



Inauthentic Kitchen

*Frank Mohr Institute
Interrelational Art Practices
Shuhan Liu*

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Research Questions

Is where we're from defined by where we were born? Where we live? Or where we grew up? Is it our looks? Our language? The way we act? Or how we think? Maybe even our food habits?

Am I more Westernized now than I was two years ago? Do I belong here? Where do I belong? Can I belong nowhere at all? Could I erase political borders?

...Actually, forget these abstract questions. Let's talk about something truly serious and important: What should I cook for dinner tonight?

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I.Introduction

After I moved to Netherlands, things around me changed dramatically compared with my previous life. In these two years, I realised that a lot of things inside me are following to change with the environment around me. From time to time I hear different sounds coming from within. The cries of a mother tongue discarded inside, the knock on the door of an unfamiliar culture, the shattering of previous worldview, the breath of different cultures in the same frequency, the growing of a new value. In the end, looking back all the way, they became invaluable experiences for me as Asian establishing identity and pursuing belonging in the European society.

Gradually, I have come to realise that identity is a very personal thing since I moved to Netherlands. It depends on where you were born, which generation you grew up in, which regime you were influenced by, which culture you were moulded in, which language you listen to for information, which language you speak to express yourself, and so on. How different cultural and social factors overlap and merge within me, how they repel and exclude each other, and finally how each individual shatters and reshapes it all. This is a very complex issue, but it is often passed over with a very simple and short question 'Where are you from?'

We all make sense of our lives through a combination of narratives, a blurred system of thought. It stimulates reactions, determines values, judgements, opinions and behaviours. I want to break down narrow definitions of space, in this project a region is not necessarily a politically or geographically defined space, but a specific space of shared stories and experiences, a state of mind, not the first place on a map. Finding our place therefore means finding our place in the story, and the fluctuation of the characters in the image, expressing themselves freely and freely in the kitchen, is the long, poetic road I have travelled to reach my current location.

I invade the participants' intimate space, the kitchen, revealing different aspects about their private cooking habits in order to explore the new personal memories it is building. Cooking stories propel us into a complex process of how we construct, and understand, ourselves individually and collectively.



A Life

27.05.2024

Congratulated for Teppanyaki Beef

There is a guest who often comes to eat in the restaurant that I am doing my part time job there, he comes alone every time and chooses to sit at a small table near the bar, short, always with a smile at the door, look a little cute, but never take the initiative to speak. He would just point to the serial number on the menu and show it to me, and without fail, he would always order a number 17 beef teppanyaki (with fried noodles) and a bottle of soft drink. I still don't know what country he is from and what language he speaks.

The first time he came here, I went up to him to help him clean up the dishes and asked him, 'Is everything alright?' He suddenly looked at me with stars in his eyes and said 'Yes! Congratulations!' with a thumbs up.

When he was checking out, I asked him, 'Is the order correct?' He replied with the same enthusiastic 'Yeah! Congratulations!', again with a thumbs up.

I knew he was not an English speaker and must have mistaken congratulations for something like amazing. But I didn't want to correct him because it didn't prevent him from communicating and I could understand him perfectly.

After that I started to somehow expect him to come to the restaurant every day and offer to serve him. After all it had been a long time since anything congratulatory had happened in my life. Every time he walked through the door, I thought, 'Even if it's an ordinary day, it's still a day to be congratulated!' (Here's a secret, sometimes if I want to hear more congratulations, I'll even purposely go up to him more often to care for him.)

Like the Eurasian fusion dish in my hand, I can't quite explain where it came from. Neither of us speaks native Dutch, and in broken English we simultaneously wrote a story about beefsteak in our lives. This simple and existential fluctuation of life stories happens all the time. It breaks all forms of geography and space, connecting us only with emotions and food.

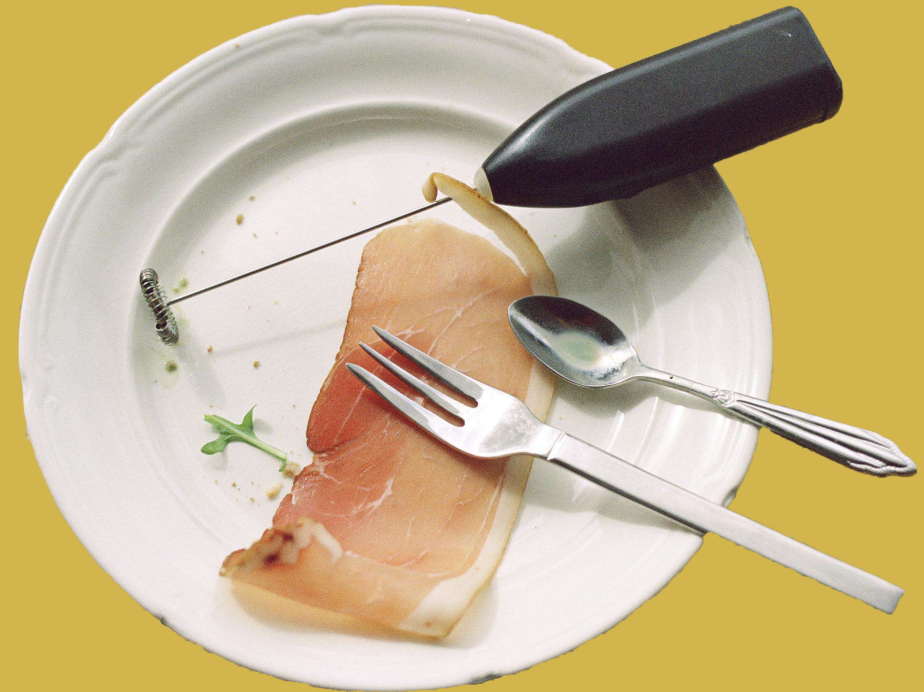
23.09.2024

A year ago today I came here and moved into a lottery single student studio. Everyone around me was telling me that I was very lucky to find a lottery studio before landing this country. But I didn't like it there. The kitchen was in the same space as my bed, and I would often get a sudden urge and passion to cook for long hours late at night. So the bed would often smell like the kitchen. The same smell that I would enjoy in the kitchen would make me gag when I smelled it in the bedroom. All I can do is change my bedding regularly. Still, I sometimes felt like I was sleeping with beef in a brine or chicken marinated in a lunchbox.

Finally, I couldn't resist the depression of a winter with little sunlight from the north-facing windows. In the Netherlands, where housing is in short supply, I left the lottery studio that so many people envied and wanted to move into.

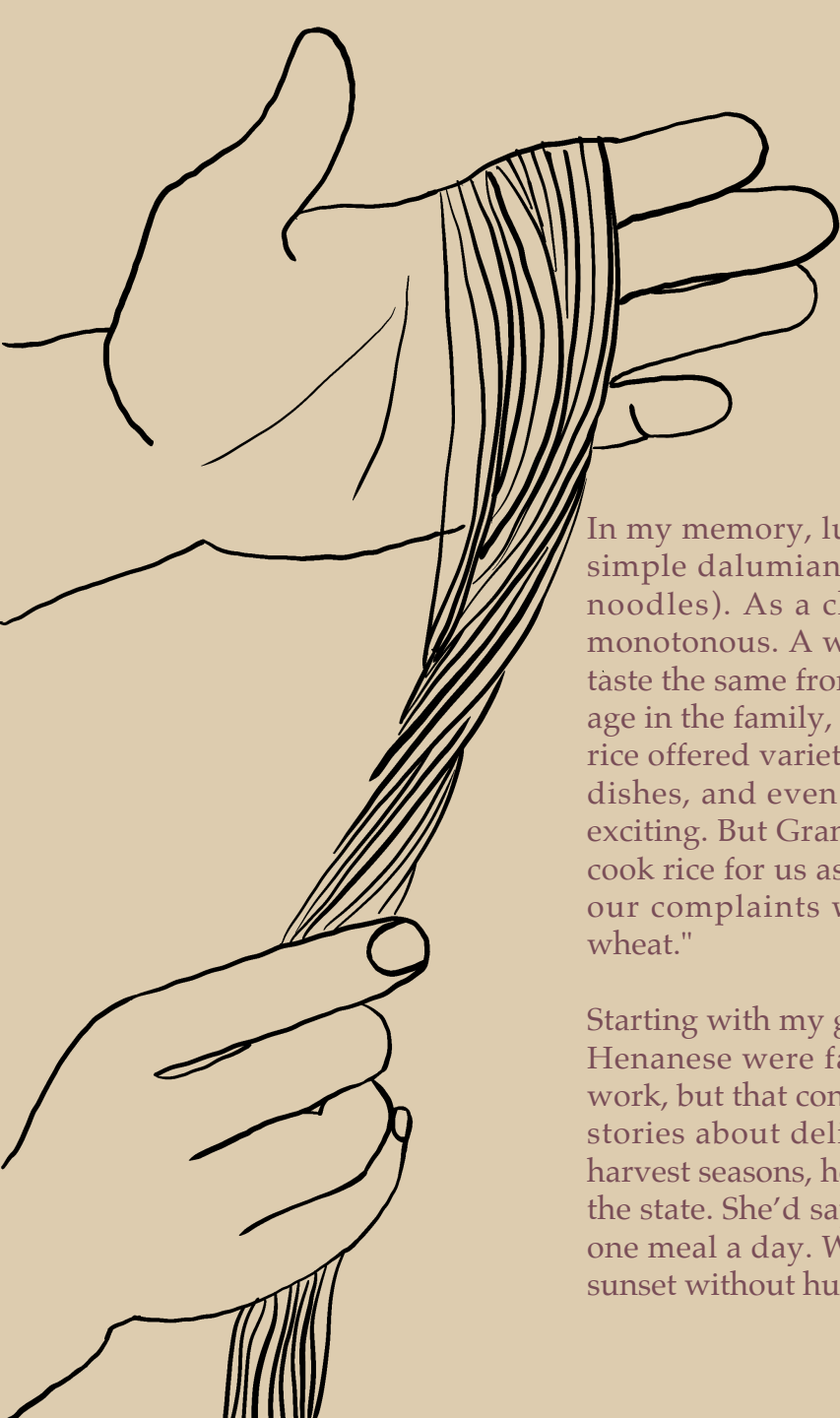
In May this year, I started living with people from different countries. I noticed that we always bought the same ingredients from the supermarket every day. Sometimes we even confuse who got the potatoes and who got the onions. But we never mixed up everyone's dishes. After everyone finished using the kitchen, the food was always in a different form, and the home always smelled of different food. Later, I could learn who was cooking without even leaving my room. For me, being in the Netherlands, it was sometimes quite exotic. I suddenly realised that the smell of food after cooking had become a status symbol for my flatmates and me.

The Magic Kitchen



The process of each person's cooking can explain a lot. How we cook, i.e. how we treat food, is related to the land we grew up on, the education we received, the society we are in, the outlook we formed, and even the experiences of our families of origin. The integration in cooking will be the integration of each of our individual experiences. Food, as an important medium connecting people to the land, has taught me that: what we eat makes us who we are.



A black and white line drawing showing two hands pulling a long, thin, and slightly twisted noodle strand. The top hand is open, with fingers spread, holding the top of the noodle. The bottom hand is also open, with fingers spread, holding the bottom of the noodle. The noodle is being pulled taut between the two hands, creating a sense of tension and length.

Henan Hand-Pulled Noodles

In my memory, lunch at home was always noodles—usually simple dalumian (noodles with gravy) or lumian (steamed noodles). As a child, I found my grandmother's cooking monotonous. A whole pot of noodles tossed together would taste the same from the first bite to the last. Like most kids my age in the family, I preferred stir-fried dishes with rice. To me, rice offered variety—every spoonful could pair with different dishes, and even the ratio of rice to side dishes kept things exciting. But Grandma would only spare one weekend day to cook rice for us as a "reward." Most of the time, she'd dismiss our complaints with, "We Central Plains folk grew up on wheat."

Starting with my generation and tracing back three more, most Henanese were farmers. My mother once helped with farm work, but that connection ended with me. Still, I often hear her stories about delivering grain taxes with my uncle. During harvest seasons, he'd always prioritize giving the best wheat to the state. She'd say, "With noodles, I only needed to bring him one meal a day. Wheat sticks to your ribs—he could work till sunset without hunger. Rice? You'd be starving in no time."

Ingredients:

- Flour 200g
- Salt 2g
- Sunflower oil
- A bowl of cold water

Instructions:

- Add 2g of salt to 200g of flour.
- Slowly add cold water while stirring with chopsticks until no dry flour remains and a crumbly dough forms.
- Knead by hand into a smooth dough.
- Cover and let rest for 20 minutes.
- Knead briefly, then roll out into two small round discs using a rolling pin.
- Brush with oil and let rest for another 30 minutes.
- Cut the dough into even strips.
- Stretch each strip and drop it into boiling water.
- After cooking, transfer to cold water (this makes the noodles more chewy).

Halal-Certified Spaghetti

My small hometown had a thriving Hui Muslim community known for their entrepreneurial spirit. In our tiny county, eight out of ten breakfast shops were run by Muslim families. My grandmother used to say, 'Those who can run breakfast shops will succeed at anything - they are smart and they know the meaning of hard work.' As a child, I often visited their neighborhood to enjoy stir-fried hand-pulled noodles (chao latiao). After moving to the Netherlands, I often craved those familiar flavors.

Once, I told an Iranian friend, 'I really love your chao latiao.' She replied, 'We don't eat that - noodles aren't our staple food. We typically eat bread or rice.'

I've tried making hand-pulled noodles twice, though each attempt kept me in the kitchen for at least two hours. (I must say, Henanese seem to have a genetic predisposition for working with wheat dough. Even with limited experience, I'm surprisingly good at kneading.) During a recent pantry cleanup, I substituted spaghetti for handmade noodles. The al dente pasta paired perfectly with Northwestern Chinese-style toppings, creating an unexpectedly delightful fusion.



Halal-Certified Spaghetti

Ingredients:

- Beef
- Garlic
- Onion
- Bell peppers
- Chili peppers
- Spaghetti

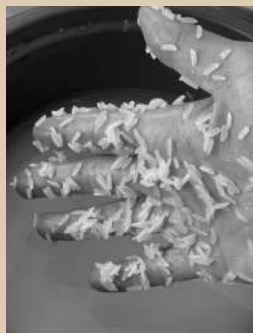
Instructions:

- Marinate the beef for 15 minutes.
- Cook the pasta and set it aside.
- Heat the pan with cold oil, quickly stir-fry the beef, then remove it.
- Add minced garlic and fermented bean paste, stir-fry until fragrant.
- Add onions, chili peppers, and bell peppers then pour in sauces.
- Add the beef back in and stir-fry.
- Finally, mix in the cooked pasta.

Rice Soup

Ingredients:

- Rice 100g
- Water 500g



Instructions:

- Boil the water.
- Rinse the rice thoroughly, then put it into the pot for 12 minutes.

On a Thursday evening in November 2023, I sat in a riverside bar clutching my stomach from cramps. My companions were deep in discussion about cinematic art, but I found myself simmering with inexplicable irritation. I knew my mood was unfairly affecting others, but after enduring campus talk about Western contemporary art all day, I simply couldn't stomach more artistic discourse.

Admittedly, I'd developed a visceral aversion to "art" during that period, and in rebellion, had zealously embraced my part-time job as a waiter. Those hours spent serving plates gave me rare moments of grounding. That night, I fantasized about kicking both the beers and pretentious art talk into the river and going home - I mean, the real home.

When I woke at midnight, the stabbing pain still had me hunched over. Moving like a sleepwalker, I flicked on the kitchen light and made myself a bowl of rice soup. My aunt had always reminded me during our calls: "Remember to make rice soup at night." They claimed it soothed the stomach - I have to mention that Henan's daily mandatory supper of steamed buns, dishes, and soup. Yet I'd never once followed this advice.

I knew this bowl wouldn't cure my gastritis. But my emotional self needed it desperately. As I sipped the warm, bland liquid, I booked a ticket back to China.

Lost Sense of Identity

One day at work, a customer with Asian features asked me, "What language do you speak?" Without thinking, I automatically chose between Dutch and English. "I speak English," I replied. He simply said, "Another beer, please." But as he was paying, I overheard him speaking Mandarin.

On my way home, I couldn't stop asking myself: Why had I immediately dismissed my mother tongue as an option?

I'm desperate to seize every opportunity in this unfamiliar country. I've realized that rather than introducing where I truly come from, I instinctively default to describing my social attributes: an English speaker striving to become a Dutch speaker, a student visa holder, an art student, a filmmaker. The question of my actual origins always seems to slip away.

Similar scenarios unfold every day. Propelled by external circumstances, I find myself repeatedly asking: Who am I? Why did I just act that way? What caused this? Where am I headed? Yet it is precisely through this process that I continuously fragment, lose my sense of identity, then rediscover my direction and steadfastly piece the broken parts back together, forging a more resilient sense of self.

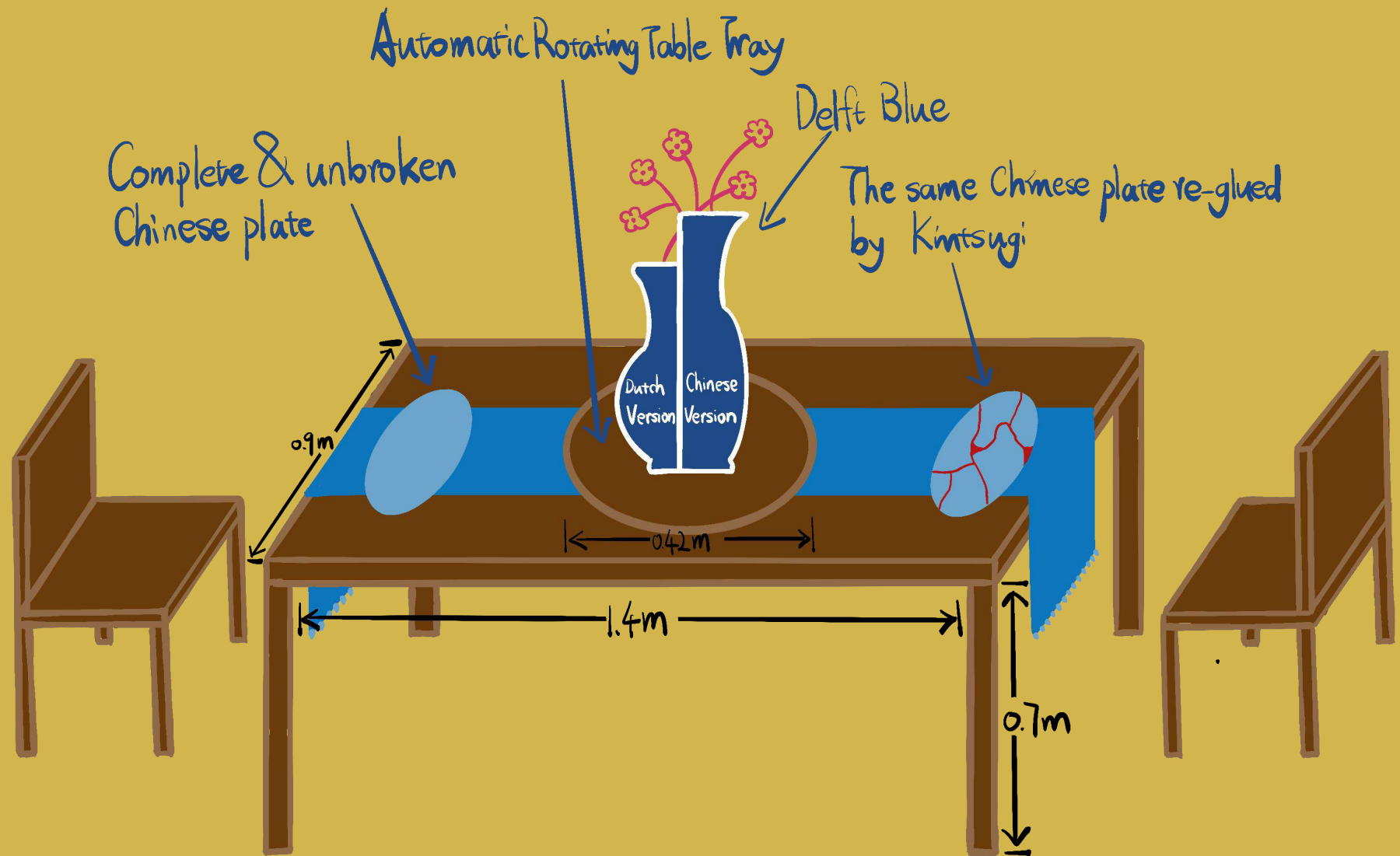
Who Am I?

To represent this two-year journey of identity exploration, I designed a dining table installation.



I chose a Western-style rectangular dining table as the foundation, symbolizing the microcosm of Dutch society. Upon reflection, my inquiry into identity began the day I landed in the Netherlands two years ago. I believe this is inevitably linked to the individualism emphasized in Western societies. When those around me prioritize discussions of "I" over "we," external forces compel me to focus more on individual identity. To visualize this process, I selected a traditional Western long table with distinct seating arrangements at either end, representing an individual's defined position within a collective—symbolizing the "host seat" (me, the individual).

At both ends of the table, I placed classic Chinese porcelain plates. One end features an intact, unbroken plate, while the other displays a plate that has been broken and repaired using the kintsugi technique. (Kintsugi (Japanese: 金継ぎ) is a traditional restoration method that mends broken pottery or porcelain with lacquer mixed with gold, silver, or platinum powder, giving the object new life and beauty.) Kintsugi celebrates the "beauty of imperfection," treating breakage as part of an object's history—where repair does not conceal but elevates its flaws. This mirrors the dynamic, ever-fluctuating process of identity formation. The act of repairing it myself further underscores the value of fragmentation and restoration, serving as a metaphor for life's scars and resilience, continually shaping a new and unique sense of self. From one end of the table to the other, this externalizes the subtle shifts within me. Though I may appear unchanged, and the plate may look the same, the internal transformation never ceases.



At the exact center of the table, I placed a Chinese-style circular turntable, highlighting the underlying influence of collectivism in my upbringing. In ancient China, extended families lived together, and dining around a round table symbolized "reunion" (团圆), particularly during festivals like the Lunar New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival. The round table became a tangible emblem of familial unity. Unlike the Western long table's emphasis on a "host seat," the round table deliberately minimizes hierarchy (though elders often sit facing the door in practice), reflecting the collectivist tendencies of agrarian societies. The rotating turntable ensures equidistant access to dishes for all diners, further flattening distinctions in status.

Above the rotating turntable, I placed a hybrid East-West vase, which spins continuously with the mechanism. This represents the two-year dialogue between the external Western context and my internal Eastern framework—an ongoing interplay where voices overlap, sometimes one persuading the other, sometimes clashing fiercely, and at other times merging anew. Not a single moment of stillness exists. The fresh flowers in the vase symbolize the growth emerging from these exchanges, conflicts, and fusions. What I seek to explore is precisely this personal journey of individual identity as it interacts with and reflects upon the collective.









Ana Núñez Rodríguez

Indeed, many artists explore similar themes—for instance, research-based photographer Ana Núñez Rodríguez, who lives and works between Spain and Colombia, delves into identity politics in her work *Cooking Potato Stories*. By weaving her own experiences of navigating dual cultural realities with other voices, she employs imagery to forge new forms of collaboration and knowledge production. Her practice unveils forgotten colonial legacies while interrogating how collective memory and cultural heritage shape identity.

What astonishes me is her expertise in using the potato as a lens for longitudinal study. Through excavating the intertwined histories of potatoes and colonization, she prompts viewers to contemplate the nuanced relationship between personal identity and social collectives.



Photo by Ana Núñez Rodríguez



Photo by Ana Núñez Rodríguez

Rodríguez prioritizes establishing authoritative historical genealogies of potatoes and colonialism. My approach, conversely, zooms in on the subtle tremors of individuals within vast cultural/political/mnemonic contexts. This narrative style is more personal—even constrained by individual perspectives. In today's historical torrent, maintaining objectivity and openness proves challenging for humans. As the artist behind this project, I neither possess such capacity nor demand it from participants.

Within participants' personal dialogues (including my internal ones), sensitive political stances, raw emotions, or uncomfortable encounters inevitably surface. Yet this is where cooking works its magic: it transmutes prickly, charged questions into softer, fluid ones, offering answers through the alchemy of food.

"Paradoxically, the more the world becomes unified, the more people cling to what divides them. The more we are able to communicate with others across the globe, the more we insist on speaking our own language, celebrating our own rituals, reinforcing our own tribal loyalties. It is as if modernity, by threatening to erase all differences, has triggered a desperate immune response—a feverish assertion of singularity."

-----Amin Maalouf.

<In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong>

The TOWERING Walls

I once read a magazine (Michael Guo & Kechun Qin, *the magazine no.1 The Lost Society*, 2021) essay where the author described an interesting scene: When their Ukrainian friend proudly introduced borscht, their Russian friend grew visibly restless. What began as a casual conversation about authenticity soon escalated into a heated debate over national ownership of this beetroot-based soup. Both parties marshaled historical evidence—from the Ukrainian town of Borshchiv (the soup's alleged namesake) to Russia's widespread claim of borscht as its most iconic dish. Their argument grew so intense it seemed neither would relent until their respective governments officially declared a "National Borscht Day."

This culinary nationalism mirrors how immigrant communities often become boxed into food-based stereotypes. Just as Eastern Europeans might be reduced to debates over soup origins, Asian diaspora identities frequently get flattened into restaurant tropes—the wok-wielding chef, the takeout box, the perpetual foreigner serving "exotic" cuisine. These edible identities build walls as tangible as any border, trapping individuals between authentic representation and marketable caricature.

The Impressing of Walls Food- Defined Identity



The only borscht I've ever known is the Shanghai version. It wasn't until later that I discovered its origins as an adaptation of Russian borscht. The Chinese name "Luósòng" (罗宋) is actually old Shanghainese phonetic transliteration of "Russian." Following the 1917 October Revolution, waves of Russian refugees poured into Shanghai. According to Shanghai Municipal Archives, between 1918-1931, exactly 14,836 Russian émigrés arrived, settling predominantly in the French Concession.

(Shanghai Municipal Archives, *Chronicles of the Shanghai concessions*, 2001) Wherever they went, they brought Slavic cultural influences—Russian theater, opera, and ballet became immensely popular, while architecture and painting absorbed distinct Russian aesthetics.

Shanghai's fashionable "Old Clerks" (老克勒) naturally began patronizing Russian restaurants, calling the cuisine "Luósòng dàcài" (罗宋大菜, Russian grand cuisine). As one commentator in the *Shen Bao* newspaper proclaimed: "Those who haven't tasted Russian grand cuisine cannot claim to have sampled the world's dishes, much less call themselves international gourmets."

The soup's signature crimson color originally came from beetroot. But in 1920s Shanghai, cold-climate beetroots proved difficult to source. Resourceful chefs substituted tomatoes, enhanced with tomato paste for color and flavor—thus creating "Shanghai borscht." When actual Russians taste it, they find it strangely unfamiliar.

This culinary evolution perfectly illustrates how food becomes a complex tapestry of ownership and authenticity, cultural adaptation, nationalist sentiment, belonging and exclusion.

Discussions about cuisine transcend the food itself. The pursuit of authenticity generates ever-evolving narratives that explain how identical recipes yield distinct regional variations—each bearing unique cultural imprints.

Globalization should be regarded as a "dynamic social process"—a process in which geographical constraints on economic, political, social, and cultural configurations gradually diminish. People are becoming aware of what it means to live as part of this "hybrid" global culture. As a result, we have grown more sensitive to the origins of our food, when it was produced, and who prepared it, recognizing the value of these factors, especially when it comes to "ethnic" dishes.

"Paradoxically, the more the world becomes unified, the more people cling to what divides them. The more we are able to communicate with others across the globe, the more we insist on speaking our own language, celebrating our own rituals, reinforcing our own tribal loyalties. It is as if modernity, by threatening to erase all differences, has triggered a desperate immune response—a feverish assertion of singularity."

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<In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong>



Deconstructing Boundaries



This project has no "culinary authority" - no definitively correct, perfect or authentic recipes exist here. What I particularly treasure are those "unorthodox" steps in participants' recipes, for they represent subtle acts of breaking free from authority, entrenched political constraints and stereotypes. Here, potatoes may be cut into any shape one desires; black vinegar substitutes for white when needed; the last chicken breast in the fridge stands in for pork belly; rice replaces unfamiliar bread. Nothing is mandatory. Every personal adaptation becomes a bold stroke in their self-authored culinary ethnography.

By using long-exposure photography to blur the human subjects in cooking processes, I redirect viewers' attention to the act of cooking itself, severing assumptions born from distinct cultural signifiers like appearance or language. This visual strategy aims to dismantle the spatial construct of political maps. From this starting point, I seek to compose unique autoethnographies for each individual - presenting concrete narratives accessible to both academic and general audiences. These challenge dominant cultural discourses while filling gaps in traditional research (regarding race, gender, class, etc.), using self-reflection to illuminate intersections between personal experience and sociocultural contexts.



Hiên Hoàng

Others, like myself, aim to question and deconstruct the walls of race, nationality and politics that are erected under the guise of food. Artist Hiên Hoàng, who immigrated from Vietnam to Germany, inspires me profoundly. Her interdisciplinary project <Across the Ocean> examines how food serves as both a bridge for cultural memory and a vessel for stereotypes. As an Asian woman living in Europe, I deeply resonate with her approach. Using familiar ingredients like rice, soy sauce and other traditional foods, she creates visually jarring works infused with violence and distortion - interrogating Western narratives that reduce "Asianness" to simplistic concepts. She refuses to distill complex identities into reductive metaphors.

In my project, I intend to extend her critical perspective by:

- Maintaining participation from Chinese / Asian backgrounds
- Actively incorporating individuals from diverse cultural contexts

If we truly wish to transcend simplified notions of Asianness, we must break the cycle of exclusively Asian-focused collective narratives. This is fundamentally a global migrant experience, not merely an Asian predicament.



Installation and Photo by Hiên Hoàng

Rajyashri Goody

In the project <Eat with Great Delight>, Rajyashri Goody employs intimate photography, poetry, and diary entries as a form of "counter-archive." The photographic images fundamentally expose and deconstruct the power of media that has long sought to reduce us to immediately visible identities.

She creatively adapts descriptions of food from Dalit literature into "recipes," revealing the complex and vital role food (or its absence) plays in shaping the Dalit experience. Each collected "recipe" carries profound meaning—often poetic—prompting us to consider what kind of recipes might lead to Dalit liberation and hopeful futures.

This project deeply inspires me. I recognize parallels between our work: while she dismantles caste power through "counter-archiving". It refers to an archival practice that resists dominant historical narratives and power structures. By employing unconventional or marginalized forms of documentation, it challenges the authority of official archives and brings to light suppressed voices and memories. I disrupt the spatial constructs of political maps via "visual blurring." In essence, both are part of humanity's ongoing revolution for emancipation.

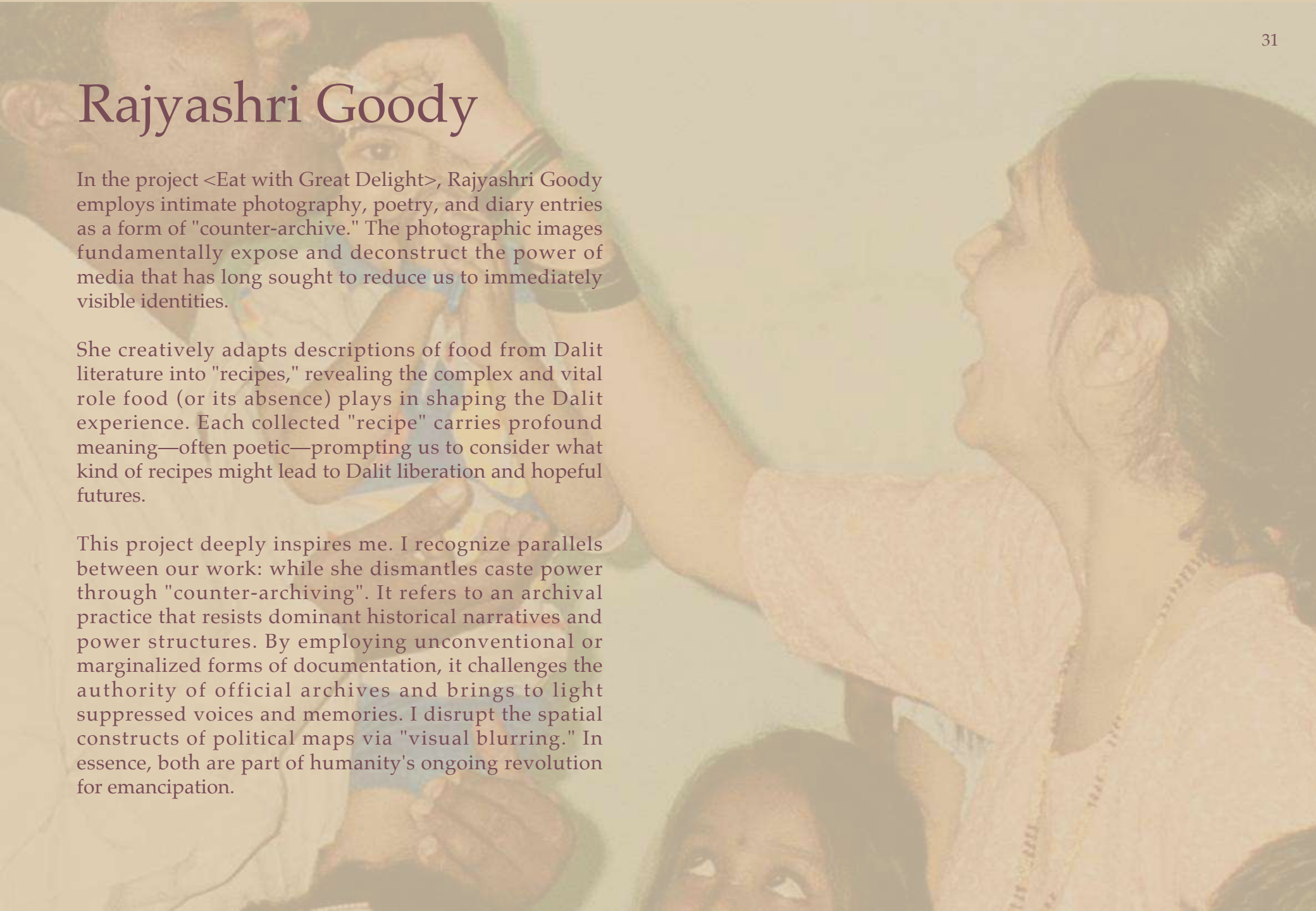




Photo by Rajyashri Goody



Photo by Rajyashri Goody



Photo by Rajyashri Goody

Photo by Rajyashri Goody

Kimchi Tofu Soup

Ingredients:

- Onion
- Scallions
- Garlic
- Pork belly (traditional Korean style, but other meats also can be used)
- Korean red chili paste (Gochujang)
- Chili powder
- Fresh chili peppers
- Rice-washing water (optional)

Instructions:

- Heat oil in a pot and sauté scallion segments, onion, and minced garlic until fragrant.
- Add meat and stir-fry, then put in kimchi (if the kimchi has a lot of juice, pour some in as well).
- Add rice-washing water or plain water, along with a big spoonful of Gochujang. Add chili powder to taste.
- Taste before serving - if not sour enough, add a little vinegar.
- Garnish with fresh chili peppers and scallion segments when serving.



Dawn is from China and currently lives in the Netherlands, mostly cooking Korean food. Before 18, she lived with her parents and never needed to cook because they took good care of her. Only when she left China for South Korea to study for her bachelor's degree did she have to learn independence. Korean supermarket shelves became her first life textbook.

The complex process of Chinese cooking was hard to achieve with Korean electric stoves' gentle heat, while Korean food's quick preparation made it a more practical choice for busy student life. Naturally, Korean food became Dawn's first choice during that time. Gradually, she learned to make soup with Gochujang and stir-fry rice cakes with kimchi, letting her taste buds adapt to foreign soil before her feet did.

Today she's cooking kimchi tofu soup. "Usually Koreans eat homemade kimchi, choosing between long-fermented old kimchi or fresh kimchi depending on the dish - they have many varieties. As a student, I mostly ate supermarket kimchi. I don't remember the brand anymore, I always picked the cheapest jar. The kimchi I buy in Holland tastes somewhat bland to me, so I add extra vinegar." She turns to get vinegar but suddenly stops, "Ah, we're out of white vinegar..." So she opens a bottle of Chinese black vinegar - something every Chinese person has - and pours the dark brown liquid into the red soup. "Never mind, this will do." Just like life, it always requires some improvisation.

At the dining table, she counts the remaining days on her search year visa. Whether she can find a job in the Netherlands within the remaining three months to extend



her visa is still unknown. I count along with her - clearly this will soon be my situation too. Neither of us knows where we'll be staying next year, temporarily or permanently. Just as I start feeling similarly unsettled, she says: "Might as well set out for Japan or Korea again, no big deal. Let's eat first."

Indeed, finding one's land of belonging can't be answered in the time it takes to eat a meal. Maybe belonging doesn't exist in any fixed place - perhaps we're solving a problem with no answer. Dawn's cooking has long since crossed national borders on the map, far ahead of her personal identity. The future is like an unfinished soup - seasonings not yet complete, heat still needing adjustment.

Bob Chorba

Ingredients:

- White onion
- Flour
- Tomato paste
- Tomato
- Carrot
- Red bell pepper
- Paprika powder
- White beans
- Dzhodzhen
- Chubritza
- Salt
- black pepper

Instructions:

- Heat cooking oil in a soup pot and sauté diced white onions until translucent and fragrant.
- Add red paprika powder and 1-2 tablespoons of flour.
- Stir continuously for several minutes until the flour is fully cooked—this is key to thickening the broth.
 - Squeeze in some tomato paste for flavor, then add diced carrots, tomatoes, and fresh red bell peppers.
 - Sauté briefly.
- Add canned white beans (if using dried beans, soak overnight and cook longer, but I usually opt for canned to save time).
- Add water and simmer for 20 minutes until boiling and all ingredients are cooked through.
- Finally, season with Bulgarian spices, salt, and black pepper to taste.

As a Chinese-Bulgarian mixed-race child, Nina grew up in Tianjin. Her father is Bulgarian while her mother comes from Chengdu, Sichuan. Since her mother was a homemaker, the family often enjoyed Sichuanese cuisine at home. Yet this didn't prevent her from developing what might be called a genetic memory for Balkan flavors early on. Her Bulgarian father, though not as readily able to source local ingredients as her mother, remained determined to recreate tastes from home. "Dad would ask his friend in Beijing who worked in food import to bring us paprika and Chubritza spices from high-end import supermarkets in the capital," she recalls. "At that time, Tianjin didn't have much variety in imported ingredients, but fortunately it was close enough to Beijing."

Her experience attending international schools established a dietary rhythm of "Western lunches and Chinese dinners," while summers spent at her Bulgarian grandmother's house deepened her love for the traditional bean soup called "Bob Chorba." This dish, born from peasant wisdom that used legumes as a protein substitute for meat, has now become her signature "comfort food from home."

After moving to the Netherlands and struggling to adapt to local cuisine, Nina began honing her cooking skills. This soup, with its simple preparation, naturally became her first mastered recipe - though initially she faced shortages of Bulgarian spices until her grandmother mailed traditional seasonings from home. What was once a humble peasant dish carrying festive memories has now become both her "survival meal" during penniless student days and the star dish at Christmas gatherings for vegetarian friends. A steaming pot of bean soup thus weaves together the taste memories of three generations.



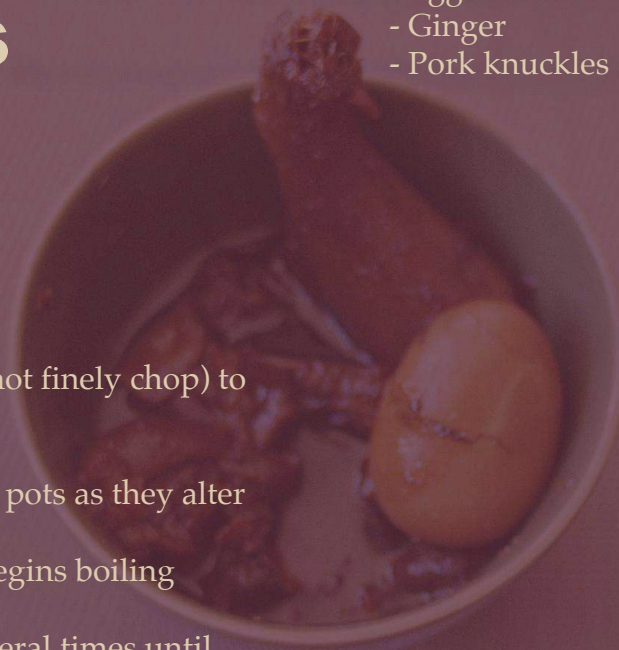
Ginger Vinegar Pork Knuckles & Eggs

Instructions:

- Preparing the Ginger
- Scrape off ginger skin with a spoon
- Crush ginger with the back of a knife (do not finely chop) to help release flavor into the vinegar
- Wash and air-dry thoroughly
- Place ginger in a porcelain pot (avoid steel pots as they alter vinegar's flavor)
- Simmer over medium heat until vinegar begins boiling lightly
- Let cool and repeat simmering process several times until ginger flavor fully infuses
- Preparing Pork Knuckles
- Blanch pork knuckles in water until foam forms, then skim off impurities
- Cook until tender, remove and pat dry with paper towels
- Add to vinegar-ginger mixture and simmer until boiling, then turn off heat
- Final Assembly
- Hard-boil eggs separately, then add to pot
- For firmer egg whites, simmer eggs in vinegar mixture multiple times

Ingredients:

- Pat Chun Sweetened Vinegar
- Eggs
- Ginger
- Pork knuckles





Chun's parents are from Hong Kong, but he himself was born and raised in the Netherlands. As he once introduced himself to me, he carries a distinctly Dutch vibe and naturally identifies as Dutch. Yet when he showed me his weekly meal prep, I sensed the deep-rooted bonds of an Eastern family woven into his life.

Every weekends, upon returning to his family home in Zwolle, his mother would carefully prepare his meals for the next five workdays—each airtight container neatly labeled with the cooking date and dish name. This way, while studying in Groningen, he could simply reheat his food and taste the warmth of home.

During my visit to Zwolle, Chun brought out a massive glass jar from the fridge, inside which glistened deep-red braised pork knuckle with ginger and vinegar. "This is what my mom made for my eldest sister's postpartum recovery," he explained. "It's a traditional Cantonese dish, and the most crucial rule is not to add a single drop of water—she always stresses this. Water would ruin the rich, sweet depth of flavor."

His gaze then shifted to the bouquet on the dining table. "This is from my sister, a thank-you for Mom taking care of her after childbirth. She even asked me what Mom's favorite flower colors were before buying them." Chun said, "Even though I only come home on weekends, I'm the only child still living here now. My three sisters have all moved out after they grow up, so I suppose I'm the one who knows Mom best these days."

The living room wall resembled an open family album, layered with photographs spanning a century—from a faded

portrait of Chun's maternal great-grandmother to a recent snapshot of his newborn niece. Looking at them, one could almost see time flowing—the elders' wrinkles holding the monsoons of their homeland, the younger generation's eyes reflecting Dutch tulip fields. Through home-cooked dishes, framed memories, and weekly reunions, they had built an intangible ancestral hall on foreign soil. Here, four generations of joys and sorrows had settled, and the Eastern family ties, far from thinning in the tide of migration, had instead matured like that jar of pork knuckle and ginger vinegar—growing richer and more profound with time. In this Western society that emphasizes individualism, this six-generation Chinese family quietly sustained the warmth of kinship, allowing Eastern familial bonds to take root and flourish in distant lands, resilient and deeply moving.



Ingredients:

- Old bread
- Spinach 300 g
- Onion one
- Grated Parmigiano 50 g
- Olive oil 50 g
- Flour 50 to 70 g
- Milk 250 ml
- Eggs two
- Salt
- A pinch of nutmeg
- Vegetable broth 700 ml
- Parsley
- Parmigiano

Instructions:

- Boil spinach in salted water for 10 minutes, then drain and squeeze thoroughly to remove excess water.
- Chop the onion and sauté in melted butter or olive oil until soft.
 - Add the spinach, stir, and let the flavors mix.
- In a large bowl, soak bread in milk. Add Parmigiano, spinach-onion mix, eggs and nutmeg.
 - Let the mixture rest for 15 minutes.
- Knead by hand until the mixture is even. Add flour and continue kneading until it holds together.
 - Form round balls around 50g each.
- Simmer in boiling vegetable broth for 5 minutes.
- Serve hot with melted butter or olive oil and a sprinkle of Parmigiano. You can also garnish with parsley.

Spinach Canederli



Südtirol... Südtirol. Tucked in the mountains between Italy and what used to be the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the air there always smells fresh—very fresh (even at -20 ° C or lower in winter)—with a hint of pine (something I still miss at times). It's the kind of place where time moves slowly, but not lazily—more like intentionally slow, yet not in slow motion. As if everything has meaning, especially when it comes to food.

Many don't know this, but my region didn't become part of Italy until 1918, and even then, it wasn't fully Italian (in the way Italy is known worldwide today) until 1947. And honestly? Even after that, we remained different.

You can taste that history in our dishes. Much of what we eat is a blend—Italian at its core, yet echoing Germanic, Hungarian, and other culinary traditions. But it's still distinctly ours. And though we may speak different languages, we've shared kitchens for centuries.

Back home, food is sacred—not in some trendy, hipster way, but because nothing should be wasted. That's something you grow up knowing, almost instinctively. Whether it's school lunch, dinner at home, or a meal at a friend's house, leaving food on your plate? A big no. It's not just impolite—it says something deeper, like: I didn't care.

And that's not who we are. Our recipes are built on respect—and survival, shaped by long winters when nothing grew and stores were far away. But the locals, mostly farmers, developed incredible ways to preserve food: Schüttelbrot (a dry, herbed bread that lasts forever—though not ideal in the Netherlands, where it's too humid), jams made from wild berries, rafano (with its sharp, unforgettable aroma), fermented cabbage, smoked meats, and cheeses (now I'm hungry...). That rich, smoky flavor? It's everywhere. Südtiroler Speck is a particular pride. We also eat a lot of game—deer, roe deer, wild boar—animals from the forests around us.

But if there's one dish that feels like home, that will always bring me back, it's Canederli. These are dumplings made from stale bread (the kind too dry to eat plain), mixed with cheese and spinach. It's one of those meals that reminds me of who I am and where I come from—humble, yet deeply comforting. Warm (sometimes too warm—it might burn your tongue). Like stepping in from the cold to find a hot bath waiting.

Maybe that's why I love it so much.

---Amina El Khatib

Borsch

Ingredients:

- Beef bones
- Beef loin
- Bay leaf
- Black peppercorns
- Onion, carrot
- Beetroot
- Cabbage
- Potatoes
- Tomato paste
- Vinegar
- Dill,
- Salt
- Sugar

Instructions:

- Simmer beef bones and meat in cold water for 2.5–3 hours. Skim scum, then add bay leaf and peppercorns.
- Shred cabbage and beetroot. Sauté onion, carrot, and cabbage together; sauté beetroot with tomato paste separately.
- Add sautéed veggies to broth. Season with salt and sugar. Add potatoes and simmer 25–30 mins.
- Stir in vinegar and dill before serving.
- Serving: Top with sour cream, fresh dill, and serve with rye bread, salo, and garlic.



Danik was born and raised in Latvia, coming from a family of mixed Russian-Ukrainian background. To him, the debate over borscht's origins is as familiar and complex as the ongoing disputes about whether Russian language could remain to be spoken in Latvia. Whenever someone asks about the "true origin" of this soup, he always says: "It doesn't belong exclusively to Ukraine, nor does it solely belong to Russia. It belongs to everyone."

He says every family makes borscht, but each version tastes a bit different. For instance, his mother's and his grandmother's recipes were completely unlike each other. His grandmother used to cook for hundreds of workers in a factory canteen, and ever since then, all her dishes—even small pots of soup made at home—carried the unmistakable flavor of cafetering cooking. "It's strange," he remarks, "as if the taste of those giant iron pots and assembly-line cooking became imprinted in her culinary style."

On the day he cooked, he insisted on serving it with few slices of salo, which is an Ukrainian-originated salt-cured pork belly. However, in the Netherlands, this Eastern European snack is hard to come by. In the end, he decided to cure it himself: laying out a slab of pork belly on the cutting board, carefully trimming away the lean meat to leave only the thick layer of fat, then sprinkling a thin layer of salt, sealing it, and leaving it to cure overnight in the refrigerator.

As for how many nations' histories have settled into this bowl of red soup, the small stove in his student apartment doesn't have enough power to simmer such weighty history. No matter—time to enjoy the soup.



Ingredients:

- Potatoes
- Flower
- Butter
- Peas
- Veggie meat
- Oil
- Nut Meg
- Salt
- Milk

Instructions:

Smashed Potatoes:

- Boil water in pot, when it starts boiling put a pinch of salt

- Peel potatoes (2 -3 per person)

- Boil potatoes in pot (30 mins till done)

Sauce + peas:

- In smaller pot melt 50g of butter

- When melted add 1 tablespoon of flower and stir it in till fully incorporated

- Add the pea water from the jar and mix it in till a white creamy consistency forms

- Add salt and nutmeg to taste

- A little milk so it stays slightly liquid, then add the rest of the peas in Jar

Veggie meat:

- Heat oil in pan

- fry veggie meat equally on both sides

- Plate all three as wanted

Potatos, Peas & Vengan Pork



Sabrina's father is German and her mother is Taiwanese. She grew up shuttling between the two cultures, though now she resides permanently in Germany, returning to Taiwan only during summer breaks.

Vegetarianism thrives in Germany, and Sabrina is no exception - neither are many of her friends. Yet while they all abstain from meat, their motivations differ profoundly. Her Christian father and Buddhist mother represented two spiritual paths, until at eighteen she consciously chose to follow her mother's faith. Still, childhood memories linger: her grandmother sneaking her into the kitchen, whispering "Real Germans are raised on meat," before slipping her forbidden morsels when her mother's back was turned.

Today's meal features mashed potatoes, peas, and plant-based pork - the vegan pork specially imported from Germany, where vegetarian alternatives abound. The owner of Berlin's vegan market likely never suspects that this mixed-race girl frequenting the Asian ingredients aisle studies the Ksitigarbha Sutra rather than environmental manifestos. On this plate converge her mother's devotion, her father's heritage, and Sabrina herself - discovering equilibrium between two worlds.

The Mirror Beyond The Window



John Szarkowski, the director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) from 1962 to 1991, introduced the classic theoretical framework of photography as "Mirrors and Windows" (John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye*, 1978) through his curatorial work and writings, profoundly influencing the aesthetics and critical discourse of photography.

As a "mirror," photography turns inward: it can serve as a medium for the creator's subjective expression, reflecting the photographer's inner world like a mirror. Through choices in composition, lighting, and subject matter, the photographer infuses personal emotions, ideas, or style into the work.

As a "window," photography looks outward: it can also function as a tool for objectively documenting reality, like a window framing fragments of the external world. Such works emphasize authenticity, spontaneity, and social significance, with minimal intervention.

This metaphor reminds me that the power of photography lies precisely in this duality—it is both an intimate form of self-expression and a public act of witnessing. In this project, I hope to find a tension between the two, capturing both the reflections of my own inner world and observations of others' expressions in the external world.

WHY

Photography

Philosopher Michel Foucault's concept of "Heterotopia" provides a framework for understanding cultural, institutional, and discursive spaces that exist as "other"—disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory, or transformative. Heterotopias are "worlds within worlds," simultaneously mirroring and disrupting external reality. Within them, technology, discipline, and order dissolve or temporarily suspend, creating space for change.

Though Foucault strictly applied heterotopia to physical spaces, his discussion references utopias—places with no real existence beyond representation: material signs, psychological realities, fantasies. To me, photography is a heterotopic medium, where emotion intertwines with subject matter, and tension/ imagination grant viewers a vague yet intimate agency. When an image is abstract in this sense, clarity isn't obligatory. Figures and ground may hover ambiguously, resisting fixed interpretation.

This is why my research and practice merge documentary and photographic aesthetics. Photography balances void and complexity, breaking linear narrative constraints inherent to documentary traditions. As Roland Barthes observed:

"A double fascination: the image itself, and what surrounds it. The fantasy delights because it coexists with consciousness of reality." (Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 1981)

Typological Photography

In the process of collecting stories, I use the dining table as a medium, employing typological photography as both a research method and material.

I enter different people's kitchens and observe the arrangements inside their kitchens and refrigerators. *<Refrigerators>* is a photography collection that examines the interiors of refrigerators in households across the United States. Using typological photography, Marke Menjivar gathers examples of lifestyles from people of different professions, ages, genders, and more, offering a microcosmic view of American refrigerators. In his derivative project *Pleasures of Eating*, he discusses industrialized diets. He points out that modern eating habits have lost their connection to the land, leading diners to suffer from a misleading and dangerous cultural amnesia.

My work also incorporates typology—collecting stories from people with diverse cultural backgrounds or life experiences. This represents a different dimension of typological photography.



WHY

Film photography

From a technical perspective, the exposure time of film is more compatible with the entire duration of cooking compared to digital. This is because long exposures with film need to consider the issue of reciprocity failure. For example, while a digital camera might require 4'33" to achieve correct exposure, a film camera could need as long as 30 minutes of exposure time. Generally speaking, cooking takes at least 30-40 minutes. Clearly, film's exposure duration is better suited to capturing the complete cooking process, thereby ensuring the integrity of both the "performance" and the "documentation."

However, setting aside technical aspects, I aim to use the limitations of film as a metaphor. Identity is not a puzzle-like assembly, but rather a continuous chemical reaction akin to silver halide development: the sense of identity accumulates over time, where image density depends on the product of light and exposure duration, and faint light signals gradually manifest through sustained accumulation. Just as every second of light contributes to the final image in a long exposure, components like race, language, and beliefs constantly recombine through lived experience. The awareness of identity exhibits a time lag, much like the process of developing film in a darkroom. During the actual moment of dialogue or environmental change, it's difficult to immediately perceive subtle shifts in one's sense of identity.

Often, it's only upon later reflection (days or years after) that one realizes certain present-day awareness may have originated from a conversation or unconscious action years prior. The transformation of identity is also uncontrollable, just as factors like film storage conditions, shooting light, production date, or development temperature can all influence the final image to varying degrees. Similarly, you might find your sense of identity shifting unexpectedly due to an experience or encounter with someone.

Film imaging and culinary alchemy share the same metaphor: the flavor of a dish doesn't lie in its ingredient list, but rather in the molecular restructuring during cooking; the value of identity similarly resides in the verbal nature of "becoming." Ultimately, each long-exposure film frame serves as commentary on fluid existence—what we see isn't an instantaneous slice, but rather the topology of time itself coalescing in the emulsion. Identity, like an image in development, remains an ongoing process of sedimentation.

Thus, long-exposure film becomes both methodological necessity and conceptual metaphor -each frame a palimpsest where transient actions sediment into singular, durational images that mirror identity's fluid accumulatio

‘Identity is not a pie that can be sliced into separate portions. I do not have several identities: I have one, woven from all the threads that have gone into the making of it. You might say it is a 'compound identity'—but even that term is misleading, for it suggests a mechanical mixture of ingredients, whereas the process is organic, even alchemical. The elements fuse together to form something new, something that cannot be reduced to its constituent parts.’

-----Amin Maalouf.

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