splendid Table*, Krishna surmises,

³¹⁸ Shameem Black, "Recipes for Cosmopolitanism: Cooking across Borders in the South Asian Diaspora," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 31, no. 1 (2010): 2, <https://doi.org/10.5250/fronjwomestud.31.1.1>.

To put it simply, my cookbook would not exist without her cookbook. Just the existence of *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* opened the floodgates for other South Asian writers to be given a chance to talk about their food to an American audience [...] Madhur is from the same part of India that my family is from and her trajectory in terms of learning to cook was somewhat similar to my mom. She is someone my mom always talked to me about and someone she admired and looked up to. She was definitely someone whose mythology was in our family from an early time.³¹⁹

The self-identification and cultural representation Jaffrey enabled extended beyond those who shared her region of origin or culinary trajectory. As Chennai-born chef and host Padma Lakshmi describes, “Madhur was one of the first Brown women that any of us, whether we were Indian or Trini or Filipino, saw on the cover of a major book in major bookstores, not only in America but also in England. She is also the first Brown person we saw talking about our food on British television.”³²⁰ Countless other diasporic Indian women recount cooking or watching someone cook from a tattered copy of *Invitation to Indian Cooking*, a sight particularly important for those who were unable to access the cultural knowledge of cooking in their own families. Krishna recounts her mother’s insistence she focus on schoolwork rather than making meals: “When I was growing up, I used to sit on top of our kitchen island, my mom cooking dinner, insisting I do my homework. All my high school math textbooks are still stained with turmeric because of this.”³²¹ Second-generation British-Indian journalist Meera Sodha recalls a parallel experience:

³¹⁹ Sally Swift, “Madhur Jaffrey Opened the Floodgates for Indian Food in America,” *The Splendid Table*, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.splendidtable.org/story/2019/06/14/madhur-jaffrey-opened-the-floodgates-for-indian-food-in-america>.

³²⁰ “Madhur & Padma Re-Air Transcript.”(13:01).

³²¹ “Priya Krishna,” *Cherry Bombe*, 22:03 accessed April 9, 2023, <https://cherrybombe.com/priya-krishna-transcript>.

For generations, Indian women have learned to cook by watching their mothers cooking at the stove. In my family, it was different. My mum didn't want me to be a housewife, so she'd kick me out of the kitchen and up the stairs to do my homework. She wanted me to be independent and not have to worry about money. The studying did pay off. At 18 I left for university – but there were two problems. I had become desperately homesick for mum's food and I could barely roll a chapati. I knew I needed to head home and learn by standing at her side. Proudly displayed in the kitchen was a copy of *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery*. It was the first of her books that we Brits were introduced to in 1983 and, excitingly, it was accompanied by a TV series. For my mum it was hugely inspirational to see an Indian woman on the television, traveling, cooking and wearing saris. That book, and my mum's guidance, allowed me to start my journey into cooking.³²²

Because of her visibility, Jaffrey's influence is best understood not in the personal diasporic community which she resides in but rather in the countless diasporic readers across the globe who drew from her work to gain or relearn cultural practices that have otherwise been lost. Particularly for second and third-generation immigrants who do not have personal experiences or cultural knowledge from the homeland, Jaffrey's work holds significant reparative power.

Cultural Identity in Food Memoirs and Writings Past & Present

“Sharing & splitting”: food as history in the memoir

Jaffrey no doubt contributed to the establishment of the immigrant food memoir genre, and her 2005 *Climbing the Mango Trees* reaffirms the embedded nature of food in the sociohistorical experiences of immigrants. Here she narrates the devastation of Partition by recounting the array of dishes shared between her Muslim and Hindu classmates: “Abida and

³²² Sodha, “Madhur Jaffrey's Sesame Seed Potatoes Recipe.”

Zahida's food was inner city, Delhi and Muslim. As my fingers tore off a small piece of meat from a bone, formed a morsel with the rotie, dipped the morsel in shorva and then place it in my mouth. I could taste all three influences [...] Sudha's food was as Jain as Abida's and Zahida's was Muslim. After we ate, sharing what we could [...] but as soon as Partition began it was if two icy hands descended and split our class into two."³²³ Jaffrey continues to weave food in her description of her family's contention with broader social and political events, pushing back against long held beliefs of food as superficial, unrelated to the historical and cultural fabric shaping the diasporic experience.

"The broken mirror": culinary nostalgia in the contemporary food memoir

In inextricably linking its sociopolitical themes to Jaffrey and her family's culinary practices, *Climbing the Mango Trees* adds complicates mainstream conception of food as a peripheral and frivolous pastime. However, Jaffrey's romanticized representation of food from the homeland, where it sits untouched, fixed at the apex of authenticity, erases the inherent fluid and place-based nature of diasporic food. I discuss the specific role of nostalgia in the diasporic identity and in the diasporic food memoir to illustrate its influence on past and present day diasporic food writings.

But to discuss the diasporic culinary memoir requires a discussion of the nostalgia inherent in its creation. Nostalgia—which Kathleen Stewart describes as "a cultural practice, not a given context; its forms, meanings, and effects shift with the context—it depends on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present,"—holds a uniquely complex role for diasporic communities.³²⁴ Nostalgia is a sense of both romance and loss that can undergird the creation of

³²³ Jaffrey, *Climbing the Mango Trees*, 131.

³²⁴ Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 260.

collective identity in a new space, as Ravia Parveen describes: “the aim of nostalgia is to facilitate a renewed cultural experience. This is a need that is balanced out with a utopian or imagined culture. In order to preserve a culture, nostalgia is necessary, whether this is imagined or not. The romanticisation of the country of origin can be so entrenched in diasporic literature as to deem it almost unrecognizable, but is needed in order to sustain a sense of culture.”³²⁵

In his now famed essay “Imaginary Homelands,” Salman Rushdie articulates the complex impossibility of migrants who enact such romanticized memories: “It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect the world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost. But there is a paradox here. The broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed.”³²⁶ For members of the diaspora, memories of the homeland are refracted and warped through the shards of a mirror. But as Rushdie and Parveen highlight, these nostalgic fragments still hold positive effect in grounding a diasporic community’s sense of identity in a foreign place. As Stewart puts it, “the search for a past and a place leads them to reconstitute their lives in narrative form, a story designed to reassemble a broken history into a new whole.”³²⁷

But nostalgia’s subjective nature also has the dangerous power to rewrite narratives both past and present, and food’s particular significance as cultural marker for displaced peoples magnifies this power. Anita Mannur outlines such possibilities in defining what she terms “culinary nostalgia,” writing, “the desire to remember home by fondly recreating culinary memories is to route longing for a homeland through one’s relationship to seemingly intractable culinary practices, which yoke national identity to subjective standards of food [from] the

³²⁵ Anita Mannur, “Culinary Nostalgia: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Diaspora,” *MELUS* 32, no. 4 (2007): 13.

³²⁶ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, Reprint edition (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 171.

³²⁷ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 261.

homeland: an unchanging and enduring cultural essence.”³²⁸ Mannur and Parveen argue that the pursuit of nostalgia is legitimized by such inherently unattainable authenticity. In her case study of the culinary practices of South Asian women in Lockwood England, Parveen finds that first and second-generation diasporic elders hold rigid parameters over what food is “authentic,” parameters that facilitate an important teaching and transmission of culinary practices, while also correlating a woman’s adherence to such parameters with the validity of her cultural identity.³²⁹

We then see how uniquely “culinary nostalgia,” functions to both cultivate and govern diasporic identity formation, and so it follows that diasporic food writings hold incredible importance in these communities. Jopi Nyman underscores the outsized influence of culinary memoirs in broader diasporic identity creation, explaining, “The culinary memoir is a part of identity-construction. It is linked to both private and public settings both cultural and communal.”³³⁰ Thus, the memoir’s power holds both harmful and reparative possibilities in diasporic identity construction. If an exclusive, static food memoir enshrines a tightly governed “authentic,” conception of immigrant identity, then a more hybridized, dynamic food memoir endorses a complex, diverse, and highly changeable understanding of immigrant identity that reflects its lived realities. To be sure, this unique power echoes the burden of cultural representation for diasporic women. Why must their writings be taken and rewoven into the fabric of their entire community’s identity? This question returns to the duality of food’s power in these communities. With its exceptional power to heal, create, and cultivate diasporic identity

³²⁸ Mannur, “Culinary Nostalgia,” 14.

³²⁹ Razia Parveen, “Food to Remember: Culinary Practice and Diasporic Identity,” *Oral History* 44, no. 1 (2016): 49.

³³⁰ Jopi Nyman, *Displacement, Memory, and Travel in Contemporary Migrant Writing*, Textxet : Studies in Comparative Literature, volume 83 (Leiden; Boston: Brill / Rodopi, 2017), 286.

and diasporic women's identity in particular, diasporic culinary practices also hold the power to overwrite and invalidate other cultural experiences as we see with Jaffrey.

Although Jaffrey's *Climbing the Mango Trees* resists devaluations of diasporic food's historical and social significance, its digestible arc and exclusive focus on nostalgic childhood food experiences do not reflect the hybridity and constant changeability of other diasporic food experiences. I do not seek to criticize Jaffrey's expression of her food journey but see its gaps as a means to understand the power of contemporary food memoirs. In *Climbing the Mango Trees*, Jaffrey places her culinary traditions squarely in a type of mythologized homeland of the past, configuring food as static and implying that the traditions of her youth are the authentic, correct practices. Several diaspora and food studies scholars, including Anita Mannur and Parama Roy, levy that Jaffrey presents an image of her homeland that is both limiting or emancipatory.³³¹ Mannur elaborates in her explication of Jaffrey's recipe for "authentic" baingan-ka-barth: "A flavor of authenticity is added to Jaffrey's recipe because it is routed through a tale of childhood nostalgia for 'real Indian' dishes, steeped in tradition."³³² In portraying the homeland as "a harmonious past only rarely to be pervaded by more sinister forces," Jaffrey participates in the romanticization of the homeland that rarely reflects the reality of diasporic experiences.³³³ Of course, Jaffrey can only write from her reality, and representations of homeland should not be limited to traumatic stories of forced displacement and conflict. But this idyllic and nostalgic version of the homeland, elevated by culinary memoir's powerful influence on diasporic identity construction, alongside Jaffrey's mythical status, promotes a static understanding of food rather than an enacted and place-based practice.

³³¹ Mannur, "Culinary Nostalgia," 15.

³³² Ibid, 22.

³³³ Nyman, *Displacement, Memory, and Travel in Contemporary Migrant Writing*, 280.

So, alongside establishing legitimacy of the diasporic food memoir genre in so explicitly weaving food into the broader multicultural fabric of transnational histories and politics, *Climbing the Mango Trees* also engages in a type of sanitization of the immigrant food journey, one that sees the practices of the nostalgic homeland as at odds with those in the modern West. Though Jaffrey's works have been powerful sources of knowledge and identification for diasporic communities, her reach adds even more legitimacy to the authenticity politics that mar so much of diasporic culinary culture.

“All the things that make our food our food”: bittersweet & honest futures

Contemporary diasporic food writers and chefs have now taken the powerful step to write of the complex, often emotionally tumultuous, hybridized dishes they grew up eating, dishes that reflect the nonlinear and bittersweet process of assimilation and diasporic identity formation. Rather than needing to cement their stories and foods in sociopolitical contexts to be taken as a serious cultural output, these authors highlight their personal lived experiences. Recent works such as Priya and Ritu Krishna's *Indian-ish*, Angela Dimayuga's *Filipinx*, and Michelle Zauner's *Crying in H-Mart*—a supermarket chain with the tagline “A Korean Tradition Made in America”—firmly assert the validity of their unique diasporic experiences, even in their titles.³³⁴

Indian-ish is an explicit tribute to the type of hybridized cultural identities that emerge from the diaspora, with Krishna explaining,

I didn't at first want the word Indian in the title. I hated the idea this book would be slotted in with all the other international or ethnic cookbooks in stores. In fact I put Indian-ish on the proposal and then underneath I wrote, Better title coming soon.' Because I was out of ideas but also unwilling to have the word Indian in the title, and 'ish' felt wishy-washy [...] And as I started to think about

³³⁴ Hmart web

it, it was a fitting way to describe my family's identity. We're Indian by heritage. We speak Hindi at home. We watch way too many Bollywood movies. We eat a lot of dal. But we're also American. We wear our printed pants with hari mirch necklaces. We made it all the way to season 10 of American Idol. We adore Pizza Hut garlic bread. I made the subtitle of the book, recipes and antics from a modern American family because this book doesn't just have paneer and kitchari, it has dump cake and dip and pizza and all the things that make our food, our food.”³³⁵

Krishna notes her hesitance to situate the hybridity at the forefront of her work for fear of ethnic pigeonholing but ultimately recognizes the validity of representing her experiences in their fullness.

Michelle Zauner’s bestselling memoir, *Crying in H-Mart*, focuses on the difficulty of such hybridized second generation cultural identity in chronicling the multifaceted grief of losing her Korean mother, Chongmi. Like Krishna, Zauner boldly centers her negotiated cultural identity at the center of her memoir. Half Korean, half white, Zauner mourns the loss of her mother and what she sees as the culinary and cultural ties to her Korean heritage. She writes, “Sobbing near the dry goods, asking myself, ‘Am I even Korean anymore if there’s no one left to call and ask which brand of seaweed we used to buy?’ Growing up in America with a Caucasian father and a Korean mother, I relied on my mom for access to our Korean heritage [...] I can hardly speak Korean, but in H Mart it feels like I’m fluent.”³³⁶ Like so many second-generation immigrants, particularly those existing in predominantly white spaces, Zauner is unable to speak her mother’s first language, instead using food as a primary cultural tie. Certainly, Zauner initially engages in a more static conception of identity, one that sees her first-generation mother

³³⁵ “Priya Krishna”, 23:19.

³³⁶ Michelle Zauner, *Crying in H Mart: A Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021), 1.

as the true, authentic conductor of her cultural heritage. But as the memoir progresses, so too does Zauner's conception of cultural identity. She later asserts, "Every dish I cooked exhumed a memory. Every scent and taste brought me back for a moment to an unravaged home [...] The memories I had stored, I could not let fester. They were moments to be tended. The culture we shared was active, effervescent in my gut and in my genes, and I had to seize it, foster it so it did not die in me. So that I could pass it on someday. The lessons she imparted, the proof of her life lived on in me, in my every move and deed. I was what she left behind."³³⁷ In reenacting the cooking practices she shared with her mother, Zauner uses this active practice to bring to life both her cultural heritage and her mother's memory. Zauner and Krishna portray food as a fluid practice, constantly being shaped by and shaping those who cook it.

Angela Dimayuga, former head chef of the wildly popular Mission Chinese Food and author of *Filipinx: Heritage Recipes from the Diaspora*, opens with an alienation similar to Zauner's: "Even today I'm humbled in the presence of native speakers; I can't keep up with an entire conversation in Tagalog [...] I am a Filipino Filipina Filipinx—I'm comfortable being identified by any of those terms, but I am also a Filipino American [...] Growing up in San Jose, California where the population is a third Asian and a third Hispanic, I eventually found a sense of belonging in a brown culture that brought together kids of Filipino and Mexican heritage. Cooking was the shining thread. Whenever I went into a Filipino home I was told 'Come inside and eat.'"³³⁸ Also unable to use language as a primary cultural tie, Dimayuga, too, spotlights the crucial role of food tying her to her hybridized "brown culture."³³⁹

³³⁷ Ibid, 213.

³³⁸ Angela Dimayuga, Ligaya Mishan, and Alex Lau, *Filipinx* (New York: Abrams, 2021), 9.

³³⁹ Ibid.

However, Dimayuga presents an interesting foil to the previous authors, contemporary and otherwise. While prominently showcasing the reality of her second-generation culinary experiences, Dimayuga still centers standards and acceptance from a formalized tradition of cooking. She recalls,

I hadn't forgotten the food of my childhood—I made it for myself and friends at home, but I realized I'd never given it proper respect. I could cook it from memory, but did I really know it? [...] I'd bought into the idea that Western cuisine was elegant while the food of my childhood was just that, food for comfort, simple and straightforward. I wanted people to know how complex Filipino food could be. So I put Josefina's House Special Chicken on the menu at Mission. (This was a bit of bravado: The first time I cooked it at the restaurant was only the third time I'd ever made it, and my audience was Rene Redzepi, David Chang, and Wylie Dufresne, three of the most prominent chefs in the world.) We sold it for \$75 a bird, and in 2015 it was voted best chicken in the city by *New York Magazine*. Lola always asked me the same questions about her house special, and I loved how astonished she was by the answers each time. 'So expensive!' she'd say.³⁴⁰

Dimayuga privileges “complexity” in her desired presentations of Filipino food and positively associates the dish's exorbitantly high price to *New York Magazine's* esteemed stamp of approval—interpreting her lola's astonishment at her dish's price as one of awe and pride. Though we cannot know how lola Josefina felt, her reaction can also be read as shock at a price that likely renders the dish inaccessible to the communities who sought to share their food as a form of nourishment and support.

Dimayuga directly names three extremely prominent chefs as another implied claim of success despite two of the three chefs admitting to engaging in widespread abuse and harassment

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 43.

at their renowned restaurants.³⁴¹ I highlight Dimayuga's standards of values to showcase how the internalization of these formalized definitions of successful cooking is at odds with the community-oriented practices this project showcases. Dimayuga herself has been accused of facilitating, or at the least ignoring, a toxic and abusive workplace at the now-defunct New York hot spot Mission Chinese.³⁴² A 2018 class action lawsuit alleges racial discrimination and abysmal working conditions does not outright name Dimayuga, but a *New York Magazine* feature on the ordeal surmises, "All of the people who spoke with [us] say the abuse cannot be pinned to any single individual. Instead, they say, it's an example of the kind of toxic behavior that is common throughout the industry. 'The only reason we had to file a lawsuit was because there was no other mechanism for us to voice our concerns, and we didn't have any collective power,' says one of the plaintiffs."³⁴³ The spectacle of abuse and subsequent media coverage of Mission Chinese and across the food industry empowers the type of paranoid reading of cooking that I have rebuffed throughout this project, one that defines food space as a replication of hegemonic power structures, where malicious actors lie in wait to exploit those underneath them, capitalizing off their pain or cultural capital.³⁴⁴ Such an approach erases the legacy of love, joy, and communion within food spaces—particularly, as we have seen, diasporic women's spaces. Simultaneously, to only focus on Dimayuga's enactment of joyful food practices would erase the devastating consequences the internalization of toxic, formalized cooking practices has.

³⁴¹ Pete Wells, "From Toxic Chefs to Covid, Restaurant Workers Deserve Better," *The New York Times*, January 5, 2021, sec. Food, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/05/dining/restaurant-workers-ndas-david-chang.html>.

³⁴² Erika Adams, "Years-Long Mission Chinese Leadership Conflict Is Back in the Spotlight After New Allegations Surface," *Eater NY*, September 22, 2020, <https://ny.eater.com/2020/9/22/21445433/mission-chinese-danny-bowien-angela-dimayuga-controversy>.

³⁴³ Chris Crowley, "The Nightmare Inside Mission Chinese Food," *Grub Street*, October 22, 2020, <https://www.grubstreet.com/2020/10/inside-mission-chinese-food-report.html>.

³⁴⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 45.

Dimayuga discounts the type of private, informal culinary knowledge she learned in childhood, her hesitance reflecting an adherence to the type of paranoid authenticity standards that have historically governed diasporic women. She asks, “I could cook it from memory, but did I really know it?”³⁴⁵ What constitutes “knowing” a food if not experiencing and cooking it off memory alone? She later describes her lola’s informal practicing cooking in Manila, where she “set up long tables in the house and cooked big batches of adobo and sinigang for students from the nearby university,” but sees her own informal, experiential knowledge as insufficient.³⁴⁶ Despite these self-criticisms, Dimayuga still reifies the significance of women’s shared culinary practice, recalling, “At her funeral, every eulogy ended in an ode to her cooking and the bounty she’d fed us. When I cook, I like to think that she’s still with me, and that these flavors will last me all my life.”³⁴⁷

Though these women have made powerful steps to reclaim the hybridity of the diasporic experience in the space carved out by those before them, they still faced barriers reminiscent of those of their culinary predecessors. In conversation with Jaffrey, Krishna describes, “We received a response to a pitch that read, ‘We’ve told a lot of immigrant stories that are similar to this so we can’t cover your book.’”³⁴⁸ Jaffrey responds with a similar experience, “I rocked the boat by going on publishing Indian books when people said isn’t there enough? As if there are ten [Indian] dishes, we have them, what is there left?”³⁴⁹ While Jaffrey’s anecdote speaks to an oversimplification of Indian cuisine, Krishna’s reflects an oversimplification of the diasporic

³⁴⁵ Dimayuga, Mishan, and Lau, *Filipinx*, 10.

³⁴⁶ Dimayuga, Mishan, and Lau, 42.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ “Madhur Jaffrey, Priya Krishna & the Journey of Indian Food,” April 6, 2023, <https://www.lassiwithlavina.com/foodisphere/foodieheaven/madhur-jaffrey-priya-krishna-indian-food/html>.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

story. To appreciate the diversity of experiences within our diasporic communities, we must turn our focus inward to the legacies of joy and abundance woven and embedded in our histories.

“Suddenly made me all warm”: compassionate cooking & legacies of care

To close, I wish to shift focus to the legacy of women who have drawn from each other to create the spaces and experiences of food as sources of joy, of nourishment and community.

Diasporic women, more so than their nonimmigrant counterparts, have long utilized food as a means to literally feed their communities, but also as a powerful form of cultural agency and coping to reconfigure what cultural identity is in a foreign space. Moreover, the gendered nature of food confers a great deal of power to women in the reshaping and reproduction of culture.

Cooking then allows women to empower themselves and cultivate relationships by sharing their stories in a space “custom-built for an exchange of female dialogues.”³⁵⁰ Diasporic women accord each other with an authority, not one held to exacting ethnocultural standards, but one that prioritizes collective solidarity, shaping, and nourishment. Throughout generations, women have used cooking to foster a healing space. As Parveen observes in her study of British South Asian diasporic food practices, “When women come together sharing ideas on how to prepare dishes, they may disagree occasionally on how best to crush chilies or soften chick peas. However, what gives these dishes nostalgic value is that all of these women are connecting to a shared cultural memory that, through repetition, has become entrenched in the community. The feel of the different textures in their hands and the fact that they are creating something that will be used in most dishes add to this sense of communal solidarity. There is also a clear message that ‘many hands make light work’ and that women’s food production generates value through

³⁵⁰ Parveen, “Food to Remember,” 56.

collective endeavor. Implicit is the idea that everyone contributes a little but gains a lot. A feeling of nostalgia is evoked when recreating this dish in dias-pora; the blending of the ingredients is only possible because there is a blending of the women who gather together.”³⁵¹ Here, we see the reparative power of nostalgia as motivation to enact the female cooking practices of the homeland, while its subjective nature encourages new shared experiences reminiscent of the homeland. Intrinsic to these practices is their shared nature, that the solidarity in their creation is what makes them so powerful in reconfiguring the culture of the past to the present.

Each of the women discussed in this project, through no intention on my behalf, wrote of the women who shared and taught the culinary practices they have since adopted. Yang and Rulan, like Priya and Ritu Krishna, and Dimayuga’s mother and grandmother, cowrote their cookbook together—a tumultuous but connective process as Yang describes, “I began talking and Rulan started to write. That was three years ago. I don’t know how many scoldings and answering back and quarrels Rulan and I went through [...] You know how it is with modern daughters and mothers who think we are modern. And it is even more delicate with a mother and a daughter, both having had mixed experience of eating, cooking, speaking, and writing.”³⁵² Though Yang’s husband Yuanren rewrote majority of the text, he could not erase the shared practices during the writing process. The Krishnas too experienced this invaluable connection during the creation of their work, as Ritu recalls, “I think we’ve gotten closer because we can relate on this additional dimension that we couldn’t do before. And me being able to call you and say, hey, you know, chotu, I have these ingredients; what shall I make? One time I said, Priya, I’m hungry; let’s go get something to eat. And you said, Mom, I just cooked some zucchini sabzi

³⁵¹ Ibid, 54.

³⁵² Chao, *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, 3.

and some raita. It's in the fridge. And I said, what? So it just suddenly made me all warm and made me feel so good that, hey, I can go to my kid's place and eat what I eat at home.”³⁵³ Ritu highlights mutual compassion the transmission of culinary knowledge enables. This shared practice is not limited to a teacher-student dynamic, but rather is a reciprocal care shaped by all involved.

The intangible but lasting influence of this shared practice is exemplified in Chen's, Zauner's, and Dimayuga's writings of the food shared and taught by their late mothers and grandmothers. Though Joyce Chen had already passed by the time of its publication, her daughter Helen saw the writing of her 1994 cookbook as a collaboration between the two of them, writing, “Instead of having my mother beside me, I had her thoughts, her philosophy, her recipes, and her stories as my guide. [...]With my mother's recipes I truly feel that she has actually been with me, leading me through the maze of her recollection, stories, traditions, experiences and food that she once prepared.”³⁵⁴ Helen's introduction recalls Joyce Chen's opener to her 1962 cookbook that includes a note of gratitude to her mother who served “the best food,” at the dinner parties of Chen's youth and “never forgot to remind” Chen of the importance of cooking.³⁵⁵

Echoing Helen, Zauner's memoir centers around her food memories with her mother. More explicitly than Helen, Zauner names the cultural significance of her mother's food practices in her powerful question: “Am I even Korean anymore if there's no one left to call and

³⁵³ Anjali Sastry, Diba Mohtasham, and Julia Furlan, ““Where We Come From’: Priya And Ritu Krishna On Indian Cooking And Assimilation,” *It's Been a Minute*, June 22, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/16/1007140883/where-we-come-from-priya-and-ritu-krishna-on-indian-cooking-and-assimilation>.

³⁵⁴ Helen Chen, *Helen Chen's Chinese Home Cooking* (New York: Hearst Books, 1994), 1.

³⁵⁵ Chen, *Joyce Chen Cook Book*, 9.

ask which brand of seaweed we used to buy?”³⁵⁶ For Zauner, food becomes inextricably linked with her mother and thereby her Korean heritage. In cooking, she reclaims the memories of them both.

Dimayuga, too, reminisces on the enduring influence of her grandmother Josefina, amazed at her funeral to see the “sheer abundance and spread of people,” her grandmother fed, similarly describing, “When I cook, I like to think that she’s still with me.”³⁵⁷

For all these women, the shared practice of cooking is a means to reconnect and reclaim their relationships with their culture and the women they share it with. Dead or alive, near or far, food, in its encouragement of interaction and embodiment, also encourages what Eves calls “active remembrance,” contrasting the passive nature of static artifacts that bear the burden of memory work, allowing us to forget people, practices, and their significance.³⁵⁸

Communal cooking is rooted in diasporic women’s past and present, creating invaluable connections and cultures across the boundaries of country, language and life, a practice where women have always accorded each other a compassionate authority. Unmoored by external devaluations of communal care, diasporic women’s cooking is then a radical means to cultivate a shared identity through joyful solidarity and care in a world that seeks to eradicate them.

³⁵⁶ Zauner, *Crying in H Mart*, 1.

³⁵⁷ Dimayuga, Mishan, and Lau, *Filipinx*, 43.

³⁵⁸ Eves, “A Recipe for Remembrance,” 290.

Coda:

Recipe for a Potluck

Ingredients:

Ingredients in a dish, particularly one from the diaspora, hold both an obvious and implicit meaning in its creation. Simply put, no dish can be made without ingredients. But for diasporic cooks, specific ingredients, or lack thereof, can both source a sense of loss and of new identity. Ravia Parveen discusses the nostalgic power of ingredients in her study of British South Asian culinary practices, *Food to Remember*. Parveen explains, “The quest for legitimacy is sometimes marked by an almost obsessive desire to use identical tools and to repeat the same processes in diaspora. To preserve these procedures and to replicate them gives a sense of purpose and reality or authentic value that underpins the nostalgic value of the dish. Maintaining traditional practices perhaps activates a mental projection of the homeland in women's minds. This creates and sustains a nostalgic desire within the diasporic community which ripples down the generations.” For first generation cooks and those that follow—my friends and I included—there are engrained practices, ingredients and techniques that distinguish one version of a dish as correct and another as inauthentic. Though the substitution of ingredients, as is commonplace in diasporic kitchens, holds its own power in paving a new type of diasporic cuisine, there is still this “obsessive,” inexplicable pull to that exact ingredient, seasoning, utensil. For my peers and I, maybe it’s an attempt to stake our claim as true, authentic Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Ghanaian, and Kenyan children. A confirmation to ourselves and those who taught us that we have not yet wholly lost our cultures.

When I invited my friends to cook a meal from home, I offered to grab any ingredients they needed. Each of them sent a list of items, most with the preface, “I have some from home but need more,” or “Obviously they don’t have it at Hannaford.” I reassured them that they would not be bound by the aisles of the Asian, Mexican, and International sections— I planned to go to Sun Market in Portland and a cascade of requests appeared on my screen. With or without a car, venturing forty minutes to grocery shop exclusively between the hours of 9 to 5 is something of a challenge. But along with the harrumphs and quarter tank of gas, shopping in Portland brings an excursion with my friends, two hours dedicated to the pursuit of tangyuan, white sesame seeds, and that one brand of fish sauce. I like standing in the condiment aisle as they weigh which brand of vinegar to get: the yellow bottle is cheaper but her mom always uses the little orange one when she marinates chicken. We pick up shiny bags of treats and wave them around with equal parts wonder and thrill— ohmygodIhaven’t hadthesesinceIwassixIcannnever findthegreenappleflavor! On the drive back I turn down the radio as everyone delicately maneuvers a show-and-tell of their treasures in my backseat.

Even with milliliters of vinegar and barely-there spoonfuls of Laoganma in their jars, there is never hesitation in my friends’ hefty servings and liberal pours. I’d like to say that I always held the same type of effortless generosity, one that seems inherent in immigrant families who encourage, “Eat more! You look skinny!” Even though Asian aisles in supermarkets are now resplendent with nori and rice vinegar, I still harbor a sense of scarcity over these ingredients. I hide the ponzu my mother shipped me in two layers of bubble wrap and tea towel behind the produce drawer in the fridge. I keep my umeboshi seaweed in a bin under my bed. I’ve never been without food, but growing up in Shanghai, the foods I often associated with home—Gushers, instant mashed potatoes, Camu Camu Lemon candies—were hard to find, and if

you did spot them, they were priced to provoke an immediate shake of the head from whoever I accompanied grocery shopping. Kids hoarded hometown delights and traded with each other—Shin ramen packets for Rice Krispie Treats for chekkalu. Anything we couldn't get at Carrefour or at the fresh market became prized currency. But when I moved back to Minnesota, the staples I'd become accustomed to suddenly required special trips to the Asian market in St. Paul. I had to wait for my mom's biannual trips home to get the bottles of dashi I dumped on the freezer-burned udon and organic white people ramen from Whole Foods. All my favorite fruit was obscenely expensive and somehow both over and underripe.

My aunt, who lovingly fed and housed me during my notoriously easy and conflict free tween years, had a fridge comprised of yogurt, string cheese, a number of craft beers and sliced turkey. She likes what she likes, and her job at Children's prioritized portability and efficiency in food. And try as she might, my aunt's grab-and-go palette did little to quell my cravings for the gyoza, siu mai and array of meat filled wrappings I'd grown up eating. My older sister, who had fed me with fried rice after swim practice and microwave mochi to accompany our screening of *Bear Versus Wild*, was away at college. Five years my senior, she had moved back to the States three years earlier to live with my aunt and taken our late night meals with her. My mother was in Indonesia, my father in Shanghai, and any taste of home resided squarely in the international aisle at Target.

Natto became a special treat. Camu Camu Lemon candies reserved for high test scores then promptly sealed and placed back in the bottom drawer. I worked instead to channel my energy into embodying the normal, white, definitely-not-struggling-with-her-culture-shock American teen. I ate Auntie Anne's after hanging out at the mall—which was apparently a whole activity and not just an errand—Jimmy John's (gross) and frozen yogurt by the scale (though

always with mochi and popping boba on top). It was not the stinky lunchbox moment that I or so many of my friends had endured; once I moved to Minnesota, there was no stinky lunchbox to be packed. No natto or cured fish to alert my classmates of my foreignness with its odor. My stinky pantry drawer grew empty.

Like my reading of the incredible women in this project, I don't dwell on these challenges to draw out the narratives of pain and disassociation in the process of assimilation. I am not sure there is another way to convey the power and gratitude I have for the community and food practices I have now, than by illustrating the independent, often isolated eating I grew up with.

Preparing guests & menus:

To host a potluck, decide when and where you'll have it. Prep necessary materials: cutlery, drinks, ingredients, and your friends to make their dish on time and not forget even though you texted them three times to remind them. Decide what you'll make and acquire ingredients ideally more than half an hour before the potluck.

The first items are the simplest: Thursday evenings are ideal for most if they don't have class Friday, and those who do have either finished or given up on finishing assignments for whatever godforsaken class meets then. The evergreen argument always works best: you'll have to eat dinner at some point!

Getting friends who agree to make and bring a dish big enough to feed (at minimum) four people, on top of the countless other obligations swallowing them whole is somehow trickier than getting plates and napkins. There is no technique I can share to acquiring and convincing said friends, but like any good cook I can, at the very least, show you how I did it.

Drag one person on your first year floor to Portland with you every Friday to haul three bags of assorted groceries on the Metrobreez to your child-size dorm fridge at your alarmingly white school. Then forget about the tangyuan you bought together for Chinese New Year, get sent home for COVID, and talk about the forsaken tangyuan for two years until you are reunited and bizarrely fixated on cooking it together. Befriend your new friend's new roommate by inviting her over for dumplings and get her to cook too.

Live in a house of fourteen and be forced to eat alone in your room for two weeks, then just as the sound of your mouth chewing begins to drive you insane, order an obscene amount of Thai food, bake a large batch of cookies, and discuss the innumerable foods you crave/d in isolation. Make one of them your roommate, two your neighbors and the remaining several your very close friends so they have no choice but to cook.

Have a very patient older sibling who makes nice meals for you but then due to the age and location gaps between you, you fall out of touch with. Reconnect when your frontal lobe starts to firm up and have her teach you a lot of niche cooking knowledge and culinary podcast drama that you bond over so she lends you cookbooks that stack so high they begin to function as a nightstand.

If this sounds complicated, labor intensive, and somewhat bizarre that's because it is. Something I've learned is that though so many of these communal cooking practices seem natural and inherent to those enacting them, they require an incredible unseen amount of care and love. They grow and change constantly, not in spite of, but because of separation, dislocation and homemaking in unfamiliar places. My friends have varying experiences with the processes of dislocation and assimilation, and certainly Bowdoin affords a myriad of privileges our families

did not have access to in their journeys. But in our meals, our mutual care, we enact the very same practices of those before us, nourishing each other in more ways than one.

Choosing a dish:

I made onigiri, karaage, and curry. I don't know if I could remember the first time someone plopped the triangle rice ball that is onigiri into my mouth, but a photo of me at two years old gumming my way into one tells me it was pretty early. They are a crowdpleaser, as I found out, and by far the easiest dish to make of the night if you, like me, disappoint your grandmother and buy an onigiri mold from Daiso for \$1.75. In a memory that my inner Saxena-esque critic struggles to believe, I remember Baba trying to show me how to shape the onigiri *sans* mold. It was like shaping sticky wet sand—if you squeeze too tight, the rice sticks to you and falls apart, if you don't squeeze tight enough, the rice refuses to stick to itself and also falls apart. Of course, with years of practice and a deftness only a grandmother can wield, Baba quickly wet her hands to stop the sticking, squeezed the onigiri once each side, and revealed a perfectly intact rice ball. She let me remold the same quarter cup of rice into an off putting sickly paste while she finished the rest. I'd try again intermittently—once at the dining table to make something of the leftover rice on my plate, another in high school after getting a Costco pack of precooked sticky rice—but the difficulties I'd encountered the first time persisted.

When my sister and I drove to Chicago this past summer and I was tucked in the backseat, she asked me to fish out a tupperware of onigiri from a Target bag. Stacked neatly were unwrapped onigiri and three packs of nori to dress them in. I've certainly eaten my share of onigiri since my failed attempts in my childhood. But really only now am I realizing how long it has been since someone made me one. My sister packing them for our brief car ride, Baba

showing me all those years ago, and now I wet my palms and pressed them together, wrapping carefully for eager hands.

Serving suggestions:

When you make a complicated dish, the praise and satisfaction rings a little hollow. There is more pride in the completion of the task than in the shared consumption of the product. I don't say this to inverse the fine dining industry and tie simplicity to quality—I've enjoyed a great deal of labor intensive dishes that were extremely delicious. But there is a different feeling of fulfillment and joy that comes when people come together and enjoy your food for its entirety: the taste, the labor, the nutrition and warm fullness in their stomach; it is not so much a pride or deserved flattering, but a delighted contentment. Maybe if Santa Claus made all the toys himself, and the toys could both feed and delight children, that's how I'd describe cooking. My friends can do so more succinctly: "It just made me really happy to see people eating my food," and "It was so nice to eat a piece of home here, with my friends."

But recently I have encountered a much deeper joy watching my friends feed each other. I love watching them cry, "WAIT! NOT WITHOUT THE SAUCE!" before someone pops a naked dumpling in their mouth, and hearing them warn that "it's probably not going to work so just don't get excited," only to see a wry smile form when the dough finally rises to the top of the pot. I love them filming each other flipping a Spanish tortilla onto a plate and cheering when it remains intact. I love them making plates for each other, for me, asking what's in that, and you have to try this and Miki made that but wrap it in this first. I don't know if I can say what they mean to me any other way.

My universal serving suggestion, then: enough to serve all your friends thirds, enough for some to inevitably get dropped on the floor, enough to be maneuvered between two pieces of fry

bread and eaten as a sandwich by your most creative and efficient friend, enough for leftovers so you can invite everyone over again tomorrow.



Appendix

Love is real
I just had some for dessert

Love is real and I just had some for dessert.
I found it
Hiding
in the flaky center of my sister's onigiri.
Crumbled on top of a Pillsbury toaster strudel,
Spoonfed into Baba's apricot jam.
Thickened into the mashed potatoes we had for
Christmas,
crisped under melted cheese,
I found it
In the full plate my friends made me.
Tossed between
their hands,
dipping and wrapping and tearing off
pieces.
Greeting me gently,
saying sit here,
eat!

INGREDIENTS:

- tomato
- soy sauce
- egg
- ketchup
- green onion
- vegetable oil

→ first slice the tomato into bite size pieces



→ heat the oil in the pan on medium heat and stir fry the tomato until they're a bit browned / kind of mushy or soft



→ in the meantime beat the eggs (2 per tomato) and add a bit of ketchup & soy sauce & a pinch of salt.

• when tomatoes are soft, add the eggs in & stir them around until scrambled

→ chop some green onion then garnish!



then you are done.

Kenyan Beef Stew + Ugali

Ingredients

- Beef chunks/cubes 1 package
 - Tomatoes (cubed) $\frac{1}{2}$ cup
 - Onions (diced) $\frac{1}{2}$ cup
 - Garlic (diced) 1 tbsp =
 - Cilantro (finely chopped) $\frac{1}{8}$ cup
 - Carrots (wired) 1 cup
 - Royco seasoning mix (beef flav)
 - All purpose seasoning w/ salt
 - garlic powder (1 tbsp)
 - onion powder (1 tsp)
 - - bleack corn meal (mazarepa goya brand)
 - 1 lbs butter
 - salt (to taste)
- Beef Stew
- Ugali

1. Sauté onions & garlic in a large deep dishned pan with an oil of your choosing until they are translucent & brown.
2. Add beef chunks and cook until meat has browned.
3. Add tomatoes, garlic powder, onion powder and mix
4. ● Take a tbsp of roycos seasoning mix & add to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water and stir until fully combined - pour on top of beef & top of pot w/ $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of water.
5. Add carrots, cilantro, and all purpose seasoning (to taste) & leave for 20 min to cook.
6. Add two cups of water to a pot & bring it to a boil.

7. gently stir in masa harina flour until consistency of pot contents becomes thick like a cake.

8. Stir in butter and salt to taste — and flip pot upside down onto a plate and leave until ready to serve!


HAPPY COOKING & EATING!

Bánh lóc - Margot & ?

● Ingredients:

- Banana leaves
- Pork belly
- Pre-cooked & seasoned shrimp
- Tapioca dough
- Thinly sliced green onions
- Fish sauce
- Bird's eye chilis

● Steps:

- Cook onion, pork, fish sauce & shrimp until brown & caramelized.
- Season & remove from heat
- Place cooled meat filling into a small circle of dough. Roll into small  shapes.
- Wrap in banana leaves and steam for 10 until springy
- Eat!

Ingredients

1 onion

6 cloves of garlic

1 cup vegetable stock

1/2 cup of vodka 202

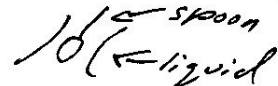
1 tomato

1/2 cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons of
gochugaru

1. Sauté garlic and onions until garlic is golden brown

2. Add tomato, ~~and~~ diced in thick pieces

3. Add vegetable broth and vodka. Simmer until ~~the~~ tomatoes
peak out of the liquid or until you can draw a spoon through
the sauce w/o the liquid coming together immediately.
Like 

4. Add heavy cream and simmer until desired thickness
5. Take off heat and stir in gochugaru.

Elizabeth's "Smack 'o mamma" Mac & Cheese

- - Cream cheese (1oz)

- Need at least 4-5 cheese

- 1 1/2 cups of milk

- Elbow mac and cheese 1 box - 1 1/2 box
for 4 people

- Black pepper

- - Paprika

- Onion powder

- Garlic Powder

- Salt

- Coriander

- - A little bit seriously of Cayenne powder

- A lil bit of milo

- Adobo

- A squeeze / pinch of lemon but optional

Cheeses (pick from list)

- Sharp Cheddar (key)
 - Cheddar Jack (key)
 - Swiss (key)
 - Cheddar (regular)
 - Mozzarella (key)
 - Parmesan (only if you want)
not key
- First you mix milk, 4 of these key spices in with boiled mac and cheese and cream cheese in pot for 5-10 minutes. Make it really creamy and then add cheeses in slowly (but not all of them). Then transfer ^(mixture) it into a tray/casserole dish and pile cheese in between and on top and bake for 30-35 minutes at 325°-375°.
- I forgot so just monitor the baked mac + cheese lol.

Corn Cake - Meg

200g sugar

1/2 c (120 ml) liquid fat

2 eggs (1 is fine)

1/2 c (120 ml) yogurt, butter milk, sour cream

1/4 tsp salt

1/4 tsp baking soda

1 tsp baking powder

80g cornmeal } can up this ratio

140g ap flour

350 for 40-60 min in loaf pan

"Risotto ai funghi"

* prep: heat up ~6 cups broth of choice, let simmer

- First cook your mushrooms & peas! (in a saucepan)

● Let garlic "bloom" in EVOO over high heat (🔥) 30 sec.

◦ add chopped onion (Salt too to let them sweat)

↳ cook ~3-5 min over med/med-high heat, until barely turned brown

◦ add mushroom & salt so it sweats (remove moisture)

↳ cook until smaller & just tender - SEASON TO:

- NOW THE "RISOTTO" part! : TASTE!

◦ add 1.5 cup arborio rice

◦ when {crackling}, add 1/2 cup dry white wine!

(save the rest of the bottle to enjoy while cooking)

● & eating with friends)

◦ when dry, add ladlefuls of broth to saucepan

one-by-one, waiting until all of the broth is absorbed before adding the next.

◦ when rice is cooked, add frozen peas so that they cook through

◦ for the ~finishing touch~, add half a stick of butter & as much parmesan cheese as you would like!



* sweet. pinot grigio & sauvignon blanc are great options!

West African Puff Puff Dessert

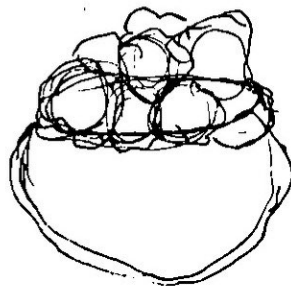
Ingredients:

- 2 cups of flour
- 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups of water
- 2 teaspoons of yeast
- 1 teaspoon nutmeg (optional)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon nutmeg salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup $\frac{3}{4}$ 1 teaspoon sugar for proofing the yeast
- oil for deep frying

Directions:

- ① Proof the yeast
- ② Make batter - combine wet + $\frac{3}{4}$ dry ingredients
- ③ Leave batter for about an hour / let rise
- ④ Fry in hot oil
- ⑤ SERVE! Hehe :)

It is a simple, delicious, sweet treat - similar to fried dough or funnel cake. Often served @ African weddings, parties, and other social gatherings.



Onigiri !

● Ingredients:

- Nori (individually wrapped)
- Short grain rice
- Furikake (optional)
- Sugar & salt
- Rice vinegar
- Mirin
- Sesame & chili oil

- Filling: Cured salmon in the Zip jars, unless Meg has eaten it all then sub what you like: umeboshi, bonito flakes, kawage.

Steps:

- Mix furikake, sugar, salt, mirin, sesame, $\frac{1}{2}$ vinegar w/ rice. Using wet hands and/or
- ~~Baran~~ wrap and/or a convenient mold, press rice into triangle form.
- Press a dime-ish amt of filling and rice on top. Eat w soy sauce & chili, wrap in nori!

Acknowledgments

I've been eagerly awaiting and dreading writing this for fear of forgetting the countless people who have supported me throughout this project but I suppose I have to start somewhere!

Thank you to all the women in and outside of this project who have taught and fed their communities long before and after me. This project is my small thanks to those who showed me love through their food.

Speaking of...thank you to my sister for every meal. For the cookies and the fried spring rolls and the onigiri in the back of the Rav on the drive to Chicago. You showed me how to cook and be a person which are maybe one in the same and I love you even when you leave all our food at work right before a snowstorm. To H for facetimeing me as I wrote my prospectus and on the drive to my defense and everything in between.

To my parents for shipping me ponzu across the Pacific, and my aunt for letting me hoard nori and osenbei in her pantry for four years. To Baba and Jiji for packing 7/11 bags unnaturally full of snacks since we were seven and I hope Dad has sent you an absurd amount of Snickerdoodle Lindt chocolates in return. Thank you Baba especially for showing me into your kitchen with patience.

I have boundless gratitude for my gracious advisor Belinda Kong, who helped me see food and food writing as worthy of recovery in the first place. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to reclaiming the power of communal care, for the shared snacks in your office and Mr. Tuna lunches, and for helping me find the throughlines of love and empowerment in each of these women's stories. This project would not have come to life without you. Writing this has been more meaningful to me than you know and I am so grateful to have done it with you in my corner. It got done!

To my wonderful committee members, John Kim and Guo Jue, whose thoughtful feedback and advice made this project immeasurably stronger and helped me do justice to these stories. Your support reaffirmed my conviction in the power of this project.

Thank you to my wonderful and compassionate friends who know exactly who they are. Thank you for encouraging me, for listening to my rants, for feeding me, indulging me, for never questioning the "why", for sitting in Kanbar for an hour and change, for the tulips and the ribs and the Ferrero Rochers and for being a constant reminder of the love that made me do this thing in the first place. I love you, by the way.

Itadakimasu!

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