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Author

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Connection Lost

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Asian American Studies

by

Lai Wa Wu

2013

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2013

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Connection Lost

By

Lai Wa Wu

Master of Arts in Asian American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Victor Bascara, Chair

Connection Lost is a story about the relationships of three transnational generations of Chinese American women- the dis/connections of intimacy and desire they experience in the midst of the grandmother's death and the granddaughter coming to terms with her queer identity, the ways they resist and/or rebuild connections they may have lost, and the refusal to live comfortably in the space of certainty, complacency, and resolution.

This Thesis of Lai Wa Wu is approved.

Lucy Burns

Purnima Mankekar

Victor Bascara, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

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I. Acknowledgments

This creative writing project could not have been completed had it not been for the overwhelming amount of community and academic support I've received throughout the duration of this program. I owe much of this project to the guidance and support provided to me by Professor Burns, Professor Mankekar, and especially Professor Bascara. Their patience, dedication, and guidance throughout this process instilled the belief and confidence within me to see this vision and project through to the end. To Professor Fae Myenne Ng and AAS 119 fellow writers, thank you for your galvanizing support and unwavering honesty. I must also recognize Mihiri Tillakaratne and Sarbani Hazra as they were two of the first individuals who deeply believed in my ability to take on this creative writing and challenged me to seriously consider this project. I am deeply grateful to UCLA Asian American Studies Department Staff: Anne Bautista, Natalia Yamashiro-Chogyoji, and Jessie Singh and fellow alumni who've consistently provided encouragement of everyone in our cohort. To everyone in the 2013 AAS MA cohort- Sophia Cheng, Jane Lee, Jessica Solis, Daniel Woo, Ami Patel, Ger Xiong, Alex Margolin, Kate Viernes- you will forever be a part of my chosen family. I would especially like to thank my sister Anica Wu for collaborating with me on the social media entries and for supporting me throughout my time here at UCLA. Lastly, I dedicate this piece to my mother and father, to their past, dreams, and hopes.

Connection Lost

June 15, 2008
Facebook Post
Los Angeles, CA



Lai Wa Wu



almost peed in my pants when my mom sent this email to me: "You all do not buy anything for Father's day, Just make a call that all he need , NO FLASH FOLLOWER PLEASE, we do like the plants in the pot , but not flash follower, we don't need anything from you all as long as you all doing good." She meant FRESH FLOWERS and instead wrote "Flash followers"

Like · Comment · Unfollow Post · Share · Promote

From: laiwa@gmail.com
Sent: Sunday, June 15, 2008 3:54pm PST
To: sandychu@gmail.com
Subject: Re: No Flash Follower any more

Hi mom, did you mean fresh flowers?? Haha. It's spelled fresh flowers, mom, NOT FLASH FOLLOWERS. That made me laugh so much. Anyway, how was Father's day? Hope you both enjoyed our flowers! And we won't send Dad any more flowers, we promise. Was he surprised?

I miss your cooking here at school, especially your dumplings. Could you send me Waipo Grandma's dumpling recipe?

From: sandychu@gmail.com
Sent: Sunday, June 15, 2008 8:34pm CST
To: laiwa@gmail.com
Subject: Re: re: No Flash Follower any more

Oh, sorry my spelling not so good. Father's Day was good, We stayed home. I bought a little cupcake and put candle on it. he liked it a lot. you should call him more, late at night work better since he come home so late from restaurant.

MAKE SURE YOU EAT. You not cook for your self? I will send you food tomrow. What do you want? I can go to store and buy tonight- ginger candy, dry mango, cranberry, nuts, seaweed, dry mushroom, dry dates. Do you need more tea? I will send some gingko, green and flower tea.

Haha you want to make dumplings? I will mail recipe. It is Waipo's recipe. Remember don't put too much filing in wrapper because skin will come apart when you cook it.

Mom

On Sunday, June 15, 2008 at 4:08pm, Lai Wa Wu laiwawu@gmail.com wrote:

Hi mom, did you mean fresh flowers?? Haha. It's spelled fresh flowers, mom, NOT FLASH FOLLOWERS. I was laughing so hard when I read that. Anyway, how was father's day? Hope you both enjoyed our flowers! We won't send him any more flowers, we promise. Was dad surprised? What did you all do for his birthday?

I really miss your cooking here at school, especially your dumplings. Could you send me Waipo' Grandma's dumpling recipe?

From: Sandy Chu
 23485 W. 123rd St
 Overland Park, KS 66232

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| United States Postal Service® Sorry We Missed You! We'll Deliver for You | | Today's Date 6/18/08 | Sender's Name Sandy Chu |
| Item is at: ___ Post Office™ (See back) | Available for Pick-up After Date: | For Redelivery Go to usps.com/redelivery or see reverse | |
| ___ Letter | For Delivery: (Enter total number of items delivered by service type.) | <input type="checkbox"/> If checked, you or your agent must be present at time of delivery to sign for item. | |
| ___ Large envelope, magazine, catalog, etc. | For Notice Left: (Check applicable item) | Article Number(s) | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Parcel | ___ Express Mail® | ___ Insured Mail | |
| ___ Restricted Delivery | ___ Certified Mail™ (Must claim within 15 days or article will be returned) | ___ Return Receipt for Merchandise | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Perishable Item | ___ Firm Bill | ___ Delivery Confirmation™ | |
| ___ Other: | ___ Registered Mail™ | ___ Signature Confirmation™ | |
| Article Requiring Payment | | Amount Due | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Postage Due | <input type="checkbox"/> COD | <input type="checkbox"/> Customs | \$ 831 W 3rd st, Apt 8, LA, CA |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Final Notice: Article will be returned to sender on | | Delivered By and Date 6/18/08 | |
| PS Form 3849, September 2009 | | usps.com Delivery Notice/Reminder/Receipt | |

[Waipo (Grandma)'s dumpling recipe found inside care package]:

How to make homemade dumplings (the way Waipo showed you)

You need:

For dumpling skin: flour, water- *you can make own skin or just buy wrapper at Chinese store. Waipo and I make our skin because it tastes a little better but you just buy wrapper. is easier.

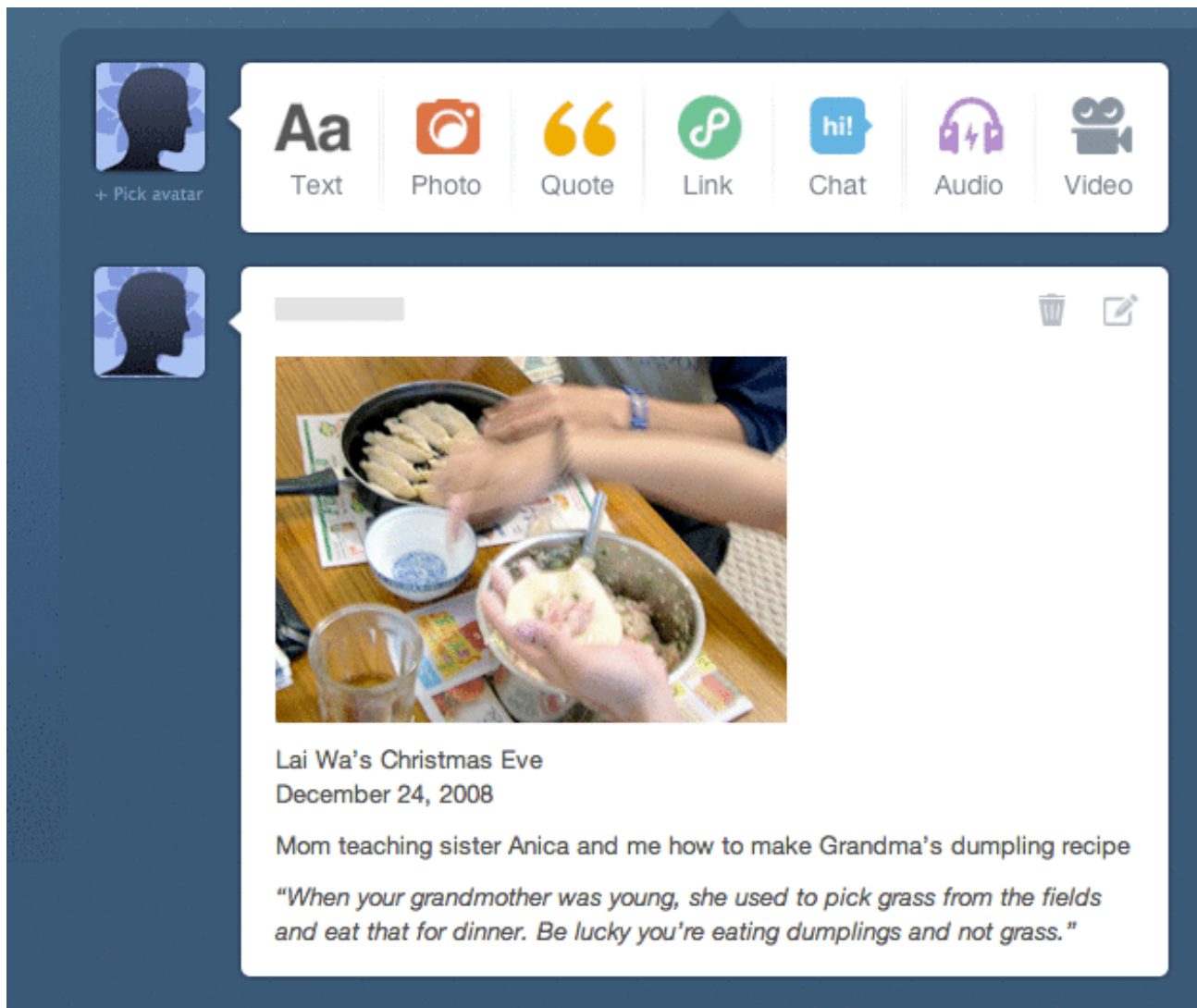
For filing: (make it Waipo grandma's way)- heat oil in saucepan. add pork (is that what it's called?) stir a little. mix green onion (only green part) in. Let sit.

For sauce: soy sauce, sesame oil, vineger (rice) mix together

1. Make sure flour have no clumps. Mix water in the flour. Quickly mix with your hands, create into flour ball. Waipo rolls with palms, I roll with my knuckle, doesn't matter. slowly add water.
2. Knead dough with knuckles until forms smooth ball. Cover with plastic wrapping paper. Place in frigerater for 1 hour.
3. Roll each ball out into circle- about three inches.
4. Spoon filing in middle of wrapper (very small or else it will come out when you are boiling them).
5. Wet sides of dumpling with egg.
6. Fold dough over filing into shape like a half-moon.
7. Pinch edge of wrapper together.

8. Boil water (about half of pot). Once water boil, turn heat down, place dumpling in water. Keep boiling for about 10 min.
9. To cook: Heat boiling water. Drop dumpling into water and cover pot. When dumplings start to float, they are cooked.
10. eat with sauce

December 24, 2008
Tumblr Post
Overland Park, KS



The image is a screenshot of a Tumblr post. At the top, there is a dark blue header with a row of icons for text, photo, quote, link, chat, audio, and video. Below this is a white text input area with a grey placeholder and a trash icon. The main content of the post is a photograph showing a person's hands shaping a dumpling in a bowl, with another person's hands nearby. The background shows a wooden table with various items like a glass and a bowl. Below the photo, the text reads: "Lai Wa's Christmas Eve December 24, 2008 Mom teaching sister Anica and me how to make Grandma's dumpling recipe 'When your grandmother was young, she used to pick grass from the fields and eat that for dinner. Be lucky you're eating dumplings and not grass.'" The post is set against a dark blue background.

+ Pick avatar

Aa Text Photo Quote Link Chat Audio Video

Trash Edit

Lai Wa's Christmas Eve
December 24, 2008

Mom teaching sister Anica and me how to make Grandma's dumpling recipe

"When your grandmother was young, she used to pick grass from the fields and eat that for dinner. Be lucky you're eating dumplings and not grass."

December 24, 2008
Lai Wa's Journal
Overland Park, KS

I flew in from school today for the holidays. Making dumplings just like every other time my sister and/or I return home. Mom brings up the boyfriend conversation again. Having come up on so many occasions, our responses have become formulaic now- we can predict what the other person will say at this point:

She asks if I have a boyfriend yet. No.

She nudges about a friend whose name I've never heard of, with a son coincidentally around my age. Then she insists we go out to dinner together. No.

My sister senses my discomfort and silence.

"Mom," Anica retorts "Just drop it already, ok? Lai Wa can do whatever she wants."

"Yes, but we never talk about..."

"No, but let's keep it that way."

"You not getting younger, you are twenty-six now. It's time you find a good man, get married, raise a family of your own."

"Mom, you know that will never happen."

"What you mean it will never happen? You don't mean what I think you mean. I will never accept this. If you want to be disowned by me and your dad, then go ahead. Live your life disgusting and sinful and..."

I fling out of the kitchen stool and storm out of the kitchen before she can finish her thought. How could she not remember? Has she already forgotten? She never wants to talk about why we really keep holding these same conversations over and over, why she will never say what she really wants to say. What it will mean for her to accept why she will never see me bringing a boy home, why I will never marry with kids.

It gets harder and harder to look at Mom. We sit inches apart yet are miles away. Sometimes I will forget where I am, I'll look up, see her, and for a split second, I won't recognize this person in front of me. As if staring into the eyes of a stranger. A stranger I feel obligated to see twice a year.

Every year, with every dumpling-making session, we pretend everything is all right.

Letter:

Postmarked- July 24, 2010

Received- August 3, 2010

July 24, 2010

Sandy Chu
23485 W. 123rd St
Overland Park, KS 66232

Connie Tsao
Room 2008, 20/F
26 Harbour Road
Mongkok, Hong Kong, China

康妮，亲爱的朋友，

我的马昨晚去世。我的大妹妹叫了两晚前告诉我，她只剩下多少时间。我想要的，以买一个平面上票证，来看到她的，，，但我知道我会不会已作出它在的时间-没有病假从在食品杂货存储区中，没有钱为平面中。两天过去了，我没有一夜没合眼。昨晚，我决定把我的脑袋休息的短短几分钟，我醒来的时候已经过去了新闻马。大姐说，马不停的问我，直到结束。我希望你在这里，马。不忍她的朋友告诉马是无处可寻。

她的声音依然是那么真实的我。马的饺子今天。揉，蘸，勺，捏，重复。揉，浸，勺，捏。虽然我做饭，我看到一只蜘蛛在地板上，它旁边走过，我知道这是马。她必须在注视着我。最后的时间我们吃了一起包饺子的是十五年前的，，在我离开之前为曼联合国。在每个饺子的眼泪下跌。

我会打电话给你的某个时候。

秀凤

[translation]:

Connie, dear friend,

My mom passed away last night. My Big Sister called two nights ago to tell me she didn't have much time left. I wanted to buy a plane ticket to see her, but I knew I wouldn't have made it in time- no sick leave from the grocery store, no money for the plane. Two days have passed, and I haven't slept a wink. Last night, I decided to rest my head for just a few minutes, and I woke up to the news Ma had passed. Big Sister said Ma kept asking for me until the end. I wish you were here, Ma. Couldn't bear to tell Ma her friend was nowhere to be found.

Her voice is still so real to me. Made Ma's dumplings today. Knead, roll, spoon, wet, fold, pinch, repeat. Knead, roll, spoon, wet, fold, pinch. While I was cooking, I saw a spider on the floor, walked next to it, and I knew it was Ma. She must be watching over me. Last time we ate dumplings together was fifteen years ago before I left for United States. In each dumpling tears dropped.

I'll call you some time.

Sau Fung

July 25, 2010
Lai Wa's Journal
Overland Park, KS

Mom found a spider next to her bedroom doorway, crouched down, and murmured in a childlike manner, "Look, I think it's Waipo! Lai Wa, you know, when Big Sister call me and told me Waipo died, a spider just walk right next to me; I think this is the same one. I have feeling that is her watching over us." She and I crouched down to stare at the spider. Mom waited for a movement, any movement. I looked at the spider, then looked at my mom, her swollen eyes struggling to stay open from so much crying. For a moment, I thought I was staring into the eyes of a wandering child having lost her way, hopelessly searching for her way home. Secretly, I wanted to believe. For me and for Mom. "Mom, you know, you might be right. I think it might very well be Waipo."

We made Yuan Bao- gold ingots- to burn to Waipo for her afterlife. "Come over here." Mom sits on the bedroom floor and crouches down next the spider to keep a close eye on it. I couldn't remember a time when mom and I just sat together in each other's presence.

"Watch me, then you do, okay?
Fold paper once. Again. [...]
Then all corners in, like this. [...]
The left finger, your second finger should be insider here.
Then you blow into this hole. You see, like this."

Step by step she explained- *fold, turn, push, blow*. I followed each instruction until a gold ingot emerged (Yuan Bao). We folded at least 50 ingots in that one sitting, placed them in a paper bag, then head downstairs with our bag of folded gold ingots for the burning ritual.

In the garage room near the back porch laid a grill lid turned upside down. It was a rainy summer's day, and as we stood under our patio roof, mom hands me three incense sticks, grabs my hands and says, "Hold it downward, like this. This way the wind won't catch."

She guides me to a candle jar filled to the brim with pearlescent marbles.

"Now bow three times, and say out loud what you want to say to Waipo. Tell her you're sorry for not being in China when she died."
"Grandma, I'm sorry for not having been in China during your death."

Mom lights her three sticks, bows.

"妈，我对不起，我不能烧外今天为你，我不知道它是下雨那么辛苦，我真的很抱歉。丽华遗憾的是不存在的，你听到了吗？" [translation]: *Ma, I'm sorry I can't burn this outside for you today, I didn't know it was raining so hard, I'm really sorry. Lai Wa is sorry for not being there, did you hear her?*

Mom takes a match and lights one corner of the paper bag filled with paper ingots.

"妈妈，我希望你喜欢这些硬币。有时候我希望我没有离开过中国，与大姐姐离开你...我是那么自私...我想...我想我是做正确的...我只是不能呆在那里.....但现在...我不能甚至在

那里你.....”[translation]: *Ma, I hope you like these coins. Sometimes I wish I hadn't left China, left you with Big Sis...I was so selfish... I thought... I thought I was doing the right thing...for everyone... I just couldn't stay there... but now ... I couldn't even be there for you...*”

She loses herself in regret as her hands cover her face, shaking her head back and forth, back and forth.

“When I have bad days,” Mom recalls to me, “I used to call her, she would know exactly what to say to make me feel better. But now, I cannot call her anymore...” Mom’s head dropped down, and tears flooded her red swollen eyes. I crouched down next to her in silence and hugged her as tight as I possibly could, hoping my warmth could somehow ease her pain from recovering the memories.

“Ma is only person who know me when I was little- she was there when I was born, she remember my first steps, they know what to cook to cheer me up after bad day. Losing her is like losing a part of my childhood, those memories of me as a child. She was the only one...”

Her voice trails off as we sit watching the fire embers spark out one by one.

Mom persisted it was getting too cold outside, and that I should head back in the house. She said she wanted some time alone with Waipo. “I’ll go back upstairs to check on the spider,” I replied. I knew she needed some time with Popo, but I hated leaving her alone. I tiptoed upstairs as quietly as I could so that if even the tiniest inkling of a tear would drop, I would hear it and run back, wrap my arms around her, and tell her, “Mom, it’s ok. Everything will be all right.”

When I reached Mom’s bedroom, I found the spider in the same location as where we’d left it. I scuffled downstairs jumping with joy, “Mom, mom, the spider is still up there! Waipo is still there, she’s still watching us!” “Really?” She stopped her conversation with Waipo to look up. “Oh, ok. I’m coming.” I watched as Mom stared into the burning flame, placed the grill lid over the embers, and slowly closed the door behind me. As we inched toward the small creature, Mom scooped down, gently cupped the spider inside the palm of her hands, and placed her underneath the bed out of harm’s way. She crawled down and laid next to the Waipo the spider. I came by to check in on Mom throughout the day.

“Mom?”

No answer.

Mom just stared at the spider until she slowly drifted to sleep.

November 24, 2010
Lai Wa's Journal
Overland Park, KS

Normally I usually stay in Los Angeles for Thanksgiving, but this year I decided to fly back home. I was worried about Mom and thought she might appreciate some company. In an attempt to assuage my boredom, I started scavenging her room, ruffling through as if I were competing to see what new, strange artifacts I could dig up this time back.

I came across a trinket box today that Mom had inherited after Waipo's passing; in it were filled with remnants of her intimate belongings. Taped on the lid of the box was a handwritten dumpling recipe. I carefully un-taped the recipe from the lid, and to my surprise I found a photograph tugged snugly behind the first sheet of paper. Clearly discolored, worn, fringing around the edges, and fingerprints smeared throughout, the picture looked like that of my grandma as an adolescent posing with another woman. Near the lower right edge an inscription is sketched, "To Sau Ying: Forever and always, Meixiu." Waipo is sitting, eyes staring directly into the camera, and behind her stood a friend, both hands on Waipo's shoulders. The bittersweet tenderness in their eyes felt strangely familiar.

I ran downstairs hoping perhaps Mom could help reveal more details to this puzzling photo, this peculiar woman by the name of "Weixiu." Mom sat in silence in the kitchen preparing Waipo's favorite recipe of dumpling from scratch.

She takes one look at the picture, flings her hand, and scuffs, "Aiya, Why you care about her so much, huh? She's just a friend of Waipo's...I don't know her. All I know is she and Waipo were just friends, and that she left somewhere. No, I don't remember..."

Mom turns away from the photo, looks back at her dumpling fillings. "This recipe doesn't seem right. Something is wrong, it doesn't fit... gah!" Suddenly she slams her mixing spoon down into the bowl in frustration, throws the bowl down onto the floor, bits of dumpling filling strewn all across the black-and-white tiled kitchen floor.

I didn't dare move. Then slowly, surreptitiously I hid the photo back inside my pant pocket. Had an inclination that if my mom were to get ahold of this photo I would never get see it again.

December 10, 2010
Phone Transcript

- 17:20:23 pm (Lai Wa , Los Angeles, CA): Hi, Mom.
- 20:20:30 pm (Sandy, Overland Park, KS): [pause] Oh, hi.
- 17:20:35 pm (Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA): So, um, I was wondering, could I invite a friend over for the holidays?
- 20:21:40 pm (Sandy, Overland Park, KS): Oh. [pause] She your friend?
- 17:21:43 pm (Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA): Yea. We're good friends.
- 20:21:50 pm (Sandy, Overland Park, KS): [pause] What is her name?
- 17:21:53 pm (Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA): Her name is Milo.
- 20:21:55 pm (Sandy, Overland Park, KS): Mi- what?
- 17:21:57 pm (Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA): MY-LOW.
- 20:21:59 pm (Sandy, Overland Park, KS): What kind of name is Mi-low? [Pause] Is she girl?
- 17:22:07 pm (Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA): Yeah.
- 20:22:13 pm (Sandy, Overland Park, KS): [pause] Oh. [Pause] Ok, sure. That is fine. Why she coming here?
- 12:22:22 pm (Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA): Well... Milo and I are going on a road trip back to Los Angeles together.
- 20:22:26 pm (Sandy, Overland Park, KS): Oh. [pause] Ok, well, does she eat pork?
- 17:22:31 pm (Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA): Oops, oh I forgot. No, she doesn't eat meat. She is a vegetarian.
- 20:22:35 pm (Sandy, Overland Park, KS): "A vege- what? Well, you can't eat dumpling without meat. It is not dumplings without it."
- 17:22:37 pm (Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA): Well, I can't ask her to force her to eat meat. Would you rather her starve?
- 22:22:40 pm (Sandy, Overland Park, KS): Fine. I will figure something out.
- 17:22:45 pm (Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA): [pause] All right. Thank you. [pause] I guess... I should probably go. I have some things I have to do.
- 22:22:52 pm (Sandy, Overland Park, KS): Oh... all right. Ok. Bye.
- 17:22:55 pm (Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA): Bye.

December 11, 2010
Firefox Search History
Overland Park, KS

The screenshot shows the Firefox Library search history window. The title bar reads "Library". Below the title bar is a search bar labeled "Search History". The main content area is a table with two columns: "Visit Date" and "Name". The table lists several search queries with their corresponding visit dates. Below the table, there are three input fields: "Name", "Location", and "Tags".

| Visit Date | Name |
|------------|---|
| 11:18 PM | what does gay mean - Google Search |
| 11:18 PM | What Does Gay Mean?: Mental Health America |
| 11:19 PM | what can parent do when child say she is gay - Google Search |
| 11:19 PM | If Your Child Says, "I'm Gay" |
| 11:19 PM | gay chinese - Google Search |
| 11:19 PM | Gay China and Chinese Gay and Lesbian Resources by Utopia Asia 大同 |
| 11:19 PM | can my gay child change - Google Search |
| 11:19 PM | Can My Gay Child Change? - Beyond Ex-Gay |

Name:

Location:

Tags: ▼

4/12/11

Recipe for Coming Out to your Chinese Immigrant Parent

ABOUT US | PRESS | ARCHIVES | CONTACT | TWITTER | FACEBOOK | TUMBLR | PINTEREST | SUPPORT US

A Queer Asian American's Recipe for Coming Out to Your Immigrant Parent

Posted by Tegan on 4.12.11

Ingredients:

- 1 or more hetero-identified sibling (preferably a job with sizeable income and/or high status symbol so your parents won't feel like all hope is lost.)
- Tissues for your parents (and possibly for you)
- 1 pair of undetectable ear plugs in the likely event your parents may scream and yell more than they do in normal conversation
- Pictures of famous, successful, and established queer Asian Pacific Islander American womyn

Directions:

Planning for Possible Reactions

1. Confirm with your sibling and make sure she is *really* ready to take on the role of the "paragon of perfection" child that you have obviously fallen short of (*This will likely mean attending all family occasions, bearing through awkward silences about the one who shall remain unnamed, etc.*)
2. Stash away all of your Chinese porcelain bowls away from sight (could get ugly)

Prep time: 20 mins

Total Conversation time: lifetime (sorry!)

Planning for Possible Reactions

1. Your parents will be in shock regardless of what you say, but if you see a small inkling of acceptance/support, congratulations, you're ready for laughter therapy phase! All hope is not lost! Bring out your iconic "feel good" lesbian family movie, ideally, with happy endings (i.e. "Saving Face"- this movie will cover all bases- lighthearted film with queer Chinese American lesbian protagonist yet doesn't rock the boat too much (femme and surgeon), traditionalist mother character for parent to identity with).
2. If parents go into denial, that is, they might change the subject, remark that some day you will "change" your ways, and/or ignore this conversation for months or years on end, rest assured- this means you've temporarily dodged the bullet of tortuous silences and embarrassing, guilt-ridden phone calls for just a little while longer. This will give you more time to prepare for your next conversation. Nothing else to do but to wait.
3. If, however, in the likely chance all hell breaks loose, prepare for the "Parental Armageddon." Some expected reactions coming out of them might include:

<http://www.queerasiandangerous.com/mjs538/recipe-for-coming-out-to-Chinese-immig-parent>

“The Bible says gay is wrong!” or
“Is it our fault our child is gay?” or
“We’re sending you back to China!”

In which case, this will be time for you to bring out the big guns. Suggestions:

1. Prepare your parents’ favorite comfort foods (must be made from scratch or VERY EXPENSIVE), e.g. making homemade pork and chive dumplings, paying for all-you-can-eat Chinese buffet dinners, durian, shark’s fins, bird’s nests, and/or abalone soup. If you can’t afford any of the former items, simply stick with big fish and big meat.
2. If food doesn’t work, bring out the collage you have of successful queer Asian Pacific Islander American women hanging on your bedroom wall. Some inspirations include: Helen Zia, Alice Wu, Nisha Ganatra, Pamela Ki Mai Chen. *Only as a last resort, you may bring pictures of Margaret Cho- her tattoos and comedy show content covered in expletives and sexual innuendos might be a bit too much to digest all at once.* †
3. Lastly, end the conversation by reminding your parents of your “model child” attributes to try to alleviate their panic that all is lost in the world. If you have sizeable income (or enough money so that parents don’t feel like their decision to leave family in China to unknown country was a decision in vain), it’s very important to remind them *you’re still bringing home the bacon and can still afford your parents’ dream home in China*. Remind them they will remain close to their sibling/family members so they can live there when they age. You will pay off their home mortgage so they could retire by age 65 from their 30-year low wage employment as restaurant cooks, housekeepers, grocery store clerks;
4. If you received some form of lucrative education degree (anything but soft sciences or worst of all, elusive degrees of “fine art,” “literature,” etc.), this is the time to bring out that piece of degree paper, put it to good use, and flaunt it like it’s nobody’s business.
5. Bring out the gift of massagers you just so coincidentally purchased for them - foot, back, massage gift certificates, etc.

Enjoy and remember, therapy is your best friend!

† Don’t plan on doing anything else in the next year that might cause parents to have a

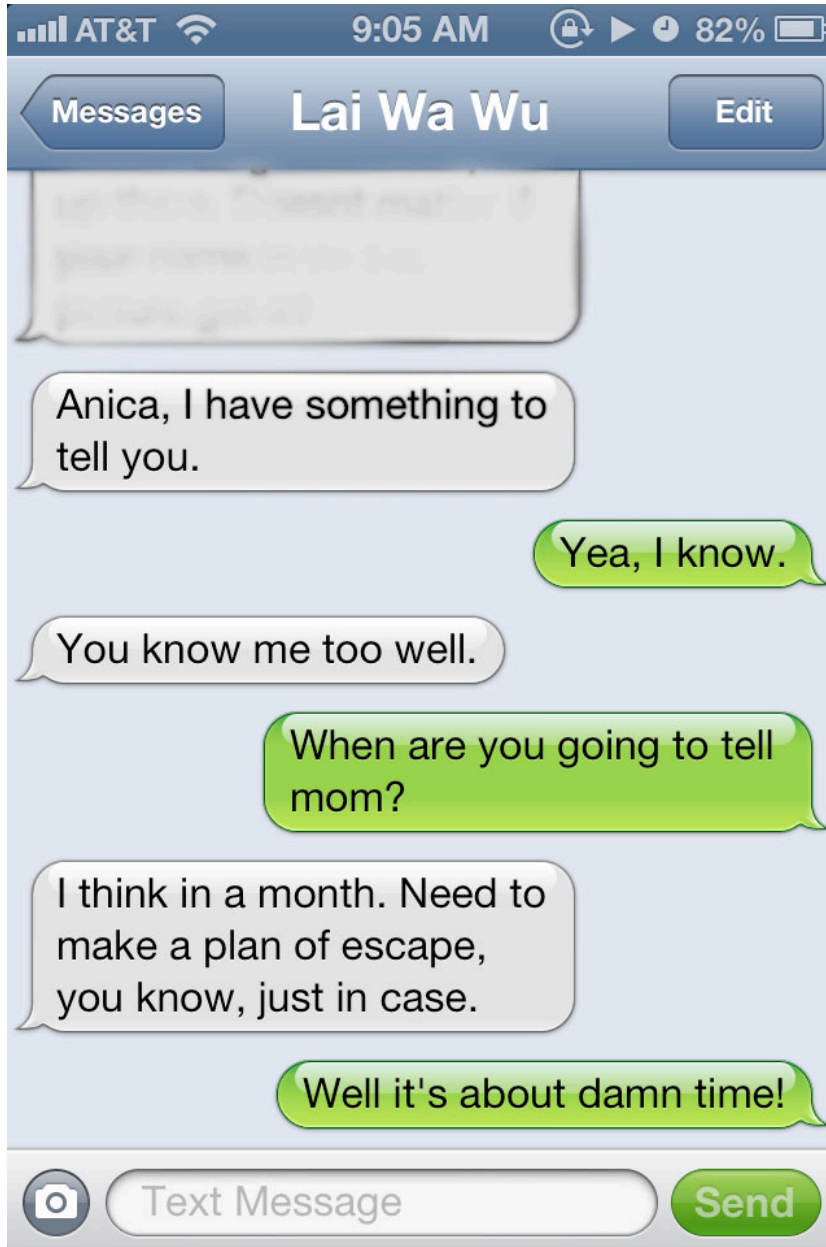
RELATED TAGS: #comingout, Asian American women, parents, things I read that I love

< Previous Post

Leave a Reply

<http://www.queerapiavisibility.com/mjs538/recipe-for-coming-out-to-Chinese-immig-parent>

May 2, 2011
Text Message
Los Angeles, CA



*May 29, 2012 1:36am
Los Angeles, CA*

Lai Wa's To Do List:

1. Buy flight ticket from LA to SF for tomorrow
2. Look over my letter to send to mom in SF- just do it. No matter how difficult it may be, just push yourself to read it again. Did you say everything you needed to say?
3. Packing
 - Clothes- jacket for windy SF weather, 1 dress, pants
 - Print out letter
 - Cell phone charger
 - Toothpaste, toothbrush
 - Check-in
 - Figure out what day I want to fly home! (Not sure how much time I'll need to readjust back to regular life)
 - Find ride
4. Check out dumpling joints in Chinatown.

Postmarked Letter:
Postmarked- June 2, 2012
Received- June 4, 2012

June 1, 2012

To: Sandy Chu
23485 W. 123rd St
Overland Park, KS 66232

Hi mom,

I wanted to write you this letter because for some reason, I can't seem to talk with you in person or over the phone about this. Every time I try, I get so scared I can't even think about what to say. I feel like I have been living dishonestly for too long, and I don't want to pretend everything is ok or be someone I am not any longer. I hope you know I am writing this letter from a place of love- love for myself, love for you.

Before I say anything, I want to let you know I still haven't changed. You have been such a wonderful mother. Please know that you have done nothing wrong, and I am still the same daughter you've always remembered.

Mom, I am gay. Deep down I know you know this, and for the longest time I know you told me to never bring it up, to never mention it, to never act on it. You and I know we haven't had the best of relationships these past few years. We haven't had any relationship, 2. Even though I've always seen myself as someone who outwardly tries to take pride of who I am, deep down I secretly hid my shame and pain around you, afraid to share parts of my life because I was so afraid of not being loved. I feel like I'm living a lie, and I don't want to pretend anymore. I am not afraid to tell my truth anymore. In my heart I know I am at peace with myself, and I am ready to be honest now.

I hope you can see this as an act of love to myself. I have to heal the hurt, make peace with myself, move on. I can only imagine how hard it can be to understand this. I don't blame you, but I am not ashamed of who I am, and I am tired, so tired to feel guilty.

All I hope is for you to listen to what I have to say. Even if you don't understand or agree, if you can just listen to what I am saying. If you don't want to talk or won't accept it, I won't be angry at you. I will understand. I take full responsibility of my life and who I am now.

I love you so much, Mom, and I hope you know that. If you didn't matter to me, this wouldn't be so hard. I just don't think I can do this anymore.

Always your daughter,

Lai Wa

June 5, 2012
Twitter Post
San Francisco, CA

Tweets



Lai Wa @ [redacted] 

18s

I've done all I could. Out of my hands, now. And I will not have any regrets. All I can do is move on. I am fine now. I will be fine.

Expand

From: sandychu@gmail.com
Sent: Sunday, June 10, 2012 6:13pm
To: laiwa@gmail.com
Subject: I don't need your love.

Not ever.

July 23, 2012

Answering Machine Transcript- Connie Tsao
Hong Kong, China

From: Sandy Chu 00:09:12 AM Thursday, July 23, 2012 (CDT- Kansas)

To: Connie Tsao 00:22:11 PM Thursday, July 23, 2012 (HKT- Hong Kong)

{语音信箱: 早上好, 您已经达到了曹居住, 留言给我们, 如果我们和您一样, 我们会给你回电话。开玩笑!}

{突然一陣無法控制的抽泣} ...我...不...不知道...從哪裡開始.每次...我覺得...像...麗娃麗娃生病, 因為我是同性戀, 我認為這是美國。我們總是那麼忙工作, 我偷偷想我總是不知道為什麼, 她從未有過任何男朋友, 但我以為她是重點學校, 工作。[嗚咽聲]中國人不這樣做。我曾經告訴麗娃和麗娟是堅強的女人。我不應該把這麼辛苦。我不能跟任何人。我們並沒有說在八個月。但我仍然愛她。我做的。我只是不能接受她的選擇。

我沒教過麗娃說中國話。我一直感到內疚。當我來到美國, 我想她只是像美國人那樣。她的父親和我的家人在中國。我們的家庭是不是在這裡。你知道有多難, 沒有家庭, 當我需要他們的幫助, 支持。我們努力讓自己在美國賺錢。20年來, 我們的工作作為廚師, 服務員在餐廳餐廳後, 夜班清潔醫院。在同一時間, 兩份工作。她的父親每天工作二十一年, 與以往任何時候都沒有假期 - 聖誕節及農曆新年前。他工作這麼辛苦, 他的手上有這麼多的燒傷疤痕。我們離開我們的父母, 我們的姐妹, 兄弟, 我們的生活, 對她和她的妹妹。馬走了, 每年去了。我是怎麼來到這裡的? 當她給我寫了一封信, 告訴我她...她傷透了我的心。這是我們來到這裡的原因。我不能接受這一點。我做不到。我知道她是傷害。但我告訴大家, 在中國呢? 她想要什麼我做什麼? [暫停]。不, 我們不能告訴任何人。

[Answering Machine translation]:

{Voicemail: Gooooood morning, You've reached the Tsao residence, leave us a message, and if we like you, we'll call you back. Joking!}

Connie ah...{sudden burst of uncontrollable sobbing}...I... can't...don't know... .. where to begin.. every time ... I feel ... like... Lai Wa is sick. Lai Wa is gay. I think... it's because I moved here to the United States. We were always so busy working, and I think secretly I had always wondered why she never brought home boyfriends, but I assumed she was...just... focused on school, work. [sobs] Chinese people just don't do this. I used to tell Lai Wa and Anica to be strong, independent women, but...maybe I shouldn't have pushed them so hard. Just... can't talk to anyone else now. We haven't spoken in eight months. But I still love her. I do. I just can't accept her choice...

I never taught her how to speak in her own language. She never knew who she was. Maybe... My brother blames me for not teaching them Chinese. I know he's right... [sobs]

No one in our family is here. Not having you here, not having my mom, dad, my sisters and brothers when I need them. [sniffle] But I WON'T tell any of them. No. We try so hard to make money here so we can send back the little we have left over every month. Twenty years we've worked as cooks, waitresses at restaurant after restaurant, janitors at hospitals, housekeepers at day care centers. I really tried. I tried so hard. [pause] You know that I've worked two full time jobs all my life. Her dad worked every day for twenty years without having taken a single vacation except when he is forced to during Christmas and Lunar new years. He works so hard his hands are entirely masked in burn scars. We left behind our parents, our sisters, brothers, our life, for her and her sister, and now... Ma is gone..

What have I come here for? When she wrote me the letter, told me that she..., she might as well have ripped my heart out. That is not why we came here. I can't accept this... I. just. can't. I know, Connie, I know that she is hurting, too. But what do I do? What does she want me to do? [pause]. No, we cannot say anything to anyone about this. I'm sorry, I will call you soon. I have to go and make dinner for Tak Lam now.

September 21, 2012
Skype Transcript

Anica (anica864) 23:30:23 pm (Chicago, Illinois, US): Hi, Older sister cousin.

Fei Fei (zhulyi45) 23:30:30 pm (Shanghai, China): Hello, Anica.

Anica (anica864) 23:30:35 pm (Chicago, Illinois, US): [pause] Did you know Lai Wa told our mom she was gay?

Fei Fei (zhulyi45) 23:30:42 pm (Shanghai, China): What?? When did this happen?

Anica (anica864) 23:30:46 pm (Chicago, Illinois, US): It's been about three months ago. So my mom hasn't talked to your mom about it?

Fei Fei (zhulyi45) 23:30:52 pm (Shanghai, China): She never told me anything about this. I didn't know anything about it. I know your mother was worried a few years back. I remember she said something to me about Lai Wa never bringing boys home, but nothing more.

If only I were there to support your sister and your family. It is so hard to understand, but your parents may be stuck in their thinking. Do you think Lai Wa would want me to talk to my mother for her? Maybe she can talk to Auntie. To be truthful, you and I know my mother and your mom are very alike; they are about as stubborn as they come. [pause] In a way, your mom and dad came into their own closet the day your sister told them. [pause] You may need to give them some time to step out of their own closets.

Family Physician Medical Group Inc.
8232 Grayson Avenue, Suite 201
Overland Park, KS 66213

KS LIC. # 23-0eI4U203

| | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Date: 7/29/2012 | Patient Name: Sandy Chu | DOB: 4/12/1954 |
|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------|

LUNESTA dosage: 100/50 --- 1 Tab BID: 60 TBS

Note: patient describes hallucinations of passed mother at night. Direct quote: "I can't sleep at night now. I see my ma in spiders. So many nights, daughter, my eyes feel heavy but still sleep won't come."

Becky Shade, MD

September 21, 2012
Lai Wa's Journal
Los Angeles, CA

Waipo comes to me every night now, except she is not alone. They're always sitting together on the floor in Waipo's kitchen wrapping dumplings. Waipo kneads the dough, spoons the filling, and hands the dumpling over to Meixiu to finish. The two work together from beginning to end in one seamless motion. *Knead, dip, spoon, pinch*, each step synchronizing from one to the other, in harmonious synchronicity. Towards the end of each recurring dream, Meixiu whispers in my ear, "Closets are for clothes. You have to be your own best friend. If you always remember that, you will always find someone with you."

Grandma seems happy. I hope Grandma comes to see Mom too. Hope Mom still searches for spiders.

September 23, 2012
Facebook Message
Los Angeles, CA; Chicago, IL

Lai Wa Wu

+ New Message * Actions 🔍

Have you spoken with Mom lately?



Anica Wu

📍 2:15pm

No.



Lai Wa Wu

📄 2:24pm

What do you mean, no? She needs someone to talk to right now- You know she doesn't have anyone in Kansas to speak with. She probably hasn't told any of her friends in China. Do you know if she's told any of our family back in China?



Anica Wu

📄 2:24pm

I don't think so. You know how mom is all about saving face.



Lai Wa Wu

📄 2:26pm

I know... but you have to talk to her. You are the only one she can talk to now. At least I have friends here, access to a therapist, and I can find support online. She doesn't have any of that. You need to take the responsibility and be there for her even more now!



Anica Wu

📍 2:26pm

Lai Wa, I KNOW! I have been! I called her a week ago, but she just doesn't want to talk about any of these things. Why don't you just call her if you're so worried?



Lai Wa Wu

📄 2:26pm

Because you know I can't!



Anica Wu

📍 2:27pm

Lai Wa, you're her daughter. She's your mom. That's forever. You want her to be happy, and she wants you to be happy. Don't think too much. Just call her.

✓ Seen 2:27 PM

September 27, 2012
Phone Call Transcript

21:34:53 pm [Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA] Hello?

23:35:00 pm [Sandy Chu, Overland Park, KS] Yes? ...How are you?

21:35:05 pm [Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA] ...good...[pause]

{Anica mouths to Lai Wa, "Tell her you miss her."}

21:35:08 pm [Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA] I miss you.

23:35:10 pm [Sandy, Overland Park, KS] I miss you too. [pause] I do love you, do you know that? 我无法入睡，很多个夜晚。我敢肯定，今年是很难的。对我们来说，这是很难过。圣诞节是这么难。我们不跟你说话，你姐姐疯了，所以爸爸和我自己度过了圣诞节。每个人都认为“我的错。我相信它。万一.....哦，我不知道了.....但丽华，我不能接受。我刚刚不是文化。我只是不能。 *[translation]: I couldn't sleep so many nights. I'm sure this year was hard for you. It was hard for us, too. Christmas was so hard. Your sister was mad at us for not talking to you, so dad and I spent Christmas by ourselves. Everyone thinks its' my fault. and I believe it. what if ... oh I don't know anymore... but Lai Wa, I can't accept it. I just can't the culture. I just can't.*

21:35:34 pm [Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA] I know.

23:35:45 pm [Sandy, Overland Park, KS] So why you decide to call?

21:35:47 pm [Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA] well, Anica is here.

23:35:53 pm [Sandy, Overland Park, KS] Oh, really? That's good. Do you want to talk to Dad?

21:35:58 pm [Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA] Um. Sure.

{Mom hands phone to Tak Lam}

23:36:03 pm [Tak Lam, Overland Park, KS] 魏？哦。丽华。你怎么样？ *[translation]: Wei? Oh. Lai Wa. Uh... How are you doing?*

21:36:07 pm [Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA] ... 爸爸？没事啊。 *[translation]: ...Dad? I'm ok.*

23:36:10 pm [Tak Lam, Overland Park, KS] 呵，你想回家吗？我们可以给你买回家的车票。Uh, so do you want to come home? we can buy you a ticket home.

21:36:21 pm: [Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA]: [沉默]我不知道。我会看到。可能不能飞马上，但也许在夏季。 *[translation]: [silence] I don't know. I will see. Probably can't fly in right away but maybe in the summertime.*

23:36:29 pm: [Tak Lam, Overland Park, KS]: {暂停}。啊，为什么你不得不说，丽华？我们不要做那种事情。我从未听说过任何人这样做。 *[translation]: {Pause. Sigh.} Why did you have to say it, Lai Wa? We don't do this kind of things. I have never heard of anyone doing that.*

23:36:43 pm [Tak Lam, Overland Park, KS]: 哦。好的。妈妈希望手机的背面。她想说话丽娟。 *[translation]: Ok. Well, mom wants phone back. She wants to speak to Anica.*

{Lai Wa hands phone to Anica. Tak Lam hands phone to Sandy}

21:36:53 pm [Anica, Los Angeles, CA] Hi, mom.

23:36:58 pm [Sandy, Overland Park, KS] 魏? 哦, 嗨, 丽娟。[叹气] 我只是不明白她為什麼寫這封信。她為什麼把它呢? 你知道我們中國人, 我們只是不能接受這些東西。
[translation]: Wei? Oh, hi, Anica. [sigh] Did she tell you why she hasn't called me in the last year?

21:37:09 pm [Anica, Los Angeles, CA] 但她只是怕你會不開心。[translation]: She was afraid you won't be happy with her.

23:37:25 pm [Sandy, Overland Park, KS] 啊, 我只是不明白她为什么写这封信。她为什么要拿出来? *[translation]: But I just don't understand why she had to write this letter. Why did she have to bring this up?*

21:37:30 pm [Anica, Los Angeles, CA] Well...Mom, you know, ... she just needed to be honest with you.

23:37:37 pm [Sandy, Overland Park, KS] You know we are Chinese, we just can't accept these things. Waipo says to me, “家庭是家庭, 在年底, 你可以打破一棒, 但你不能打破捆绑。” That means, “family is family, in the end, you can break one stick, but you can't break a bundle.” If I don't accept her, where would she be? She have no places to go. I know that. I know she don't have family here. I know she feel lonely...But I CAN'T. You know that, right?

21:37:44 pm [Anica, Los Angeles, CA] But Mom do you know just as you say you can't change how you feel, she can't change who she is? This is who she is!

23:37:49 pm [Sandy, Overland Park, KS] I know that!
 我知道! *[translation: I know!]*
 I JUST CAN'T, OK!
 不要同我讲, 丽娟。 *[translation]: Don't argue with me, Anica...*
 There is nothing I can do. This is the only way. Tell her she has to accept this...
 我们不能有不同的想法。 *[translation]: We can't think differently.*

21:38:01 pm [Anica, Los Angeles, CA] But this is who she is!

23:38:06 pm [Sandy, Overland Park, KS] 但是, 我们只是通过这种方式 *[translation]: But this is WHO WE ARE!*

21:38:10 pm [Anica, Los Angeles, CA] MOM! YOU CAN'T DO THIS!

23:38:15 pm [Sandy, Overland Park, KS] Anica, we are not trying to do anything!
{Silence}
 Let me talk to her.
{Anica hands phone to Lai Wa}

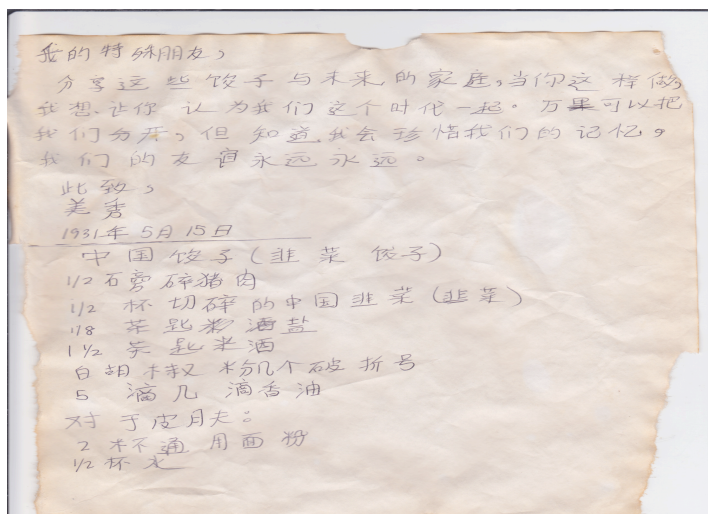
23:38:28 pm [Sandy, Overland Park, KS] When are you coming home again, Lai Wa?

21:38:31 pm [Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA]: I don't know. I'm pretty busy with school. I'm not sure. Maybe. We'll see.

23:40:19 pm [Sandy] Whatever, let me know. [pause]

21:40:25 pm [Lai Wa, Los Angeles, CA] Fine.

23:40:28 pm [Sandy] Alright. Bye.
{hangs up}



[translation]: May 15, 1936
To my special friend Chu Sau Ying,

Sending you this dumpling recipe to you along with a batch of dumplings as you leave us. Share with those you love from now on. When you make these dumplings, I hope you think of me, of our times together. Miles may separate us, but know I will cherish our memories, our friendship forever and always.

*Yours,
Meixiu*

Chinese dumplings (leek dumplings)

- 1/2 pound ground pork*
- 1/2 cup chopped leek*
- 1/8 teaspoon salt*
- 1 1/2 teaspoons rice wine*
- A few dashes of white pepper*
- A few drops of sesame oil*

For skin:

- 2 cup all-purpose flour*
- 1/2 cup of water*

- 1. Knead the flour with water until the dough becomes soft. Divide the dough into two equal parts separately, and scroll to the cylinder. They are covered with a wet towel, and set aside.*
- 2. Ready chives chopping off the white part of the leeks. Using only the green part. With ground pork and leek mixture, add all seasonings. Let sit.*
- 3. To prepare the skin, pinching the dough into small balls. Flattening it with a rolling pin until it becomes a circle the size of your palm skin. A teaspoon into the center of the skin fill and seal it tightly with your fingers.*
- 4. Heat a pot of hot water until it is boiling. Place dumplings into boiling water, cover the pot. When the dumplings float freely, which means they complete. Serve with vinegar sauce.*

II. Introduction

The conventional trope of “coming out of the closet” as a linear “successful” trajectory, a progression from a period of closeted secrecy and repression into a stage of freedom and liberation, is a narrative that often does not engage queer Asian American immigrant communities. This presumes these individuals hold inherent access to the “choice” to “come out of the closet.” The representations of queer Asian American immigrant communities and their processes of “coming out of the closet” from this lens have often emerged as traditionalist, orientalist, and repressively patriarchal. This trope also fails to recognize the historically systematic exclusion of queer Asian American immigrants as producers of self-determined communities and histories because it challenges dominant representations from without. in public spaces. Because of lack of access to such visibility, queer Asian American communities’ historical activism and agency could easily be interpreted as non-existent. “Coming out”, different from visibility, has real material gain in economic, social, and political stratosphere, and it can affect one’s access to cultural production in public spaces. Therefore, it is important to center queer Asian American immigrants as we put the creation/recreation of “closet” narratives into new media discourse. How do the experiences of these individuals add to the ‘queering’ of immigration/nation-state narrative and complicate, disrupt, and rebuild meaning in identity and community politics in new and old media? How can we measure the effect of such resonance with the community? How does one grant dignity and privacy in a narrative that has become so vastly politicized and ingrained in nationalist neoliberal ideals, and what analytic should be used to build alternative forms of representation and agency other than the traditional essentialist representations of queer immigrants? In what ways can these short stories be considered as a form of defiance?

III. Objectives

My objective in creating this narrative was to make visible the portrait of a transnational family at a moment of transition, struggle, loss, resolution, and foreground some of the ways these often undervalued and underrepresented social and kinship structures operate. This story is one of dis/connections of intimacy and desire in the relationships between three transnational generations of Chinese/Chinese American women and the social world that exists through their friendships/ familial relationships. What different kinds of living, knowing, and relating to a family or community do diasporic conditions/spaces enable in an age of new and old media? How might these individuals/communities attempt to create alternative forms of being?

More importantly, this story is one of resistance and agency as each character finds courage in her own terms to cope with various losses, rebuild connections, and confront spaces of uncertainty, tenuous positions, and irresolution. I hoped to also highlight histories which cannot be known, and the ways in which “lies” or quiet omissions could be seen as forms of resistance to survive. In an attempt to explain the unsayable, the unspeakable losses can potentially become too destructive. For racialized gendered immigrants in the United States, often the only reliable forms of knowledge are “lies” or holes of the unknown, since these are often the only spaces of possibility in which one can exist- troubling the idea that what we know to be “true” are not the only forms of “valid” narratives. I hoped to explore the ways in which the daughter protagonist constructs her identity out of all the different “lies,” and her attempts to reshift criteria of normativity as truth and non-normativity as false, in particular the ways in which the daughter and mother refuse to attribute the moment of “coming out” as their sole measure of liberation or agency in their relationship.

Many queer diasporic Asian Americans have struggled with their sexual identity and the psychological fears of navigating the often-dangerous terrains in exposing their sexual and gender identity. For those who are not granted access to a safe space and resultantly do not have access to a supportive community, this “coming out” process is often unintentional and life threatening. The revealing of queer Asian American diasporic identities calls into question the ever-shifting identities, the meaning of im/proper and un/dignified living, and their deviation from the idealized, gendered, nationalist, racial, and cultural norm. “Coming out” for queer Asian American immigrants often indirectly requires one to embody a transnationalist responsibility to reproduce a neoliberal heteronormative ideal of a ‘good citizen.’ I hope in this creative piece to complicate “coming out” processes in the post-modern age of new media, historically positioning the daughter’s experiences leading up to and after as a racialized diasporic queer subject, and how she has attempted to reclaim her narrative and self-determination in the contemporary context of “coming out” counter-narrative strategies. I also hope to use this supplementary commentary to expand the creation of dominant representations of “closet” narratives and the historical context of technological and cultural developments from which these representations emerge.

IV. Historical/ Theoretical Framework

Immigration policies have and continue to rely on hetero-normative standards if “desirable” citizenship and assumes queer diasporic Asian Americans as readily assimilable into a “self-realized state of gay modernity.”² This assumption resultantly causes queer Asian American diasporic individuals to feel obligated to politicize oneself to “come out” to no longer

² Manalansan, Martin F., *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*, IV. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003. 4

“keep quiet.” Martin Manalansan challenges this assumption with his case study of queer Filipino diasporic male subjects and their everyday means of existence. By positioning the Filipino immigrant gay male not as a passive subject of a universal modern gay identity/reality but as “queer subjects constituted through struggles that oscillate between exuberance and pathos and between survival and loss,” he engages their simultaneously racialized, gendered, sexualized, and classed positionalities to better understand how they negotiate and confront boundaries of cultural citizenship and gay modern identity.³

Manalansan further problematizes the universality/globalization of an “international” lesbian and gay identity and the existence of a universal, developmentalist trajectory of gay modernity through the contextualization of local identity building and practices.⁴ Queer individuals’ struggles are neither examples of heroism of queer liberation nor examples of oppressive victimization.⁵ Their relationships with time and space are also frequently disrupted, and verbal language often cannot be an accessible medium of expression. Due to this and a number of other reasons, kinship relations often hold greater weight to one’s life chances in the United States. Furthermore, the sole focus on one’s participation in same-sex relationships as the sole indicator of one’s gay identity is untranslatable across different locales as such performances of identity are intricately structured by power and historical context.⁶ Manalansan thus challenges the essentialization of a universal “coming out” process by providing an alternative insight to the significance of silences in queer immigrant subjects’ lives and to complicate the act of “coming out” as more than just a revealing of a “secret, inner” self.⁷ During

³ *ibid*, xi.

⁴ Manalansan, 154.

⁵ *Ibid*, 89.

⁶ Manalansan, 15.

⁷ *Ibid*, 27.

his interview with a participant named Carlo, he writes, “the silent *biyuti* [*self-conscious notion of performances manifested in everyday life*] of Carlo’s parents is seen neither as being homophobic nor as parents’ unwillingness to talk about it. Silence is not taken as denial or complete acceptance- rather dignified acquiescence and abiding love.” By contextualizing the multiple manifestations of silence not as universally oppressive, we can see the possibility of silence as a form of communication, and in the words of Manalansan, begin to “not repeat moments of colonization and privilege and refuse recapitulation of one-sided communication and omniscient observation.”⁸ If we call attention to the ways in which queer Asian American diasporic individuals use nonverbal modes of communication, we can see the importance of the “nonvisible, unexposed, implicit or ‘hidden transcripts’” found in everyday life.⁹

Neoliberalism shifts the “regulatory competence of the state onto ‘responsible,’ ‘rational’ individual citizens but also uses queer “irrational” individuals to continue to exploit for a neoliberal end. Situating the creative narrative within its historical context will help us understand how queer Asian American diasporic populations are geopolitically defined as a throwaway population. Aihwa Ong’s theoretical critique of neoliberal rationality and the role of market politics distinguishes a throwaway population as certain members of society who are deemed as dispensable, replaceable, and normatively categorized as an exception to the rest of active citizenry in order to benefit neoliberalism.¹⁰ Through the normalization and moralization of queer diasporic communities as a “throwaway” population for the institutionalization of economic rationality, the United States nation-state produces a “let live/die” ideology to further promote and justify its neoliberal immigration industrial complex.

⁸ Ibid, 7.

⁹ Manalansan, 43.

¹⁰ Ong, Aihwa. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Duke University Press: 2006. 6.

Ong argues in neoliberal rationality, the market becomes the “organizing and regulative principle of the state and society” to construct the normative and moral way of modeling the self and citizen.¹¹ She describes certain members of society who are deemed as “throwaway populations” that are dispensable, replaceable, and categorized as an exception to the rest of active citizenship body to further benefit and perpetuate neoliberalism.¹² Free and open market forces also restructure new arrangements of capital and labor across national borders so spaces of exception can regulate and imprison certain labor without necessitating any state responsibility for human rights. More importantly, this neoliberal process of reorganizing connections of self-governed bodies and spaces is slow and resultantly becomes a “common sense” and intimately integrates into everyday practices. It also requires that social inequities (race, gender, sexuality, immigration status, etc.) be bracketed off from economic and political liberalism. An individual rational action, for example, would be seen as only a rational person, not a rational person of color.¹³ To place value on life that is worthy of help means to place responsibility on an individual’s “mismanagement” of his/her own life. Wendy Brown explains the logic of the “model citizen” and “mismanaged citizen” below:

A “mismanaged life” becomes a new mode of depoliticizing social and economic powers and at the same time reduces political citizenship to an unprecedented degree of passivity and political complacency. The model neo-liberal citizen is one who strategizes for her/himself among various social, political and economic options, not one who strives

¹¹ Brown, Wendy. "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy." *Theory & Event* 7.1 (2003). Project MUSE. Web. 2 Jun. 2013. <<http://muse.jhu.edu/>>.

¹² Ong, 2.

¹³ Ong, 17.

with others to alter or organize these options. A fully realized neo-liberal citizenry would be the opposite of public-minded, indeed it would barely exist as a public.”¹⁴

Often “coming out” narratives also coincide with the racialization of Asian American conditions as one may feel the need to prove one’s allegiance to the nation by proving one’s “claim” to a “model minority” status as a qualifier of “good active citizenship.” Situating these conversations within its structural context from which the value of attaining “model minority” citizenship stem, in particular the histories of liberalism (political and economic) of individual as free subjects and values of self-care, -reliance, and –management, will help identify and acknowledge the simultaneity of reactions and contradictions these subjects may feel when engaging in such externally transformational forms of defiance.¹⁵ Due to the violent effects of race, nationalism, and capitalism are inextricably diffused into private domains of kinship, family, and intimacy, and the slippage between public and private realms that reinforce structural regulations, I decided to pursue this creative project to challenge this reinforcement and to bring back to visibility the violences of such forces. By choosing not to represent this passive value of neoliberal rationality, of a “model” or “model minority” citizenship, “coming out” can then be seen as an act of defiance rather than an act of complacency. By refusing to normalize queer Asian American immigrants as a throwaway population, I hope to expand beyond the US neoliberal trope of successful immigrant American dream and reshift the “mismanagement” of lives, losses from the hands of individuals to the larger structural forces of power. Additionally, I hoped to make the connection that the forms of subject, self-care by “coming out” did not apply to this particular

¹⁴ Brown, paragraph 15.

¹⁵ Solórzano, D., & Delgado Bernal, D. (2001). “Examining Transformational Resistance through a Critical Race and LatCrit Theory Framework: Chicana and Chicano Students in an Urban Context.” *Urban Education*, 36, 308-342; Solórzano, D., & Yosso, T..

case, as the daughter's choice to "come out" did not lead to an outcome of self-care and self reliance for the daughter or the mother.

Lisa Marie Cacho argues for a reinsertion of human agency and choice when examining transformational resistance in marginalized individuals' lives. Because they are often defined as the negative absence from which normativity is derived, those who are marginalized will be assumed as naturally deviant from the "universal American norm."¹⁶ Values of a queer immigrant Asian American life will continue to be denied because an alternative interpretation on deviance will threaten the oppositional discourses of normative capital value that centers around the [queer immigrant body]'s "negative absence."¹⁷ Defining life as the absence of what it is not robs it of dignity and detaches the body from its specificity. She warns the reader of solely contextualizing a marginalized individual's life choices as a reactionary result of exclusion due to structural conditions or as an act of defiance, and argues that this analysis is incomprehensive because 1) it represents the individual solely as a fated victim without agency¹⁸, and 2) it does not depict forms of being and agency that expand beyond a U.S. neoliberal trope of success as the heteropatriarchal, nationalistic, immigrant American dream.¹⁹ When a life is decontextualized, it can then be categorized as a throwaway, as a part of a deservedly "ungrievable" population. Cacho challenges the reader to reject this creation of the 'other' as a "negative resource," to dismiss deviance and nonnormativity as a fact in queer immigrant lives, and to ascribe a new interpretation on deviance as not something that is abnormal.²⁰ Instead, by

¹⁶ Cacho, Lisa M. "Racialized Hauntings of the Devalued Dead." *Strange Affinities: The Sexual and Gender Politics of Comparative Racialization*. Ed. Grace K. Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. 33

¹⁷ *ibid.* 44

¹⁸ *ibid.* 39

¹⁹ *ibid.* 43

²⁰ *ibid.* 26-7

viewing a queer Asian American individual's rejection of this immigrant dream and choice to live as a queer immigrant subject, dignity can then be redistributed back into these individuals' narratives. We can instead investigate how they defied normative investments in heteropatriarchal structures and neoliberal value of capital, and we can follow their own logic of self-worth and personhood that the dominant logic of morality and ethics could not value. Through these alternative forms of representation, or what Cacho terms as, "the archive of the feeling," we can reinscribe hope and beauty back into the specificity in marginalized subjects' lives.²¹

Lisa Duggan problematizes the rhetoric of public discourses around conservative and liberal LGBT politics as well as dominant discourses around homonationalism, that is a normalization of certain queer population as more "acceptable" in neoliberal democratic and nationalist ideals.²² Conservative politics frame gay public discourse around values of morality and values assuming essentialist universality of experience and reproduces heterosexuality as the norm and homosexuality as an immoral threat to hetero-nuclear family structures. Liberal politics' rhetoric to call for an end to discrimination and claim for rights, however, also is incomplete as it assumes a fixed "strategic essentialist" constituency for the purposes of political reform. Queer studies have thus argued for the contextualization such categories of sexual identity and "identity politics" as a modern western neoliberal homonationalist development and critique the naturalization of these categories as well as the ways these fixed identity positions center white men as the universal exemplar of a "gay" subject.²³ In particular, the production of the "coming out of the closet" trope has created the closet as a space of humiliation and isolation

²¹ Cacho, 46-8.

²² Duggan, Lisa. *Queering the State*. Social Text, No. 39. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994. 4.

²³ *ibid*, 4.

bounded and fixed to “closeted” and “homosexualized” bodies, thereby not critically assessing the ways in which homosocial desire are also manifested and produced in larger structural forces. Homosocial domesticity is then considered an illegitimate form of domesticity and social unit. However, Duggan argues the queer studies discourse also reproduces a “closet” by one, trivializing identity and cultural politics without understanding how it is reflective of the structural influences of identity, and two, disengaging critically political languages with constructionist discourses and transform political practices from liberal gay rights and neoliberal nationalism.²⁴

Right-wing conservative politics have strategically mobilized and formulated strategies to denounce homosexuality by framing queer politics as strictly an identity or “antidiscrimination” discourse and restricting the support of such campaigns especially through state funding. Like the utilization of religious discourse around the separation between church and state, we can use this same analogy for queer politics to disestablish heteronormative discourse and its relation to the state, instead of viewing queer politics from the lens of antidiscrimination or naturalizing queer identities as a “fixed minority.”²⁵ Sexual practices and beliefs therefore should be seen as valid forms of dissent in practices and beliefs that can also change depending on the individual’s historical and cultural positionality.²⁶

How have queer Asian American narratives and forms of resistance been constructed within recent years, especially in the context of “coming out” stories, and how can we look at sites of “coming out”, particularly in new media, as spaces that allow multiple “lies” to arise without blanketing them into one universal truth? The politics of in/exclusion behind the trope of

²⁴ Duggan, 5.

²⁵ Ibid, 8-9.

²⁶ Ibid, 11-12.

“coming-out-as-coming-home” are rooted in colonial ideas. “Coming out” narratives in the United States are rooted in origins of Western history and languages, and according to Nayan Shah, this reveals a shared strategy that attempts “to show a linear progression of the origination of an identity.”²⁷ It often suggests a binary progression with finite beginning and end points, leaving from a ‘there’ (a backward, enslaved location to come out from) to arrive at a ‘here’ (a site of home and freedom that one returns to). For queer Asian American communities, this dominant linear narrative of “coming out” does not fully engage the realities of these individuals, as it often symbolizes a ‘choice’ to “come out of the closet”- choice free from transnational migratory policies that inform globally displaced identities. Nor does it recognize the systematic exclusion of queer Asian American immigrants as producers of their own resistance narratives. Because of the lack of access to such visibility, queer Asian American communities’ historical activism and agency may be seen as non-existent. Nationalist “coming out” narratives of Asian American “model minority citizenship” also rely on homonormative ideologies of “proper homo” and “proper hetero” to replicate normative racial, gendered, and class ideals, thereby reproducing an active from a passive citizenry (that are subsequently justified as exploitable, detained, and disposable).²⁸ Such pathologies explain how queer Asian American immigrants’ exertion of agency within institutions does not allow certain acts of dissent to be viewed as such.

The production of fixed gay identities and traditional trope of “coming out” narratives that emphasize equality of rights or difference (slogans of “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it”) forefronts realities of only those whose gay identity are their main or only identity marker. This trope marks the event of publicizing one’s queer gender and sexual identity as detached

²⁷ Nayan Shah. “Sexuality, Identity, and History.” *Q&A: Queer in Asian America*.

²⁸ Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press, 2007, 342.

from all other differences or contestations of other identities. The site of “coming out” reconciles, contests, shapes, intertwines, and queers all social identities manifested in that site—trans/nationalism, ethnicity, race, class— depending on where he/she is historically located. When looking into the lives of queer Asian American communities, as Bascara states in *Stranger Affinities*, one must “understand that differently gendered racialized immigrant subjects can be considered different racial formations that can be subjected to comparison.”²⁹ Depending on where the racialized immigrant subject is situated, the subject can simultaneously confirm and disrupt narratives of United States modern nation making.

How do queer Asian American diasporic subjects complicate this majoritarian narrative of “coming out,” and how has the utilization of new media technology become a tool for community in/exclusion? Instead of reading resistance as deviance, what framework should be used to define these ‘alternative’ forms of resistance? New media analysis is necessary since its ubiquity has created a particular subjectivity and community in the way location, time, and cultural identities are multiply experienced. The instantaneous temporality, on the one hand, could potentially provide a level of intimacy for queer Asian American immigrants that allows consumers and producers to create spaces of healing, community, and activism. In Lisa Nakamura’s book *Digitizing Race*, she centers the cultural politics of new media usage, particularly the internet, to problematize existing scholarship that overemphasize Asian American communities’ role as consumers in new media usage while grossly underemphasizing their roles as cultural and media producers, thereby ignoring a substantial population of Asian Americans and their transformative resistance through the production and recreation of these

²⁹ Victor Bascara. “In the Middle: The Miseducation of a Refugee.” *Strange Affinities: The Sexual and Gender Politics of Comparative Racialization*. Ed. Grace K. Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. 195

new media spaces.³⁰ However, it is important to take into consideration the regulatory processes of these platforms that dictate who is allowed input and what content is allowed expression for the reproduction of the neoliberal capitalist and nation-state market. With such public visibility comes an implicit obligation to perform “model” citizenship by politicizing one’s identity. Moreover, new media has increased the division between those who consume and those who produce media, especially as marginalized communities of color, class, immigration status, sexual and gender identity, etc., increasingly are allocated to labor training for low-skilled work force and excluded from technical training skills that are necessary for access to new media platforms.³¹

Given the early assumption of new media as an egalitarian democratic form of media and cultural production/consumption, the terms of in/exclusion are often more subtly demarcated. Those who arrived late into new media “scene” often miss out on the means to produce or access social capital in economic development- some of which include the development of technical skills and capacities, access to career ladders, technical jobs, and job improvement. Because new media culture is a space racialized to view queer Asian Americans as “model minority” or “honorary white” consumers (largely in reference to younger demographic) rather than producers, this masks a substantial part of the communities who are not “wired” or as interactive. This oriental-ization of new media impact queer Asian American communities by ignoring again queer Asian American immigrant forms of cultural production, erasing existing social disparities and reinstating orientalist tropes of “coming out” closet(s).³²

³⁰ Nakamura, Lisa. *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007. 172

³¹ Ibid. 176.

³² Nakamura, 178.

My decision to integrate old with new forms of media stemmed from multiple reasons. One, I hoped to critique the limitations of new media platforms as spaces of community and familial support for queer Asian American diasporic subjects. I decided to incorporate certain forms of conventional storytelling (i.e. journal entries) because of the power in the conventions of the short story genre for character development and in creating a closer emotional readership identification. However, the linear, developmental structure of narrative holds limitations in its capacity to articulate the experiences of this transnational family. Thus, by using an epistolary narrative in written form, I hoped to combine both structures in order to re-center narratives of queer Asian American diasporic communities and complicate transgressions of identity and embodiments of ‘third spaces’ of resistance, while not fetishizing such creative endeavors as an oversimplistic solution to existing dominant narratives.

To simplify queer diasporic Asian Americans’ “coming out” narratives as a contribution to the assimilationist myth erases the complexities in her public narrative and invisible-izes the ways they also problematizes the dichotomizing “model citizen” narrative. Part of the purpose of this creative project is to explore the various means and degrees of interactivity, (depending on one’s social positionality in immigration status, class, geography, etc.), to challenge the perception that queer diasporic Asian American subjects have never played a proactive part in any community by placing the daughter and mother within a visible part of multiple communities, and contribute to a larger conversation around how scholars can queer transnationalism not as positively cosmopolitan or negatively imperialistic/exploitative but as free static concepts of identity within a specific place and ideology and provide new possibilities of rethinking citizenship, homeland, and belonging.

I recognize it is important not to simplify queer Asian American identities as if they were permanently fixed categories and to recognize the larger practices of the United States modern state that regulate racialized queer bodies in geographic limbo. I hope to ensure the narratives of queer Asian American communities are no longer on the periphery but are respected and put on the forefront of history. I hope by re-centering the ways queer Asian American communities take part in transformative resistance through literature, we can begin to create different forms of being and relating and reinscribe dignity and agency/voice in lives deemed “invisible.”

V. Creative Process

How did this project emerge?

My first introduction into the work of queer, feminist, Asian American literature stemmed from reading feminist anthologies of poetry, prose, short story fiction and testimonials, in particular Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga’s anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. This was my first introduction to a language that articulated parts of my personal narrative, and for the first time I was able to situate myself within a community. Through these accounts, I began to understand the capacity of the written word in empowering those who may feel invisible or forgotten. I also connected to the transparency of the subject location, the personal positioning of the narrative, and the accessibility of these analytical discourses around racialization, gender, and sexualization of power.

Taking on a creative writing project was something I wanted to tackle from the beginning. Through the power of personal narrative, I believe we can recover moments in our histories that

were most silenced; and through these histories of contradictions we can empower and reimagines our selves. I wanted to write a thesis that was rooted in the personal in this way.

There were other forms of literature that inspired my own writing aside from reading anthologies of poetry and short stories. One of the writings include Le Thi Diem thuy's *The Gangster We are All Looking For*. I appreciated her multi-layered assemblage of narratives- the veering away from a more conventional narration and the powerful, haunting ways in which she drew out time and space to bring to light the various fractures in memory and family.

Richard Fung's film *Dirty Laundry* was another effective example of non-chronological storytelling that decentered conventional approaches to sexuality. His splicing of present dialogue between enactments of the past and the interjection of multiple characters' narration illuminated the implications of sexualized, racialized, and gendered forms of crossing. Moreover, the homoerotic relationship between the two main central male characters reaffirms the notion that sexuality as one's identity- that is one's sexual relationship as indicative of some significant meaning about who he/she is- is only but a recent phenomenon. For example, homoeroticism and homosocial companionship for each other were much different and a more acceptable notion in other moments in history, depending on the positionality of the subject in relation to the intersectional processes that constitute such identity formations.³³

Bone by Fae Myenne Ng was another inspiration for this creative writing project. The non-linear, oscillating temporality was such an effective narrative to highlight how mixed histories were often erased and inexpressible and could not be narrated in any other way. I also appreciated how she showcased losses that could not fit into "successful immigrant assimilationist" stories, losses that often happen without a sense of development or resolution.

³³ Fung, Richard, and Sara Diamond. *Dirty Laundry*. V Tape. Toronto, 1996.

Part of my intention in selecting an epistolary format was to disrupt the temporal and spatial normativity and foreground all forms of losses that conventional narration might not capture.

For marginalized communities, particularly for queer women of color, to quote black feminist lesbian mother poet Audre Lorde, “poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.”³⁴ Art making is a form of survival. For me, I wanted to create a project that would not only contribute to existing academic scholarship, but also evoke something familiar within the readership. This alternative artistic framework allowed a space for affective and emotional knowledge that would fully express the racial, heterosexist microaggressions within this transnational family unit- a grandmother, mother, and daughter, and the ways in which each individual copes with their own losses at a moment where their senses of selves and relationship with the other female members are in contestation, and their attempt to find ways to understand, cope and struggle. Interwoven in this story are inspirations from actual events from my own life as well as fictionalized accounts.

Rules of Content/ Structure Conventions/ Story Development

I was drawn to the functionality of short story in that it offers the narrative arc to focus on a small set of characters and one or two major incidents (in this case, the death of the grandmother and the daughter’s queer identity). Additionally, I appreciated the flexibility the

³⁴ http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/18486.Audre_Lorde?page=2

short story form allowed me as a writer to play with experimental formats such as epistolary narratives that could transcend beyond rules often placed in other fixed literary forms.³⁵

In making a decision on the structure conventions of my story, I decided on the epistolary narrative writing and the utilization of new and old media for a few purposes. I wanted to look at the little remnants that make up who we are, fragments we leave behind- recipes, journals, emails, Facebook posts, etc.- that tell us a little bit about the evolution of who we are. This format was capable of evoking a literary discourse that could appreciate what can be told through the assemblage of these somewhat disjointed yet connected relics of the past. The heightened visuality and textuality with the pieces exemplify the conflation and simultaneity of time-space continuum in modern technology, where everything is immediate and much more textual than they were ever before. I also hoped it would provide readers with a better appreciation of the mediums of representation we use today and the conditions in which we communicate or fail to communicate.

I was surprised to find limitations in carrying out the storyline when I attempted to use primarily new media for narration. Transnational movements and diasporic communities often utilize technology to communicate in ways that allow for real-time conversations and interactivity to take place and can directly influence the identity and relationship development of its consumers/producers. There are certainly benefits and costs to this form of interaction. For example, the usage of new media can often be an extremely disorganized and confusing experience for users. however, it can also be a rewarding space to satisfy desire, kinship, and sociality. For the narrator and other characters in this piece, however, the form of online interaction did not play as much of a primary role in this form. Old and new forms of

³⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short_story

communication often could not exist without the other in contemporary community/familial formation and connection- instead it is often much more effective to rely on both modes of existence. Therefore, the decision was made to marry in this piece old and new forms of communication.

I decided on a chronological format in conjunction with an epistolary story because, on the one hand it allowed for the manipulation of time through conflation or simultaneity of events, gaps between time, or events happening in rapid succession. This displacement of time was set to help the reader frame this storyline beyond the conservative linear trajectory of bildungsroman narrative, that is, one of progression from loss, shock, mourning and finally healing.

Humor also played an integral part in this story as it provided certain characters with a coping mechanism to incongruities or tensions in relationships. In the first entry, the miscommunication between the mother and daughter through the misspelling of “fresh flowers” in email was placed intentionally to set the tone of the story by underscoring the humanity in the two primary characters. The satirical entry, “A Queer Asian American’s Recipe for Coming Out to Your Immigrant Parent” was inserted for the daughter to not only come to terms with the contradictions and ambiguities in her relationship with her mother Sandy, but it also provided a space of resistance through self-directed mockery while simultaneously relieved tensions from the often illogical, incoherent and paradoxical nature implicit in “coming out” processes for queer Asian American families.

Lastly, the decision to include the mother and grandmother’s native tongue Mandarin (actual characterization, translations, or Pinyin transliterations) in journal entries, visual artifacts, etc. was made to highlight moments of quietness, vulnerability, intimacy of significant recognition.

Themes

In this story, the grandmother Waipo's death becomes the catalyst for each character to mourn a variety of losses that previously had no cause or language to be brought to visibility, losses that are often endemic to Asian immigrant racialization and displacement (the way each character relates to their space, time, immigration, and relationship to the other women, and experience family life, intimacy, and desire), and open the possibility to new and different ways of remembering and living. Immigration limits access to familial normativity and structures gender, space, and time.³⁶ Women in this story are also living in gendered non-normative ways—either through forced mobility (e.g. the mother Sandy leaving China for economic pursuits or daughter Lai Wa's departure out of the Midwest separating from family for long durations of time) to the mother's forced immobility (Sandy's missing of Waipo Grandmother's death and funeral). This account also challenges the assumption of the “successful” assimilationist narrative of immigrants to United States society, highlighting what is given up through the process of immigration and displacement. At the same time, these characters are also actively re-imagining themselves and their relationship with the other women in the family that might not have happened had there not remained the physical disconnection, actively making decisions to take on risky and socially compromising behavior. Finally, the grandmother, mother, and daughter's need for intimacy and desire to reconnect with her parents is an underlying theme emergent throughout the narrative. Though each individual holds different motivations behind such desires, all three women attempt to reconnect with parents to find meaningful recovery from unmet (and almost impossible) expectations of heteronormative familial unconditional love, ideals that non-normative (and even those identified as normative) families could never

³⁶ Espiritu, Yen Le. *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws, and Love*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. 1997.

achieve. Despite their attempts to rationalize the illogical sense in this, each character must come to terms with inevitable feelings of guilt and shame.

There are three pivotal events/rituals in this short story: the death of the grandmother, dumpling making, and the daughter's coming to terms with her queer sexuality via a "coming out" letter. The funeral and "coming out" becomes a backstory to the food ritual, as this ritual reproduces something from a memory of the grandmother but then also draws visibility to a past and present that is intentionally forgotten (Meixiu). Therefore, the dumpling ritual was intended as an attempt to recreate kinship, hope, and connection, and a vehicle of desire for each other to return to either a nostalgic past and/or use it as a temporary coping mechanism.

I chose to place the "coming out" narrative as a backdrop to bring out unresolved issues and surface other memories of haunting through the manifestation of the grandmother and her friend Meixiu. I hoped to decenter the moment of "coming out" to help readership understand why that could never have been the center of the daughter's history, and attempt to create a different form of queer diasporic imaginary to recenter females as diasporic subjects when diasporic narratives are often centered on bonds of relationality between men. Gayatri Gopinath argues queer desire is often reoriented through a traditionally backward-looking glance of diaspora, giving rise to a conservative diasporic that assumes the subject wishes to return to lost origins.³⁷ Additionally, I had hoped to encapsulate desire as riddled with contradictions of yearning for family acceptance while simultaneously enacting on willful defiance, and one that also brings to visibility that which are "forgotten but not gone."³⁸ In this story, these "clandestine

³⁷ Gopinath, Goyatri. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003. 3

³⁸ Roach, Joseph, quoted in Gopinath, Goyatri. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003. 4

countermemories”³⁹ are embodied through the emergence of Meixiu as a character and the significance of her dumpling recipe.

Primary Character Analysis

Sandy Chu, Mother

Sandy, a working-class immigrant from China, immigrated to mid-western America with the intention of fleeing grueling gendered labor conditions of farm work in rural China. In the United States, most of her employment consisted of unstable and impermanent work as “cook, waitress at restaurant after restaurant, janitor at hospitals, housekeeper at day care centers [...]” Physically separated from her family, Sandy struggles to reconcile with feelings of guilt of leaving her parents while also refusing to see her decision to migrate as one made in vain. The death of her mother Waipo and her daughter’s letter triggers an unraveling of ongoing, often unresolvable losses, as she simultaneously oscillates between states of anger, melancholia, and denial, and reacts in many ways with an acute sense of anguish and confusion.

Lai Wa Wu, Daughter

The story follows the protagonist of the story, Lai Wa, a 1.5-generation, as she seeks to find value and attempts to claim some form of truth, visibility, and legitimacy in the eyes of her mother. The character struggles to not judge the mother from a criteria of normativity as she tries to come to terms with her incapability to find full resolution in her relationship with her mother. Though the daughter’s endeavor to claim visibility may be seen as a noble endeavor, often times

³⁹ *ibid*, 4.

for racialized gendered queer Asian Americans this is harder to actualize under conventional terms.

Ending choices

Lastly, the ending was intentionally made to be somewhat ambiguous. I did not want to privilege a resolution or close the narrative with a clear sense of healing over the loss of the grandmother, loss of the mother and daughter's expectation of each other, or a clear sense of progression. Rather, this somewhat open-ended closing only shows the parent's attempts to make "peace" with the sending of the dumpling, hoping to emphasize that the purpose of healing does not necessarily equate to "getting over" losses.

VI. Conclusion

During the fall quarter of my second year, I was enrolled in an Education course with Professor Daniel Solórzano who, at the very beginning of our first class, recited a quote by American sociologist Troy Duster, "If you scratch a theory, you find a biography." For me, the significance of this project lies in this statement, taking on a project that not only allowed me to engage in academic theory and scholarship but also enable me to communicate about the subjects and share parts of my own history in addition to how and why I came to do this work. I hope this piece can be used as a teaching tool to help reshift the dialogue around diasporic queer Asian American immigrant stories beyond the linear "liberatory coming out" tropes and encourage others to immerse themselves in the process of creative production, to find the joy in imagining as a form of resistance.

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