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How Visual Narrative Can Elevate Immigrant Food

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How Visual Narrative Can Elevate Immigrant Food

by Elaine Chai



Après "Garçon d'honneur",
la nouvelle comédie culinaire
et sentimentale de Ang Lee

Salé Sucré



Figure 1 (Left)
Eat Drink Man Woman French Movie Poster, 1994.

How Visual Narrative Can Elevate Immigrant Food

by Elaine Chai

Throughout the history of immigration, visual cultural products have provided channels for them to express their voices in North America, helping audiences understand immigrant culture and situations to promote social equality. Photography and cookbooks, as traditional expressions of food art, provide insight into the vitality of food and the way people treat food.

Graphic Memoir and social engagement, as emerging categories, have emerged in the post-pandemic period. These diverse creative forms discuss individuals and food deep connections, such as interactions between people and community or a sense of belonging. For immigrant groups, Food is the quintessence of human existence, which is also political.

In the post-pandemic period, the resumption of social order and the emphasis on immigrant groups also need to be achieved through visual narratives. I want to acknowledge people the different approaches of visual storytelling that can benefit immigrant communities by speaking out about their situations.

“Home is where the heart is.”

-- Su Shi(Song Dynasty) , Claming the Wind & Waves.

Immigrant Food Culture and Art

Food has always been a staple to one's attachment to a place. Especially for the group of immigrants, they adapt to new environments in different stages and ages. When associated with ethnic mobilization theory, food can speak with pride in the family's immigrant heritage and their involvement in Western cultures. The movie *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994) is a story about a Taiwanese chef family in the 1990s that express the pursuit of love and life changed between the two generations. Director Ang Lee expresses the art of the Chinese food cooking process through the lens of the movie and uses family dinners every Sunday to tell the story of the unspoken love between the characters to emphasize its existence.¹ He made the point that generational conflict over

intimacy in traditional Confucian families. Close and hierarchical family relationships, and the modern Western-influenced concept of the individual are the movie's primary focus. As satisfying as food can be, the fullness we feel when watching is far richer and more complex than that offered by the most extravagant meal.²

Every family has its own recipes and special ways of sharing food. Food is not only creativity but also love and emotions that cannot be expressed in spoken words, especially for immigrants living in a strange land. Food is the quintessence of human existence. When migrants find themselves in unfamiliar sensory and cultural

1 *Eat Drink Man Woman*, directed by Ang Lee. (1994;), Film.

2 Hal Hinson, "Eat Drink Man Woman," *The Washington Post*, last modified August 19, 1994, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/style/longterm/movies/videos/eatdrinkman-womannrhinson_a019c2.htm.



Figure 2 (Left)

Every Sunday, the father Lung, who is a chef, will prepare a large table of delicious meals for his three daughters. The daughters and their partners would get together on time to spend this dinner time.

Figure 3 (Above)
Dinner Time,
Veri Lee, 2022.



environments, eating is an inevitable component of daily life to build up their community in a new place. In international North American cities with a long history of immigrants, food has transformed from being the mere sustenance that carries people through their day to something that encapsulates culture and community.

Toronto is one of the most diverse cities in North America, and has rich migrant food cultures. The society celebrating racial variety should look for the stories told from the perspective of immigrants who have lived and were raised between cultures. *AsialiciousTO 2022* was a pop-up exhibition, *Food and the City*, showcases the artworks created by the artists and aims to show the food cultures brought by immigrant people from their motherland to Toronto. Some local young illustrators highlighted the unique memory of their favorite foods living in Toronto and showed the attachment to their families of origin as a minority in Toronto.

As an international student who has lived both in Canada and the United States, I have known and worked with many different immigrants in the past several years. Their stories captivated me with their twists and turns, each leaving their hometown for different reasons and looking for a new path for their families, with stories of success and failure. In the summer vacation of 2018, I was 19 years old, and had just left home to come to Toronto for school for a year. Because I missed my hometown -- Yunnan's food so badly, I walked into a Yunnan restaurant in Chinatown and asked if they needed any help during the summertime. So I had my first special experience of working as a waitress in an immigrant restaurant. I found that recommending food of my hometown to customers and getting positive feedback from them really gave me a great sense of satisfaction. What I promoted was not just a dish, but also the honor of letting the whole world know my hometown cuisine, which greatly relieved my homesickness.

Figure 4 (Above)
Neon Buffet,
Anson Ng, 2022.



As a foodie, I also like to taste a lot of dishes from different immigrants, and I feel so lucky to live in a diverse place where I can appreciate these food cultures as the result of the accumulation of immigrants from worldwide countries and regions. In my graduate thesis art book *THE FOOD COURT: Chinese immigrant food stories in Toronto and St. Louis*, I created a series of illustrated interviews with five Chinese immigrant restaurants from Toronto and St. Louis. The book aims to make people understand the wisdom and creativity of immigrant groups, as well as their contribution to the local communities.³

One Taiwanese bakery in St. Louis in my book, The Foundry Bakery, is run by Ray and Leah. This couple bought their childhood memory of Taiwanese sweets to St. Louis. Ray said: "I think food is one of those things that really brings people together. It evokes a lot of nostalgia. I always remember that scene in *Ratatouille* where the critic takes a bite that brings back old memories from childhood. For example, the pastries are heavenly. Not just tasty, or buttery, or flaky, but good in the way things were good when you were a kid. When your grandparents brought a box of pastries home, and that first bite made you feel cared for and safe."⁴

Many ingredients are hard to find in the North America due to geographical resource limitations, such as spices, vegetables and some hot substitute fruits. But smart immigrants use local ingredients to change food recipes for local markets. However, many immigrants have successfully found a balance between food from home and local tastes as food ambassadors. Another example in my art book is the owner of Wonton King. Ling and her husband came to the US in the early immigrant wave, and opened one of the first Cantonese food restaurants in St. Louis. As the winner of the best restaurants in St. Louis in 2022, they have correctly found the elder local immigrants and foreigners as their target audiences, adjusted the recipes to suit local preferences, and at the same time insisted on using simple and fresh

ingredients. Ling claimed that to me: "When we get old, we prefer to return to a kind of simplicity. And it's not just because of cost. It's because they see food as part of their world rather than an opportunity to make high art. So right now, I'm trying to hold on to whatever reputation we've built, and risk just enough to get new fans while not losing a majority of the old ones."⁵

Food culture cannot easily be written down, but there are still some artworks standing up through in the visual history of immigration. The combination of images and texts often provide narratives in overlapping categories: personal, communal, collective, and institutional with material to reflect on the experiences and memories.⁶ The role of visual narratives for migrant communities can negotiate their presence in postindustrial societies where individuals and groups define their identities around lifestyle and art. There are food photography, cookbooks, graphic memoirs, and social engagement activities organized by the art institutions.

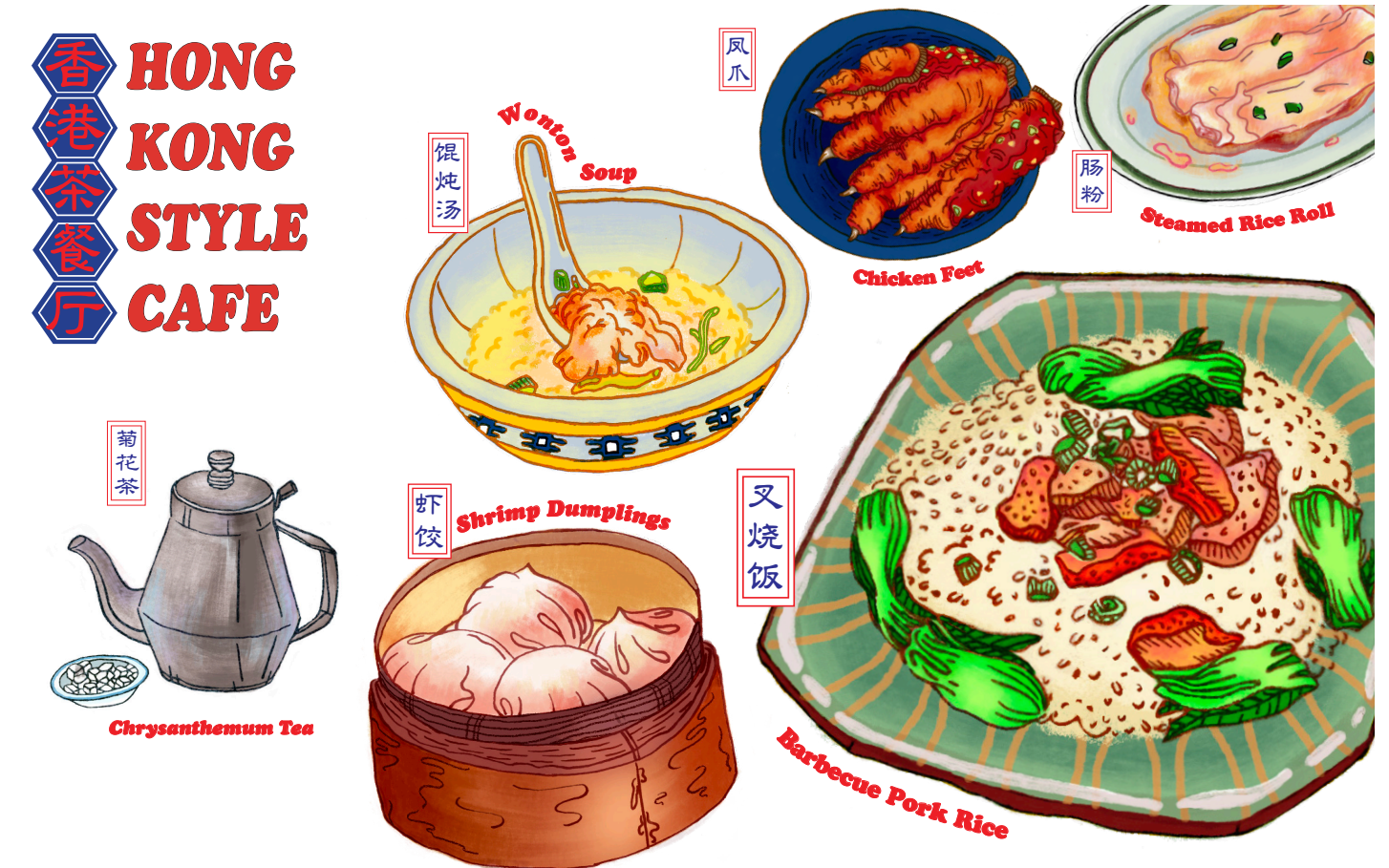
- 5 Elaine Chai, *THE FOOD COURT: Chinese Immigrant Food Stories in Toronto and St. Louis*, April 19, 2024.
- 6 Kennan Ferguson, "Intensifying Taste, Intensifying Identity: Collectivity through Community Cookbooks," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37, no. 3 (2012): 700, doi:10.1086/662697

Figure 4 (Right Top)
The Foundry Bakery Today's Menu, Elaine Chai, 2024.

The egg tart made by Ray and Leah has always been the most popular and preferred food among local communities. And the Taiwan style fruit teas are also made by organic and seasonal fruit.

Figure 5 (Right Below)
The Hong Kong Style Cafe Menu, Elaine Chai, 2024.

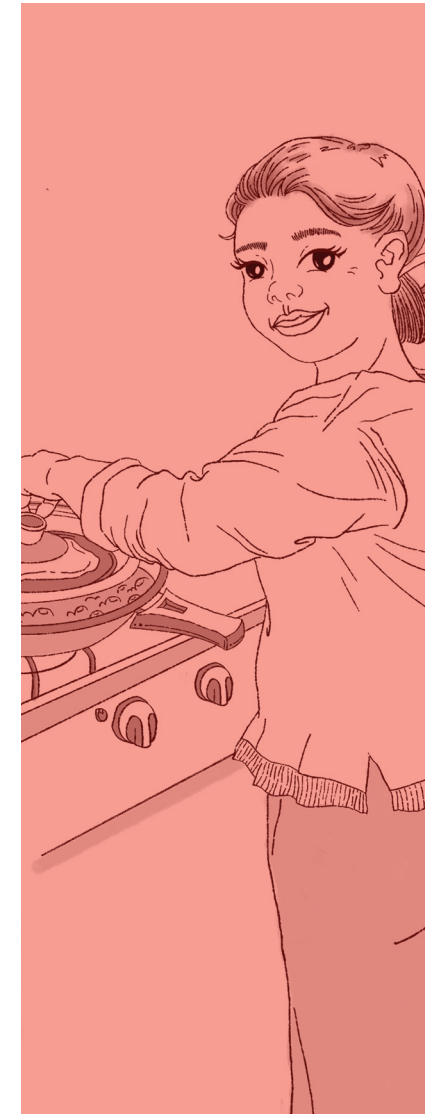
Although most Hong Kong-style tea restaurants have relatively similar dishes, which have hundreds of years of history, such as chicken feet, shrimp dumplings, etc., Wonton King has a group of loyal fans for sticking to tradition.



3 Elaine Chai, *THE FOOD COURT: Chinese Immigrant Food Stories in Toronto and St. Louis*, April 19, 2024.
 4 Bridget, "The Foundry Bakery: WashU Entrepreneurs Find the Sweet Spot," *The Source*, June 8, 2022, <https://source.wustl.edu/2022/02/the-foundry-bakery-washu-entrepreneurs-find-the-sweet-spot/>.



Figure 4 (Above and right)
The portraiture of immigrant restaurant owners, Elaine Chai, 2024.



Visual Narratives about Immigrant Food

01. Photography

Photography is a uniquely inclusive and accessible research method for understanding the social problem of food well-being and designing innovative food experiences.⁷ Excellent food photography not only plays a role in spreading regional culture, but also recommends updated and iterative healthy and sustainable eating habits to modern people. The photos intuitively show people's understanding of eating in different eras and regions, and the role food plays in daily life. For international food cooperation by global food agencies, the appearances of food and how it is appreciated changes when it spreads from country to country due to ingredient shortages, climate change and different tastes of local populations. This transformation is seen as part of globalization and cultural exchange, and immigrant foodways, as a typical representative, photography has witnessed how it rapidly adopts design thinking methods to develop and market innovative products and services.

In *The Mission Chinese Food Cookbook*, the famous chef and coordinator of the tremendously popular Mission Chinese Food restaurant Danny Bowien tells his story as an immigrant chef who redefined Chinese American cuisine. It blends both Eastern and Western two worlds and put innovation in the recipes. As an Asian boy adopted by an American family, his journey as a chef began from his childhood living in the Asian community in Oklahoma. Here he discovered that food was a bridge that connected different groups of Asian immigrants.⁸

Later, he went to New York and San Francisco to chase the chef dream. These two food capitals have different food cultures, and people also treat food differently. In fast-paced New York, they had the sharpest knives and tried to be the fastest and most efficient line cooks and

to execute the most difficult dishes possible, which doesn't seem to be what Danny wants. Then he moved to San Francisco to rediscover his roots. When he first tried to rent an old restaurant and renovate it into his own restaurant, the owner couple named Sue and Liang generously helped him. At that time, they were not optimistic about Danny's concept of opening a creative oriental restaurant for local people. As an older generation of immigrants who wanted stability, Sue and Liang just wanted to repeat the business model they had worked out. They confessed that they rented the house to Danny because this place was given to them by their boss to help them start a business, and now they want to help young people take risks.⁹

According to the conversations between Danny and Sue recorded in the book, immigrants of different generations have very different understandings of the dining environment. Traditional Chinese restaurants like bright lights, but many young people prefer to go to dimly lit bistros. Sue thought that Chinese people would complain that they couldn't see the food clearly or that the music was too loud in such a restaurant, but what he didn't expect was that Danny's approach would attract many second-generation immigrant children to bring their parents to dine, and of course, many foreigners. The series of photos about the Mission Chinese Food cuisine and restaurant environment in the book really catch people's eyes and make Danny's creativity shining. This bright food and vibey installation announce his success as a cook and cultural ambassador.¹⁰

⁹ Danny Bowien and Chris Ying, *The Mission Chinese Food Cookbook*, 41-42.

¹⁰ Danny Bowien and Chris Ying, *The Mission Chinese Food Cookbook*, 43.

⁷ Jane Emma, "Visualizing food: photography as a design thinking tool to generate innovative food experiences that improve food well-being," *European Journal of Marketing* 55, no. 9 (September 2021): xx, doi:10.1007/978-3-030-54296-2-1.

⁸ Danny Bowien and Chris Ying, *The Mission Chinese Food Cookbook* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 30-40.



Figure 6 (Above)
Mission Chinese Food restaurant
new installation, 2015.

The decoration style of this store incorporates Chinese elements from the 1990s, such as neon lights in the dimly lit room, blue and white porcelain patterned tiles and posters of the Reform and Opening Up propaganda (1970's China).

Another remarkable photographer is awarded by filming the immigrants in the restaurants. Hannah Yoon, a Canadian Korean who is passionate about Sociology and psychology, tries to evoke many themes relating to not only the immigrant experience, but also a human one. Such as childhood memories, the sacrifice for American dream, and the significant of food in one's culture and racial identity. *The Restaurant Kids* documents the children growing up in Chinese restaurants, which shows the real-life situations during the pandemic period of the restaurant kids as a second immigrant generation. This Chinese immigrant family comes from a small town in Pennsylvania. In Hannah's lens, the restaurant becomes a playground for the children after school, but once dinner rush comes, they turn into little helpers for their parents. In some photos, we can see in these 7- or 8-years old kid's eyes, they had a



Figure 7 (Above)
Chongqing Chicken Wings (La Zi Ji), 2015.

To highlight the spiciness of the chicken wings, this photo uses a bright and high-contrasted color palettes to increase visual appeal. The dish bowl is placed in a mess of red peppers, the contrast makes both of them stand out more.



Figure 8 (Above)
Danny Bowien's Mission Vegan, 2015.

This promotional photo of the restaurant combines Western photography concepts with Eastern plating art. The round plates are placed together in an orderly manner. That expresses the Mission Chinese Food restaurant aims to make modern and innovative Chinese food.

maturity and sophistication that did not suit their age.¹¹ Jennifer Lee points out *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles* (2008) that there are more Chinese restaurants in the United States than McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, Domino's and Pizza Hut combined. In turn, these environments play an extremely important role in the development of thousands of children. They grew up with their parents, working and playing in industrial kitchens and countertops, doing homework between seats while their parents bustled around them. These fragments of life truly record the people behind immigrant food. The ups and downs of their lives also make the food they cook more personal and styled, because cooking is done with heart and emotions of the chef, all the imperfection about their cooking or being a human being are worthy of being recorded and explored by photography.¹²

11 Jyni Ong, "Hannah Yoon's Restaurant Kids Documents the Children Growing Up in Chinese Restaurants," *It's Nice That*, last modified October 22, 2020, <https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/hannah-yoon-restaurant-kids-photography-221020>.

12 Jennifer B. Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures in the World of Chinese Food* (Cornwall: Twelve, 2008), 5.

Excellent food photography not only plays a role in spreading regional culture, but also recommends updated and iterative healthy and sustainable eating habits to modern people.

The photos intuitively show people's understanding of eating in different eras and regions, and the role food plays in daily life.



Figure 9 (Above)
The Restaurant Kids, Hannah Yoon, 2020.

The kids are playing in the front desk. The walls are covered with their paintings and handicrafts made in school, and the marble front desk becomes a bunker for their "air gun battles."



Figure 10 (Above)
The Restaurant Kids, Hannah Yoon, 2020.

The Chinese girl picking up a phone when her parents are busy in the kitchen. She frequently asked customers what meals they wanted, how many pairs of chopsticks and take-out boxes they needed.

02. Cookbooks

The introduction to a community cookbook presented by the National Council of Negro Women (1991, iii) states: “Through choosing this cookbook, you are part in centuries of history, tradition, and culture. You are perpetuating an important legacy in the fabric of African American life”. In the essay *Intensifying Taste, Intensifying Identity: Collectivity through Community Cookbooks*, Kennan Ferguson claims that changing places and times can give new meanings of food culture through recipes, since food can be reinvented through participation and exclusion, adoption and creation. A community cookbook is a collection of recipes provided by individuals, often named in the recipes themselves as the authors of those dishes, which serves the need to support the community. So cookbooks reinforce people’s sense of belonging and community by politicizing food, communalizing cooking, and literalizing identity through recipes (Ferguson, 700).¹³

In the book *World of the East Vegetarian Cooking* (1981), author Madhur Jaffrey includes delight and nourishing vegetarian recipes from different central and east Asian countries in the 20th century. The book spreads the idea of health while celebrating diverse Asian foodways. Although Jaffrey includes personal preferences, each ingredient and dish is relevant to the structure of the meal and to all the elements that make up the culinary culture. In the General Information section, Jaffrey lists ingredients grown almost exclusively on Asian soil, describing their origins and history with the linear food illustrations nearby. There are bunch of ingredient spot illustrations, step-by-step recipe infographic and whole-page portraiture illustration to give a comprehensive reading experience to learn Asian food culture and cooking process.

Historically, Cookbooks have often been defined by patriarchal family ideologies and as relatively anti-feminist. But in fact, many community recipes highly celebrate women’s contributions and creativity to

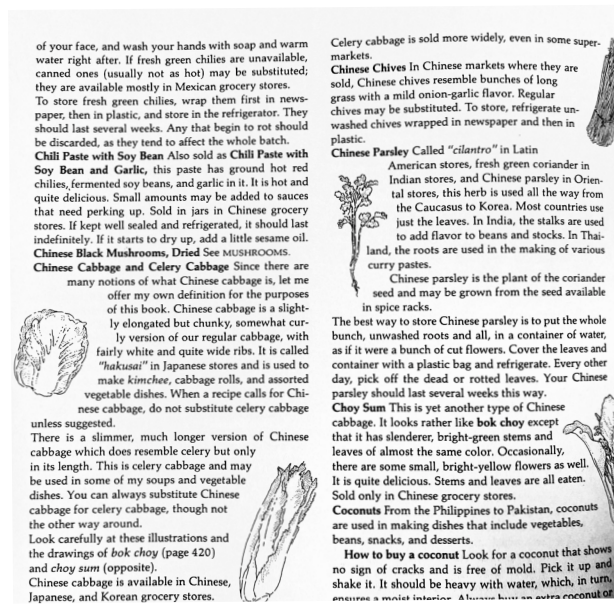


Figure 11 (Above)
The Asian vegetable vocabulary, *World of the East Vegetarian Cooking*, p422.

It includes the series of introductions and usages of different Chinese vegetables, such as Chinese cabbage, Celery cabbage, Chinese chives, Chinese parsley, and Choy Sum. Jaffrey points out the minor differences between them. For example, celery cabbage is a longer version of Chinese cabbage. Plus, Chinese parsley has different usage in different cultures, which also can be found as cilantro in Latin American stores. Most countries use just the leaves, but in India, the stalks are used to add flavor to beans and stocks.

¹³ Kennan Ferguson, “Intensifying Taste, Intensifying Identity: Collectivity through Community Cookbooks,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37, no. 3 (2012): 700, doi:10.1086/662697.

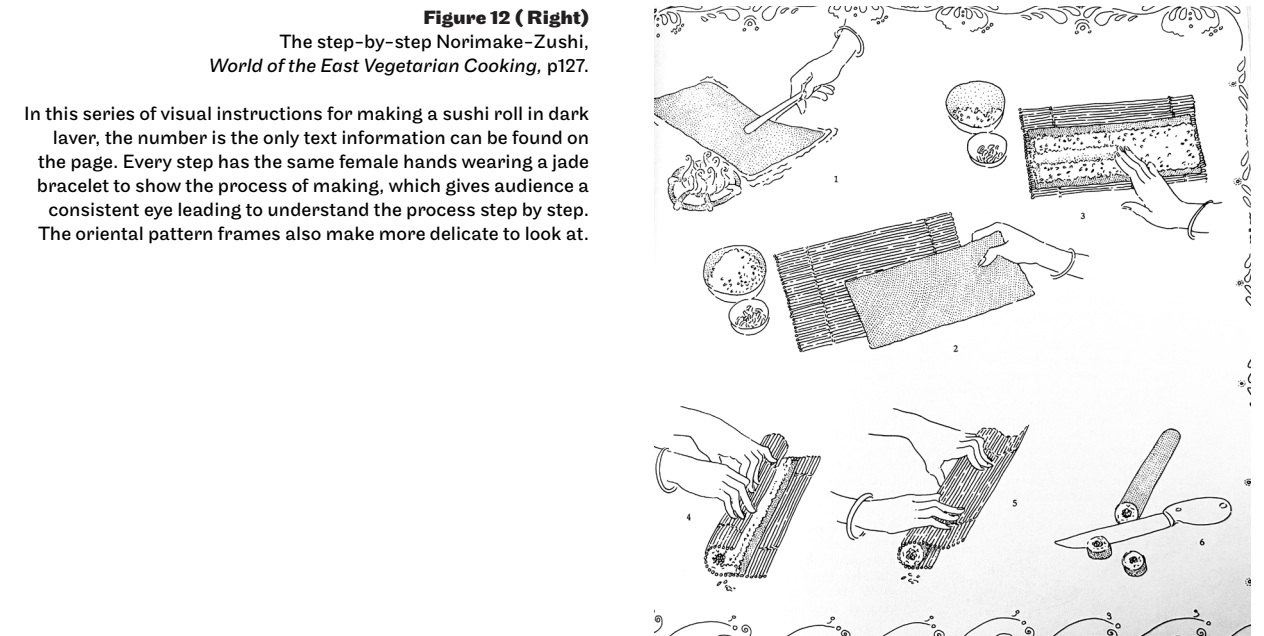


Figure 12 (Right)
The step-by-step Norimake-Zushi, *World of the East Vegetarian Cooking*, p127.

In this series of visual instructions for making a sushi roll in dark laver, the number is the only text information can be found on the page. Every step has the same female hands wearing a jade bracelet to show the process of making, which gives audience a consistent eye leading to understand the process step by step. The oriental pattern frames also make more delicate to look at.



Figure 13 (Left)
Full-paged portraiture drawing, *World of the East Vegetarian Cooking*, p160.

A Japanese housewife is making soy milk to warm herself in a snowy winter. This powerful moment brings the readers into the old time of Japan and Japanese traditional food making. The detailed food container and kimono with Japanese patterns contribute to the aesthetic value of this cookbook.

their own culture. The recipes' craftsmanship testifies to women's collective capacity to create worlds and demonstrates that the kitchen is a politics where women come together to create, feed, and nurture the next generation. The books themselves do not suggest women's dissatisfaction with their position in society, but engage them in a resistance that is different from the dominant collective memory. Mainstream culture should document the labor and creativity of women who modeled for readers the virtues of caregiving, domesticity, and even obedience.¹⁴

The *Joyce Chen Cook Book* (1962) collects personal knowledge of Chinese cooking, Chen had a rich experience, including fourteen years' research work in American family kitchen and six years teaching American housewives and four years managing a Chinese restaurant in Cambridge, Massachusetts.¹⁵ She

14 Ferguson, "Intensifying Taste, Intensifying Identity," 696.

15 Joyce Chen, *Joyce Chen Cook Book* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 1962).

Chinese Seasonings and Spices



CHINESE SEASONING AND SPICES INTRODUCED AND recommended in this chapter are limited to those used in recipes in this book.

In China people prefer to use lard in cooking as the Europeans prefer butter. Lard gives rich flavor and clear color. That is the reason lard is very expensive in China. I was so surprised to know lard was so inexpensive here, when I came to this country. Nowadays more and more doctors are proving that animal fat is not healthy to eat. So I gave up lard in home cooking as well as at the restaurant. When I see so many doctors eating at our restaurant, especially when Dr. Paul Dudley White comes, I am encouraged to improve my dishes and my recipes, not just in flavor but also in nutrition.

Many people ask me about what is the right kind of oil to cook with. It is true that the right kind of oil is very important in a good dish. There are three kinds of vegetable oils for cooking in China:

Peanut oil: It is the next best to lard, tastes richer than other kinds of vegetable oil. Very good for deep frying. It turns cloudy in very cold temperature but does not change in flavor.

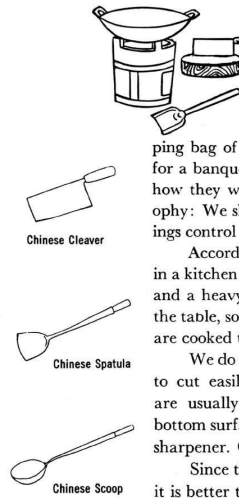
Soy bean oil: It is not so popular as peanut oil. Recently in

COOKING OIL

油

Figure 15 (Above) Chinese Seasonings and Spices, The Joyce Chen Cook Book, p13.

Utensils for Chinese Cooking



I STRONGLY FEEL THAT IT IS NOT NECESSARY to get special utensils just for cooking Chinese dishes. It is fun and easier to use Chinese made tools on sale at Chinese groceries, but they are not absolutely necessary. I have often brought only a shopping bag of ingredients to cook at my American friends' homes for a banquet party of ten or more. We tested my recipes to see how they would work out in an American kitchen. My philosophy: We should control the surroundings, not let the surroundings control us. Of course, fine utensils make cooking easier.

According to my experience, three items are very important in a kitchen: a large sharp knife, a good hardwood cutting board, and a heavy smooth skillet. The Chinese do not have knives on the table, so most foods are cut in bite size, or large pieces of meat are cooked tender enough to pick up by chopsticks.

We do need a good sharp chef's knife and good cutting board to cut easily and neatly in preparation. Stainless steel knives are usually too flexible and difficult to sharpen. Any rough bottom surface of earthenware can be used as an emergency knife sharpener. Chinese cleavers may scare you but are very handy.

Since the Chinese dishes are usually cooked by quick stirring, it is better to use a large, heavy skillet or frying pan which holds the heat. If the skillet is also smooth and seasoned by use, less food will stick.

24

Figure 14 (Above) Utensils of Chinese Cooking, The Joyce Chen Cook Book, p24.

The illustrations show the special utensils for cooking Chinese dishes, which designed and adopted to Chinese food culture, which usually cooked by quick stirring. Chen recommends these three necessary items in the American kitchen for cooking Chinese food, which are a large sharp knife, a good hardwood cutting board, and a heavy smooth skillet.

introduces Chinese seasonings and spices which have their own unique and wonderful uses, such as wine, ginger root, star anise, bean paste, Chinese pepper corn and so on, and describes in a few short sentences the role they can play in the home kitchen. These descriptions are filled with Chen's personal insights and preferences for Chinese food, paired with small spot illustrations that allow the viewer to visualize the process and tools she uses to cook, thus creating a more closed understanding of Chinese food and the Chinese immigrant home kitchen, especially for housewives.

Therefore, the *Joyce Chen Cookbook* is political; it is intimately tied to a way of being that determines its value. The domestic kitchen interacts with larger commercial, economic, bureaucratic and judicial forces, and the concept of the individual owner gradually disappears, replaced by collective interpretations that

refract and reinforce the group's identity, allowing the language of community recipes to constantly reaffirm the group's values. In an ethnically diverse country, recipes evolve as language, policy, location and law change, and create special emotional bonds between immigrant groups.¹⁶

World of the East Vegetarian Cooking and *The Joyce Chen Cookbook* represented cookbooks are mostly presented and disseminated in black and white printing in the 20th century. I found that Linear spot illustrations with organic brush strokes had been used mostly in the printing industry. Nowadays, there are more colorful cookbooks amazes people both in the content clarity and aesthetic value. They have no solid format but more free visual flow to make the audience easier to follow.

16 Ferguson, "Intensifying Taste, Intensifying Identity," 708.

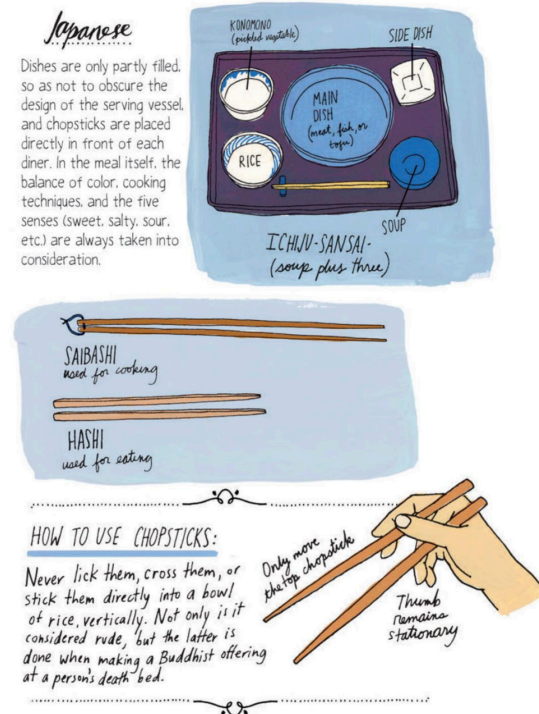


Figure 16 (Above) Food Anatomy, Julia Rothman, 2016.



Figure 17 (Above) Egg Cake Recipe, Shark Orange, 2022.

03. Graphic Memoirs

While community cookbooks represent collective memories within a class, graphic memoirs tell the story of the different life experiences of the same group. Food is as exclusive a human behavior as language. Lévi-Strauss has pointed out that while cooking, it has never been sufficiently emphasized, cooking is with language a truly universal form of human activity: if there is no society without a language, nor is there any which does not cook in some manner at least some of its food.¹⁷ Food is a cultural phenomenon that can be mutually explored and understood because it is influenced not only by tradition but also by new phenomena resulting from the integration of elements of the external environment.

For immigrants, the individual's understanding and use of food becomes complex, and they have to think about issues such as where to get ingredients, how to store and process them, and how to eat them. Each of these is enriched by the contributions of others from different or the same background. At the same time, the immigrant's process of adapting to the new environment is constructed through interactions with family, friends, neighbors, and social groups. As immigrants collectively expand and reshape their culinary capacities to adapt to their new environment, the memories and experiences associated with motherland also influence their relationships with each other.

Since the last century, New York's food culture has been enriched by different immigrants. They bring hometown cultures to this city and create new possibilities with local ingredients, which becomes a priority to New Yorkers with a clear set of choices of dishes and traditions that somewhere distill the culinary essence of a place. Certain places are identified as the crucible expression of migrant culinary traditions, such as Little Italy, Chinatown, Jackson Heights and Washington Heights. So, New York's food culture may be difficult to define, but the interviews/personal memoirs of New York chefs may provide a glimpse of the tip of the iceberg of New York food.

In the book *Food and the City*, Ina Yalof collects "the other restaurants" who run restaurants for minority communities without enough exposure to the wide audience, such as small business, line cooks, street vendors, and purveyors. These conversations happened randomly. The adaption process to the new land is shared, influenced, and constructed through interactions within the intimate circles of family, friends, neighbors, coworkers and the immediate social sphere. At the beginning of each memoir, there is a linear doodle showing the restaurant's memory points, such as light signs, signature dishes, and well-designed dining cars. These restaurants decorate the streets as a cultural icon, bringing new vitality to those small corners of New York. Collecting these personal and communal experiences in a city can really give a vivid impression of the city, and constitutive of their emergence.

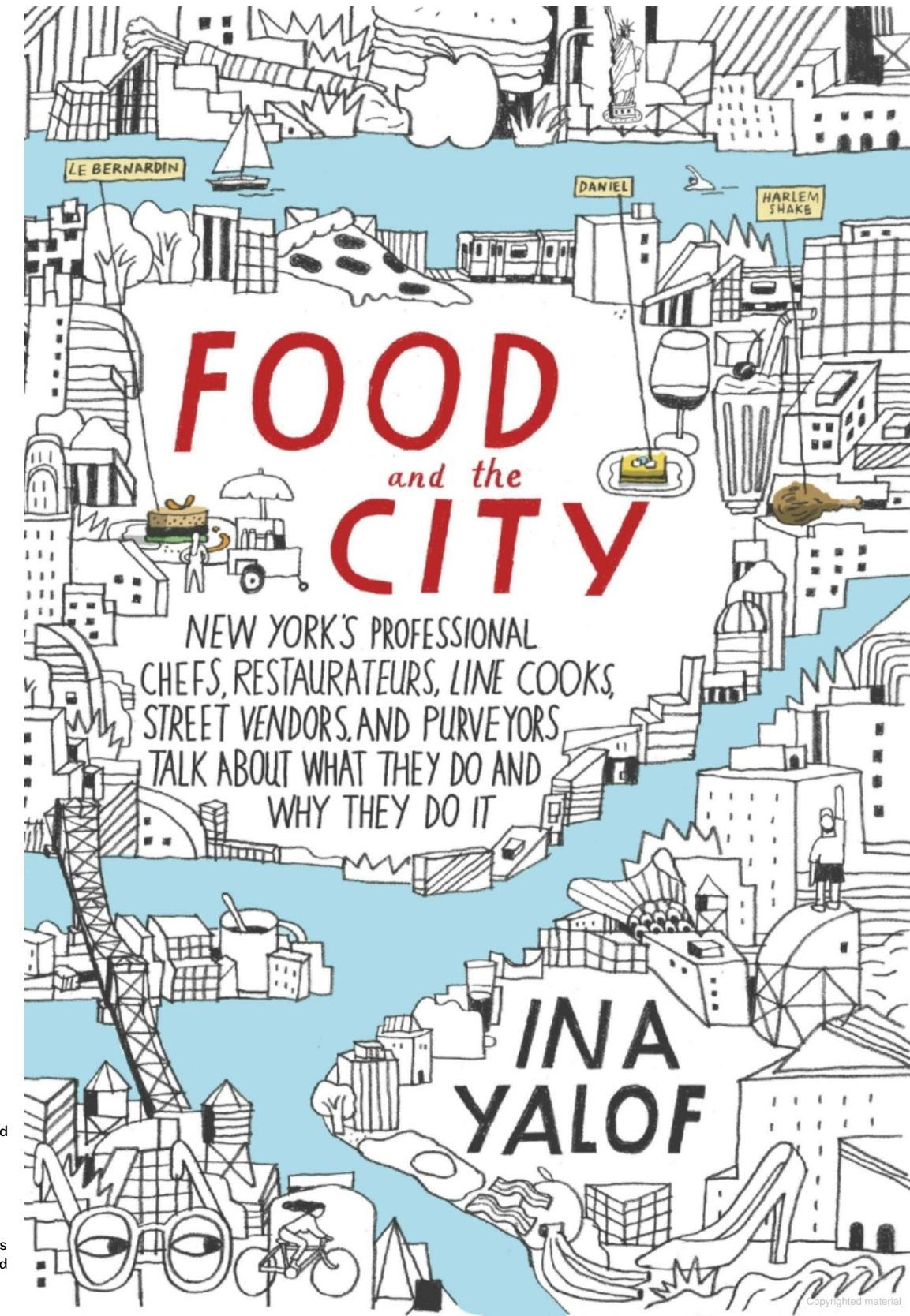


Figure 18 (Right)
Cover Illustration of *Food and the City*, Ina Yalof, 2016.

The cover illustration is a big food map of Manhattan, different locations are marked by the famous street foods. When the creator introduce geography to feature the city landscape, people will notice the significance of local food for different areas. That makes marginalized food cultures and the groups of people behind visible to a wider audience.

17 Fabio Parasecoli, "Food, Identity, and Cultural Reproduction in Immigrant Communities," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (2014): 416, doi:10.1353/sor.2014.0015.

As the only visual element in a heavy-texted book, the illustrations play a very important role as visual guides. Most food-related book illustrations choose a more organic and linear style to evoke the impression of real food, because food is very personal, and while many chefs try to meet the expectation that certain dishes will be similar to the original, they may also prefer to be strongly involved in a variety of fusion dishes, festivals, and regional events that are filled with a wide variety of food. Food culture connects sharers and recognizes eaters as individuals or collectives. At the same time, food also excludes those who do not participate in it, viewing them as outsiders. Thus the rediscovery, preservation, and promotion of traditional foods and ways of eating, as well as the construction of historical narratives around food, positively contribute to the formation of a sense of shared experience among immigrants.

Over the past few years, travel inconveniences caused by Covid-19 have left more people stranded away from home for longer than expected. AURA, a Thai illustrator, is one of them. She stayed in Northern Thailand for a year and was unable to return to her hometown, so she observed and recorded a lot of local food in Northern Thailand. She connected the food with local landmarks and re-interpreted it from a personal perspective. AURA used collage elements to compose the picture, and paired with her handwritten text, the whole book looks very artistic and interesting to read. Therefore, food can really be the clue to connect people life experience and environment, and documenting food is essential to record human culture.

Lauren Clark

SUCRE MORT PRALINES



She's been a New Yorker for almost a decade, but she still sports a soft, unmistakable Louisiana accent. She's in her early thirties. Tall, with dark hair and eyes. She currently works as an editor and website manager for a war photography project called Nuba Reports, which covers the civil war in the Sudan. "Working from home makes life easy, although it can be somewhat of a vampire existence. Still, it's helpful because it frees me up to make my pralines." At first she appears shy, but in a short time her face and hands come alive as she reflects on her hometown.

Figure 19 (Above)
Sucre Mort Pralines, Food and the City, 2016.

I am personally more interested in desserts and street food, so I will be attracted firstly when looking at the candy illustration. This story introduced the New Orleans-style traditional pralines and the chef Lauren Clark from Louisiana. She talks about the story when Hurricane Katrina hit her place, people are afraid to lose their homes. One woman found her recipes in a tattered, water-stained form, she was so relieved to not lose her memory of home and food making.



Figure. 20-21 (Above)
Good Days: The Color of the North, AURA, 2023.

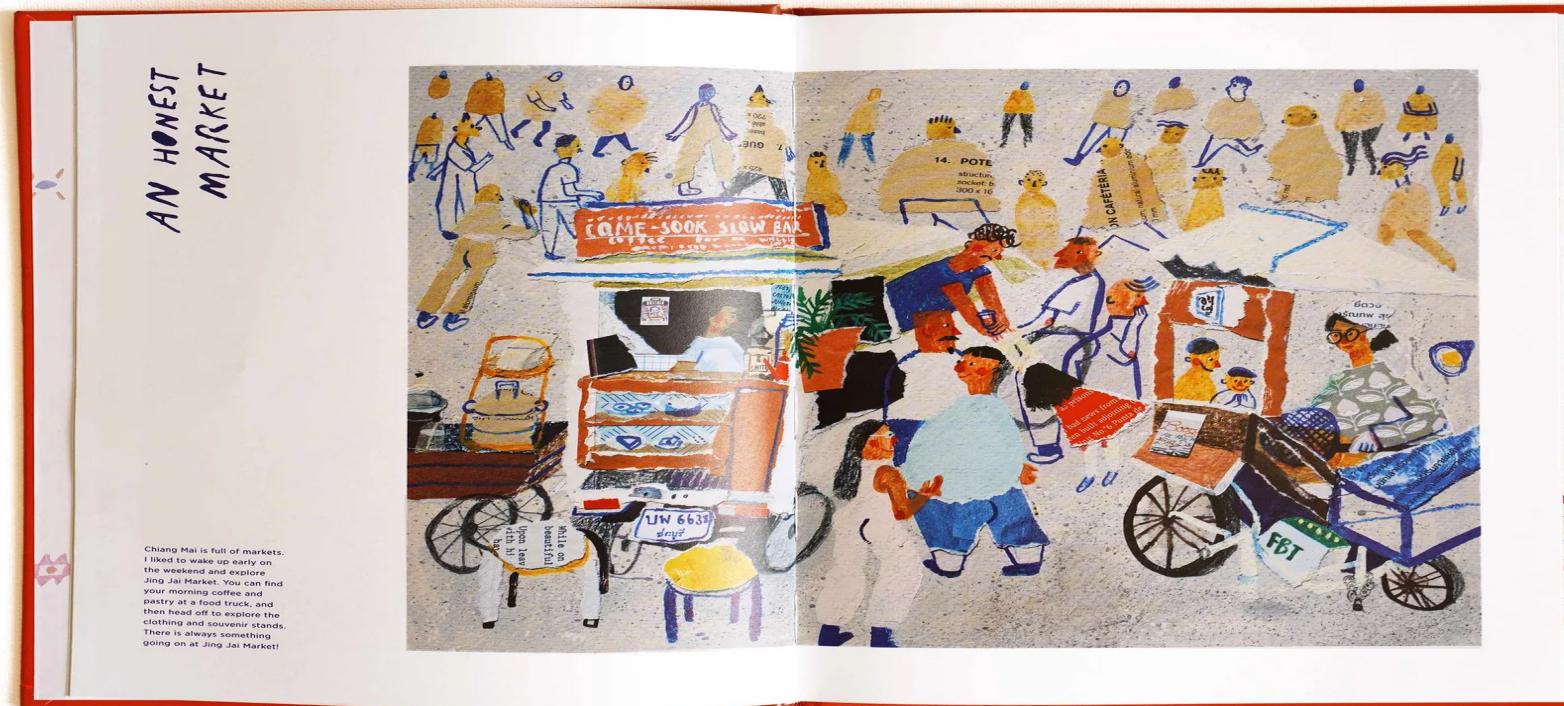




Figure 22 (Above)
I Still Believe In Our City Wall Illustration, MK Luff, 2021.

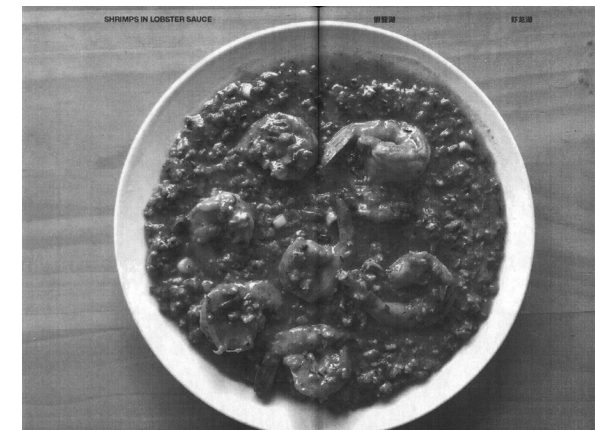


Figure. 22

Shrimps in lobster sauce Recipe, 2022.

The black-and-white images take away the original brightness of Chinese food, making it unappetizing. The dish look more like the representatives of Chinese ethnic group. Obviously, The author wants the audience to pay more attention to the text content rather than photography.



Figure. 23-24

The structural design of half recipe and half propaganda runs through the entire zine. Large, bold fonts are used for recipes and slogans, and the black background makes the text clear.



Figure. 24

The explosive font design exaggerates the mood of protest and expresses the author's hope that Asian people and Black people can unite to fight against racial discrimination, support and speak out for each other, and fight for the rights and respect of all ethnic minorities.

04. Social Engagements

In the Spring of 2021, brightly colored posters, murals and displays appeared at bus stops, in subway stations and on landmark buildings across New York City. A project "I Still Believe in This City" commissioned by the City's Commission on Human Rights shows many Asian artistic responses to the rise in anti-Asian hate since the COVID-19 pandemic period. When human rights are challenged by the chaotic social order in a special period, and in the face of nonsense hate, immigrants from different communities will express their voices through different channels.

For example, in order to remind people of the contributions of Asian immigrants to the United States, and to support the Black Lives Matter movement, the independent publisher God Of Cookery produced and self-published a zine *Chinese Protest Recipe* to express their resistance on racism and whiteness supremacy. The zine included four classical American Chinese style dishes, including Shrimps in Lobster Sauce, F.T.P Fried Rice, Anti-Racist A-Choy, Beef Ho Fun. In each recipe, there are the origin of the recipes, the step-by-step cooking process, the editor's personal cooking tips and the editor's firm opposition to racism and stereotypes. As he wrote, "I hope this recipe challenges everyone's notions of what is considered normal food vs. food that is 'exotic' or 'weird' ".¹⁸

18 The God Of Cookery, "Shrimps In Lobster Sauce," *Chinese Protest Recipes*, November/December 9, 2020.

Various forms of artistic expression are widely used to tell the stories of immigrant groups, most stories with pain and anger were transformed into “a new pathway for peace and gentleness, and a new way forward” by art.¹⁹ During the Pandemic, all restaurants had to change to food delivery. It was a no-contact door drop-off and very different from sharing a meal with people in the same space. There is a series of interactions happening in the food industry that as patrons surged back, a dearth of workers kept things off-balance. And as the worker shortage eased, inflation thwarted many diners from pre-pandemic levels of patronage. The situation among the Asian immigrant community got even worse because of the lack of social resources and Asian hate. Otherwise, The zero-touch policy and increasing delivery needs made many restaurants shift their physical store to online ordering. The dine-in business is going to be radically smaller than it was, which more focuses on takeout orders. The development of technology and social media has been the basis of competition.²⁰

People realized that even food speaks for itself, but the conversation we were having when we were first putting it together had a lot to do with the absence of food in institutional art spaces. In the public art field, food has played an important role in how contemporary artists have pursued food and cooking in their practices. For example, Red Flower Collective was born during COVID-19, out of the desire to eat with people, to counter the taboo of being together and sharing home space, and to assert that food is a primary issue of public concern.

They are drawn to the idea of a porous home, one that is malleable based on both individual and collective needs. The provision of a meal and the meal as an event invites a group of people unfamiliar with one another to assemble. Red Flower Collective aims to break the transactional nature of food consumption and instead encourage communal eating. The nature of care is at the center of the collective’s project. The experimental art project “Eating an Archive” in New York City in 2022 tried to prove the truth that the body is an archive of the gestures and smells of the kitchen, and the hand reveals its memory. The tongue always commands the hand when cooking. Chefs with different backgrounds will treat the process of cooking and sharing food differently, communal eating will remind people the diverse of eating habits all over the world.²¹

²¹ “Meal #7: Eating an Archive · Asia Art Archive in America,” Asia Art Archive in America, n.d.<https://www.aaa-a.org/programs/meal-7-eating-an-archive>.



Figure. 25 (Below)

Eating an Archive Activity in New York City, 2022.

Conclusion

I found that different forms of artistic expression tell the story of food from different angles. Photography and film convey the original beauty of food to the audience through the lens, allowing people to feel the desire and humanity brought by food in our society. Often a simple lens can show the vitality of food and make people salivate. Cookbooks record the usages of food from both personal and normative perspectives and are always full of exploration. Recipes from different periods and regions reflect the food culture of the society at that time. Culture, because how people treat food reflects the economic, political and even spiritual world of that era.

Graphic Memoir is an emerging category that can emphasize textual narratives of food stories, paired with spot illustrations as eye-leading. The memoir gives more space to discuss deeper human emotions and connections, such as mental health, self-care, ethnic heritage, etc. Immigrants need the ability to perceive phenomena in a new environment as signs, i.e. to understand the connection between parents, partially hidden and absent phenomena. Sometimes, immigrants feel the less coherence, although individuals and communities can engage in interactions effectively, the meanings and behaviors they produce can never be stable, revealing themselves as variable, contested, ever-changing, and incomplete. We often hear stories about finally slowly healing with the help of art and self-care, guiding her to a deeper understanding of her heritage and herself.

Social engagements always surprise people. With the different focuses of the organizers, audiences from different social groups are brought together to express their voices. This can make the public more involved in understanding social justice and making the food culture of all ethnic groups visible. For the upcoming challenges after the pandemic for the group of immigrants, immigrant small businesses need to get exposed more to visual narratives to show an understanding of diverse foodways.

¹⁹ “An Illustration of Resilience and Hope, in the Face of Anti-Asian Hate,” UN News, last modified September 15, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1098842>.

²⁰ “How the Pandemic altered the restaurant industry forever,” *The Washington Post*, last modified December 26, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/12/26/restaurant-industry-post-pandemic/>.

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