

# NOURISHING ROOTS



JENNY LAU

材料：雞翼  
羌

12兩  
2片  
2條  
少許

味噌醃鮭魚

魚の味噌漬け  
在日本，肉、魚、蔬菜、雞蛋等可以用味噌醃製。加入味噌的食材可以保存的時間拉長，並增加風味。醃好的魚或肉可以根據不同的鹹度不一。請參考食譜。

將食物放在鍋內，  
能忍耐低溫和慢湯受  
法之水(湯或汁)必須  
質及維他命損失。

材料：雞仔  
羌  
蒜末  
花奶  
椰汁  
小叻  
鹽

調味：鹽  
糖  
油

豉油



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2024



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All photography and artwork by Jenny Lau unless stated otherwise.



# preface.

Growing up in Hong Kong, I was no stranger to the stigma surrounding mental health. In a culture where open conversations about mental wellbeing were (and continue to be) rare, it was easy to dismiss the importance of addressing emotional struggles. It wasn't until April 2020, while living alone in New York City during the COVID-19 lockdown, that I came face-to-face with the debilitating effects of anxiety on my physical health.

Thrust into isolation, my body began to react to the mounting anxiety in alarming ways. Severe psychosomatic symptoms emerged daily, from sporadically losing sensation in my limbs and experiencing extreme dizziness to developing chronic hives and a resting heart rate of 140bpm. After my visa expired and I returned to Hong Kong, my symptoms reached an all-time high.

Desperate for relief, I sought out various forms of therapy, but found no lasting solace in clinical rooms. It was during this time that I came across research on the gut-brain axis, which sparked a profound shift in how I viewed food—from mere sustenance to nourishment. As I immersed myself in learning about the significant connection between our digestive and mental health, I found myself drawn to the comfort foods of my childhood—the nourishing Chinese dishes my mother would make when I wasn't feeling quite myself. This reconnection with my cultural cuisine brought relief and comfort, as I rediscovered

the familiar flavours and traditions that had always soothed me. Surrounded by weathered cookbooks filled with scribbled notes and my mother's old recipes, their pages ripped and brown with age, I gained a new appreciation for the wisdom and resilience embedded in our culinary heritage. Now, as I have returned to NYC, I continue to explore the profound impact of cultural food on our overall well-being. This journey has ignited a passion for understanding how the food heritage of the Chinese diaspora can serve as a powerful tool for healing, connection, and empowerment in the face of cultural stigma and Western narratives that often overlook the knowledge of our ancestors. Above all, I have come to recognize the importance of preserving and celebrating the culinary traditions that have sustained our communities for generations. These acts have the potential to foster resilience in the face of adversity.

*My experience shifted my relationship with food from one of sustenance to nourishment.*

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BRAIN

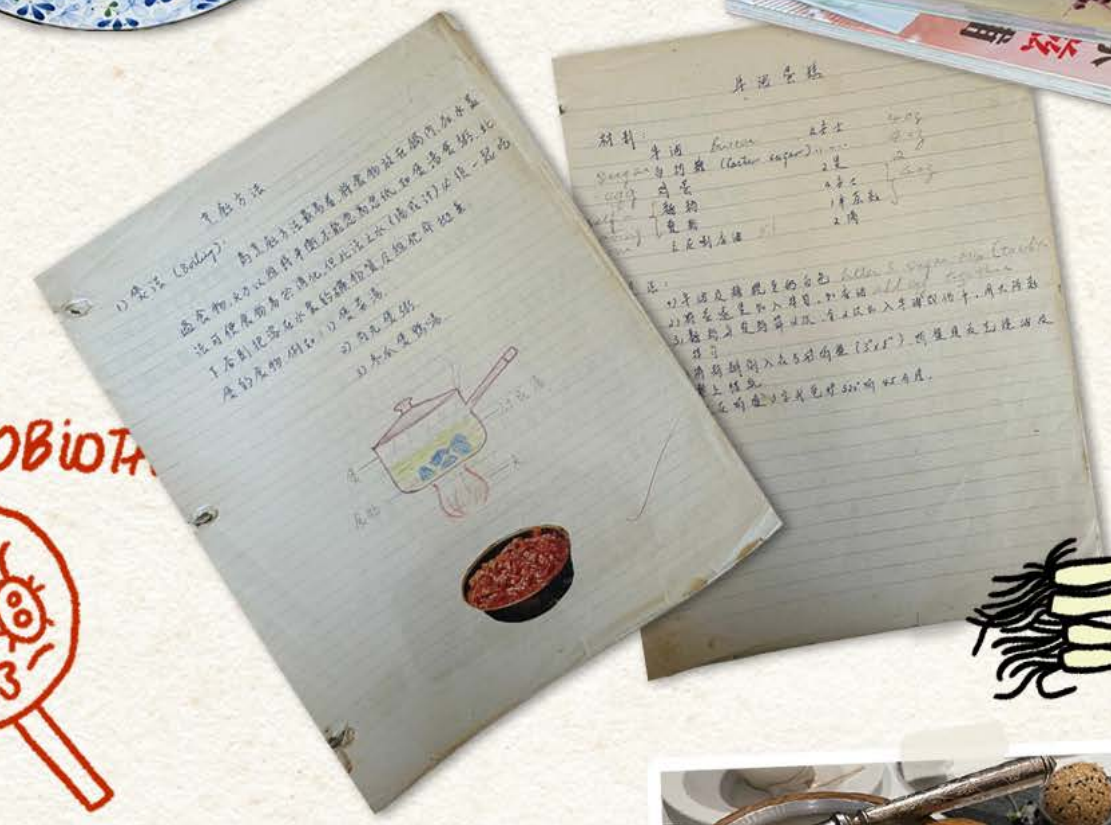
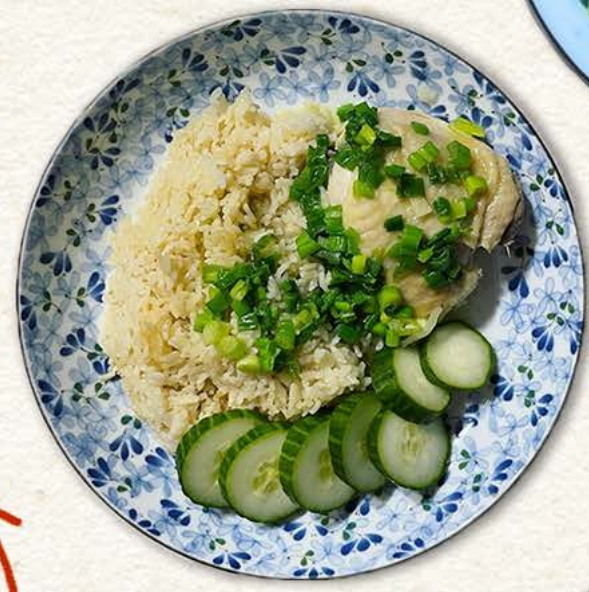


VAGUS NERVE



GIUT

MICROBIOTA



# glossary.

Language is a powerful tool that shapes our understanding of the world around us. In the realm of social design and research, it is crucial to establish a shared vocabulary that enables clear communication and fosters a deeper understanding of the complex issues we aim to address. In the spirit of clarity and inclusivity, this glossary serves to define key terms and concepts that are central to my thesis project. As you move forward, I invite you to refer back to this glossary as needed, using it as a tool to engage more fully with the ideas and stories presented.

## a

### **ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE**

the wisdom and practices that are handed down from ancestors within a cultural or familial group. It encompasses a broad range of elements, including traditional medicines, spiritual beliefs, agricultural practices, ecological insights, and cultural norms.

### **ASSIMILATION**

“the process whereby immigrants do not retain their original cultural identity and link to their heritage; instead, they seek to close interaction with the host culture and adopt the cultural values, norms, and traditions of the new society.”

— Jane Jackson in *Introducing Language & Intercultural Communication*

## c

### **CULTURAL COMPETENCY**

encourages being aware of one's personal worldview, building knowledge of and understanding different cultural practices, and developing skills for cross-cultural communication. It is knowledge-based.

### **CULTURAL HUMILITY**

a practice stressing a commitment to lifelong learning and self-critique that aims to correct power imbalances inherent in structured, institutionalized relationships (like patient-physician relationship in medicine). It deepens the intentions of competency by encouraging an open, other-oriented approach when engaging with people; it goes beyond a set of skills that can be acquired.

— Dr. Melanie Tervalon & Jann Murray-Garcia

### **CULTURAL IDENTITY**

the sense of belonging to a group that is defined by shared characteristics such as language, traditions, societal norms, and artifacts. This identity is influenced by a variety of factors including ethnicity, geography, religion, and history, and helps individuals understand their place in the world.

## d

### **DIASPORA**

the dispersion of any people from their original homeland to multiple other regions.

## f

### **FOOD HERITAGE**

refers to the culinary traditions and practices that are passed down through generations within a culture or community. It encompasses the ingredients, recipes, techniques, and rituals that are associated with a specific group's historical and cultural background. Often deeply intertwined with cultural identity, it plays a crucial role in how communities celebrate their history and maintain connections to their ancestry.

### **FOODWAYS**

refers to why we eat what we eat and what that means. They are shaped by culture, religion, tradition, geographic location, climates, time periods, politics and socio-demographic power differentials.

— The Society of Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB)

## h

### **HEALTH & WELLBEING**

a holistic state of physical, mental, and social wellness. It encompasses not only the absence of disease but also the presence of positive emotions, meaningful relationships, and a sense of purpose and belonging.

## i

### **INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

the information, skills, beliefs, and traditions transmitted from one generation to another within a community or family. It involves older generations sharing their wisdom and experience with younger members through oral traditions, shared activities, mentoring, and storytelling.

## t

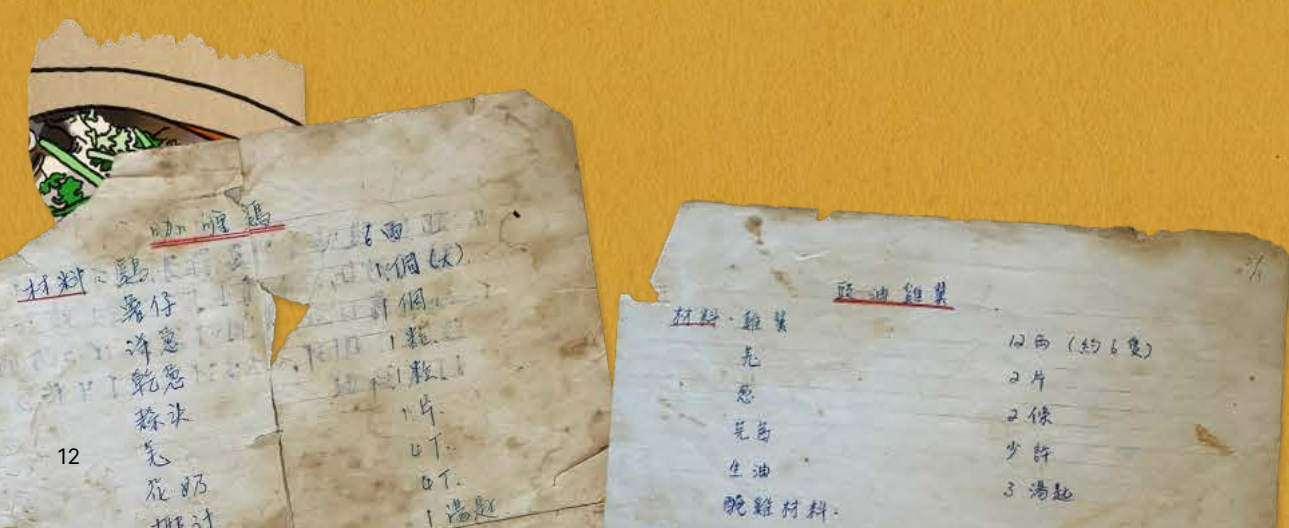
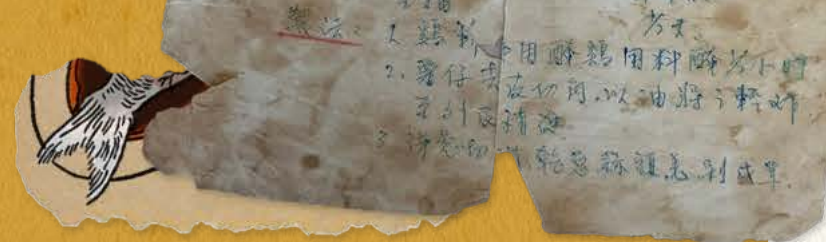
### **TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE (ALSO KNOWN AS 'TCM')**

a holistic system of health care that has been practiced in China for thousands of years. TCM is based on the concept of Qi (vital energy) and its balance in the body, and it uses various therapeutic approaches including herbal medicine, acupuncture, massage (Tuina), exercise (Qigong), and dietary therapy. Its principles are rooted in the philosophy of Yin and Yang—opposing forces that need to be in balance for health—and the Five Elements theory, which explains the interconnection and interdependence of all life and environmental forces.

# context & framing.



background | designer positionality



The United States is a nation of natives and immigrants, with a long history of welcoming people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. In fact, by a wide margin, the U.S. has more immigrants than any other country in the world (Budiman). As of 2021, Asians account for 6% of the U.S. population, or over 21.1 million people, making them the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group in the country (Pew Research Center). In New York City alone, there are over 600,000 Chinese Americans, representing roughly 9% of the city's population (Asian American Foundation).

This demographic growth, however, does not automatically translate into a sense of belonging, which remains elusive for many. The process of assimilation into mainstream American culture can be challenging, with Asian Americans often reporting feeling like 'perpetual foreigners', citing experiences of discrimination, a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes, persistent stereotypes, and a lack of representation in prominent positions (Huynh, Devos, and Smalarz 133-162; Tessler, Choi, and Kao). The pressures to assimilate while also preserving cultural identity can create a complex and sometimes conflicting set of expectations for Asian Americans. They may feel torn between the desire to fully integrate into American society and the need to hold onto their cultural heritage and practices. This can be particularly evident in the realm of food, where traditional dishes and preparation methods may clash with more mainstream American culinary norms, ultimately affecting the health and wellbeing of Asian American communities.

Research has also shown that Asian Americans face unique health disparities, including higher rates of certain chronic diseases, mental health stigma, and barriers to accessing culturally competent healthcare (Jang et al.; Nguyen et al.). These disparities are often overlooked due to the 'model minority' myth and a lack of disaggregated data for Asian subgroups (Yi et al.). Cultural attitudes towards health and wellness play a significant role, with traditional Eastern approaches like Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) differing from Western biomedical models (Xu et al.). Cultural beliefs, practices, and stigma surrounding health and mental wellbeing

can impact health-seeking behaviors and outcomes within Asian American communities (Chung & Chen).

Additionally, food serves as a powerful marker of cultural identity and a means of maintaining connection to one's heritage (Kittler et al.). Traditional food practices and knowledge can be a source of resilience, comfort, and healing for diaspora communities (Weller & Turkon). However, there is a notable lack of culturally relevant nutrition resources, guidelines, and interventions tailored to the specific needs and cultural contexts of Asian American communities. The dietetics field, in particular, lacks diversity, with 74% of practitioners being non-Hispanic white (The Census Bureau ACS). This highlights the need for greater cultural humility and community engagement in developing effective and inclusive nutrition programs and policies (Brown-Riggs).

**WHITE DIETITIANS MAKE UP 74% OF THE INDUSTRY**



The Census Bureau ACS PUMS 5-Year Estimate

# the cultural significance of food

Food is a fundamental element of human life, not only fulfilling physiological needs but also serving as a core component of cultural identity, social structure, and health practices. In the context of health equity and dietary interventions, understanding the cultural significance of food is essential. This understanding provides the foundation for creating interventions that are culturally responsive and effective, particularly within diverse communities.



## CULTURAL DETERMINANTS OF FOOD CHOICES

At the core of dietary habits are cultural determinants that define what is considered appropriate or inappropriate to eat, and what is deemed healthy or unhealthy. These cultural norms are not merely preferences but are deeply ingrained in the societal fabric, reflecting broader values, knowledge, and historical contexts. As Joel Gittelsohn, a prominent researcher in nutrition and public health, notes, culture profoundly influences food choices, affecting everything from food selection to preparation and consumption norms (Gittelsohn).

## CULTURAL FOOD CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS

Every culture has its unique food classification system, which impacts not only dietary choices but also health perceptions and practices. These classifications often overlap and are prioritized differently across cultures, reflecting core values and societal norms. For instance, the categorization of foods based on their perceived thermal properties—such as hot or cold—is a significant aspect of dietary planning in many Eastern cultures and is thought to affect health outcomes by maintaining bodily harmony (Kuhn et al.).



## HAIRY KING CRAB COMPLEMENTED WITH GINGER TEA

In TCM, this pairing is believed to balance the “cooling” properties of crab with the “warming” properties of ginger.

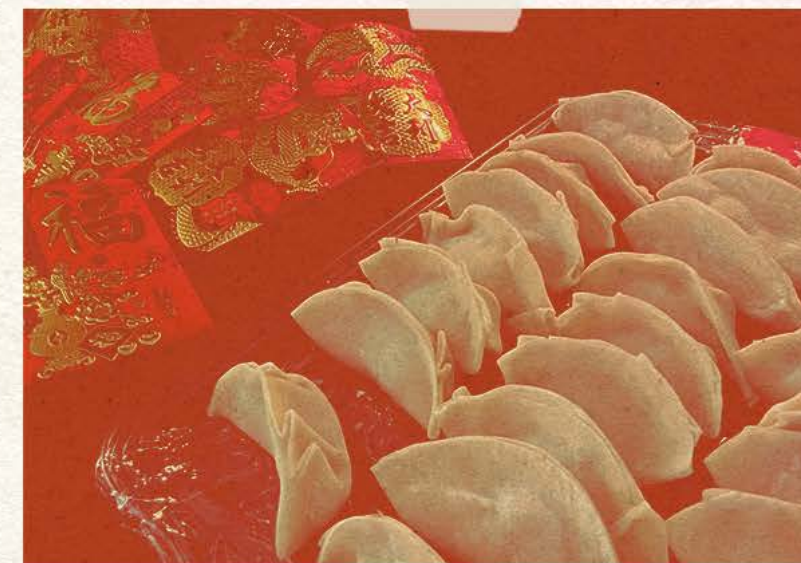


## THE INTERSECTION OF CULTURE & CONSUMPTION

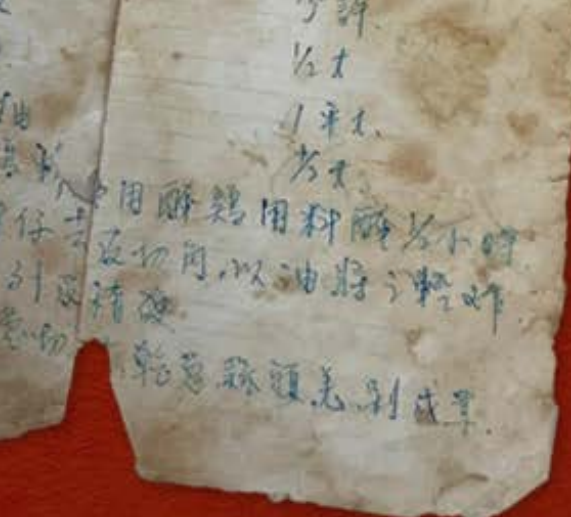
Foodways, which include the entire array of eating habits and dietary practices across different cultures, encapsulate how food is selected, prepared, and consumed. These practices are embedded with rules that guide not only what makes up a meal but also how foods are combined or segregated, and their sequential consumption during meals. This systemic organization within cultures provides a sense of order and continuity, influencing daily health behaviors and choices (Gittelsohn). For example, in many cultures across East Asia, the balance of flavours and ingredients, based on the principles of Traditional Chinese Medicine, dictates that meals consist of elements that are both ‘yin’ (cooling) and ‘yang’ (warming). These principles are believed to influence bodily health and are integral to meal preparation and food choices (Cheung).

## SYMBOLIC & SOCIAL ROLES OF FOOD

Food also carries symbolic meanings that transcend its nutritional value. It can denote social status, reinforce social bonds, and serve as a marker of ethnic and cultural identity. In social gatherings and rituals, the choice of food can signify respect for cultural traditions or adherence to social norms. The symbolic use of food in ceremonies, from weddings to funerals, illustrates its integral role in cultural expression and community cohesion (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002).







# so... what's the issue?

There is a lack of cultural humility in mainstream Western advice, which often overlooks the healthy cultural food traditions that diaspora communities rely on, erasing generations of ancestral wisdom and contributing to severed ties with their identities.



# thesis statement

I am co-creating tools centered on Chinese cultural cuisine for US diaspora members in order to increase the acceptance and integration of traditional Chinese food as a means to health and wellbeing. Given the fragmented access to the inheritance of Chinese food knowledge, there is an urgent need to ignite pride and strengthen connections to heritage. This will empower communities to guide their own wellbeing, maintain their cultural identity, and counter dominant Western narratives.



# designer positionality.

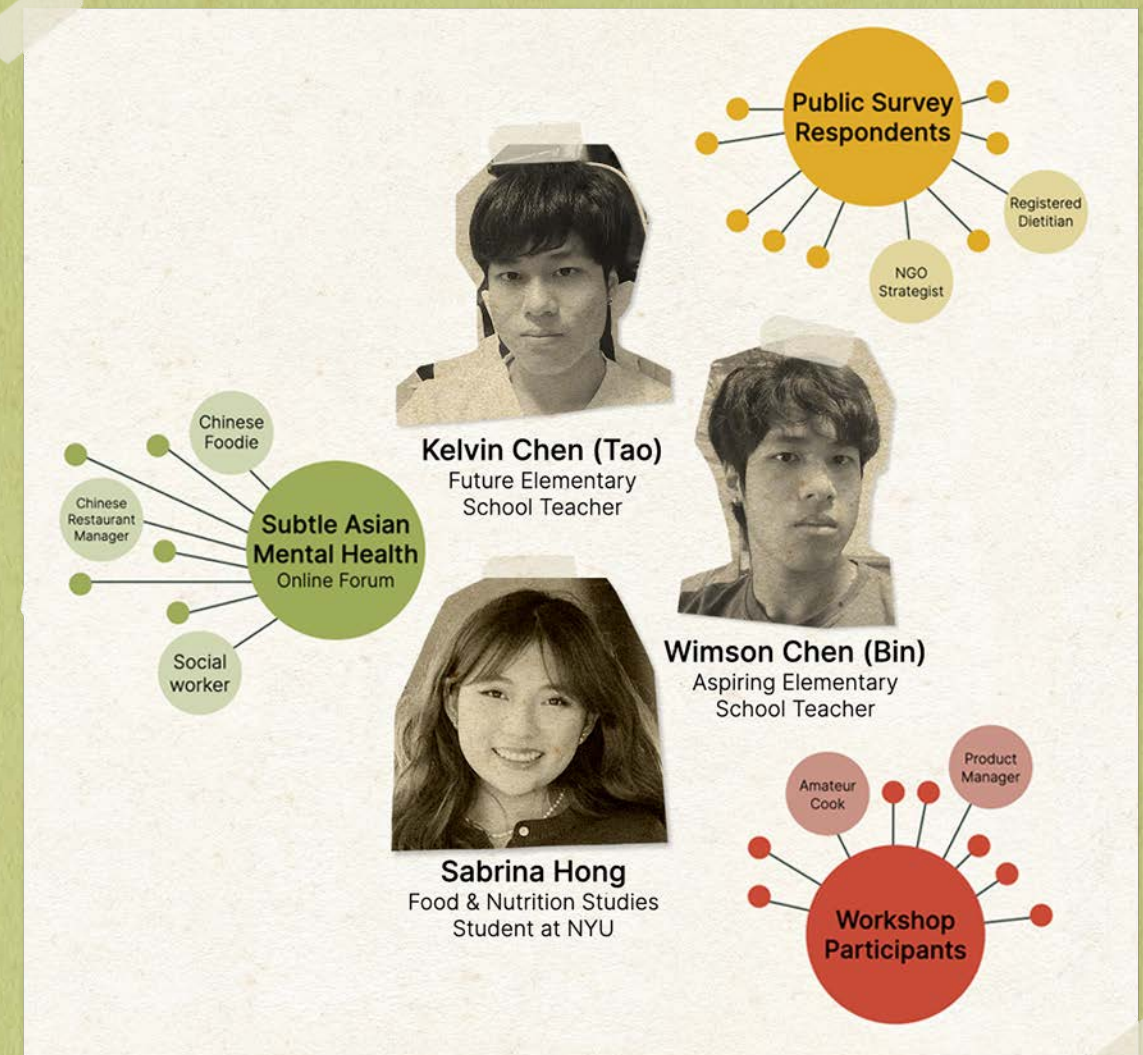
As a Chinese designer from Hong Kong, my personal experiences have uniquely positioned me to undertake a project like this. Having navigated the complexities of cultural identity, mental health, and the profound impact of food on wellbeing, I bring a deep understanding and passion to this work. My journey from struggling with severe anxiety symptoms to healing through the comforting, nourishing dishes of my childhood, to rediscovering the wisdom embedded in my cultural cuisine, has taught me the importance of reconnecting with our cultural heritage as a source of healing and resilience. Now, as I continue my New York chapter for the second time, I am driven by the desire to explore how this knowledge could support the wellbeing of others in the Chinese diaspora, and more importantly, a mission to create a community that empowers individuals to embrace their cultural food heritage as a path to holistic wellbeing. Drawing on my own experiences of disconnection and reconnection, I am committed to building a space where people can come together to share their stories, celebrate their traditions, and find a sense of belonging.

However, I recognize that my personal journey, while valuable, is just one perspective among many. As a designer, I must be mindful of the power I hold in shaping the direction of this project and the potential biases and assumptions I bring to the table. It is crucial that I approach this work with cultural humility, acknowledging the diversity of experiences within the Chinese diaspora and the importance of centering the pieces and knowledge of the community.

To ensure that this project truly serves the needs and aspirations of those it seeks to support, I am committed to creating opportunities for co-creation, collaboration, and ongoing dialogue. By actively listening to the stories and insights of the community members, I aim to design interventions that are not only effective but also culturally resonant and inclusive. Additionally, I recognize that my own positive experiences with Chinese food heritage may lead me to overemphasize the potential benefits, or overlook the challenges and barriers that others may face in connecting with their cultural cuisine. It is essential that I remain open to diverse perspectives and experiences, and continuously reflect on how my own biases may influence my design decisions.

Ultimately, my role as a designer is to leverage my skills, cultural understanding, and personal experiences to amplify the voices and stories of the Chinese diaspora. By creating a platform that celebrates the richness and resilience of our food heritage, I hope to contribute to a larger movement towards cultural humility, health equity, and the empowerment of communities to define and pursue their own paths to wellbeing.

This project is not about me, but about the collective knowledge and aspirations of the community it serves. It is a collaboration, a shared journey towards healing, connection, and the celebration of our diverse identities and traditions. Together, we have the power to redefine the narrative around cultural food heritage and its role in our holistic wellbeing.



## The Hot Pot Healing Collective *community partner*

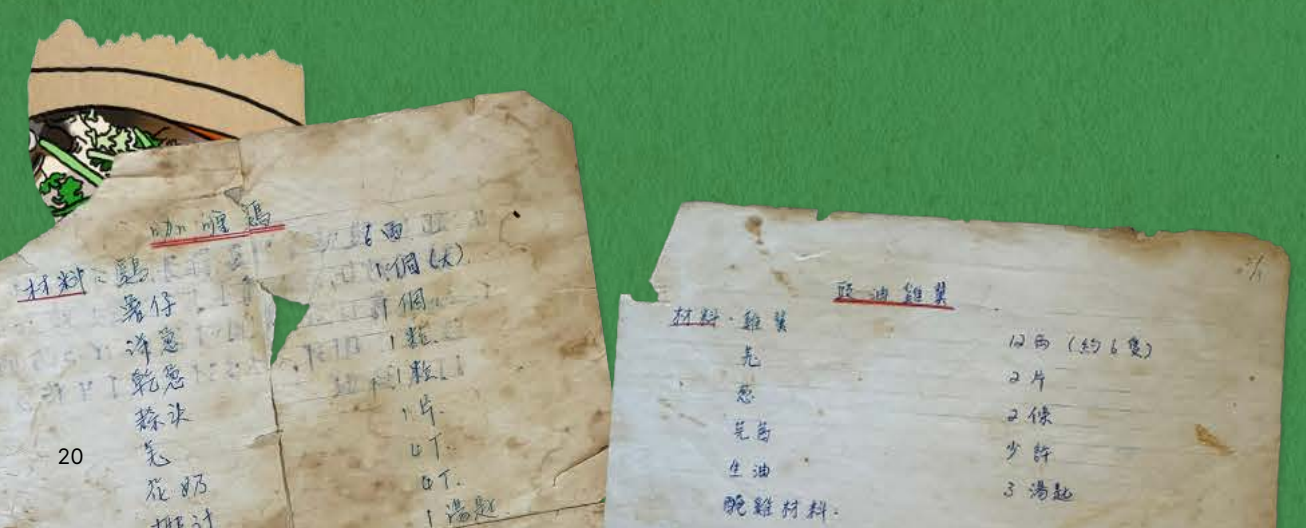
The Hot Pot Healing Collective is a **distributed community partner** consisting of Chinese diaspora members from various backgrounds, including nutrition students, mental health professionals, amateur cooks, social workers, registered dietitians, and international students. The collective is anchored by three dedicated individuals based in New York City who have been instrumental in providing guidance, feedback, and support. Beyond this core group, the collective also includes a broader network of members who come and go from online forums like Subtle Asian Mental Health, as well as participants from public surveys and workshops.



# the design process.



research phases one & two



## JOURNEY SNAPSHOT

**3 CONFERENCES**

**25 INTERVIEWS**

**3 PROTOTYPES**

**2 ONLINE SURVEYS**

**Nutrition & Wellbeing: The Role of Chinese Heritage**

## JOURNEY SNAPSHOT

# PROCESS TIMELINE

**1** INITIAL RESEARCH  
focus on the nutrition space



**2** ANALOGOUS RESEARCH  
what is healing?



**3** PIVOTING  
focus on the Chinese diaspora

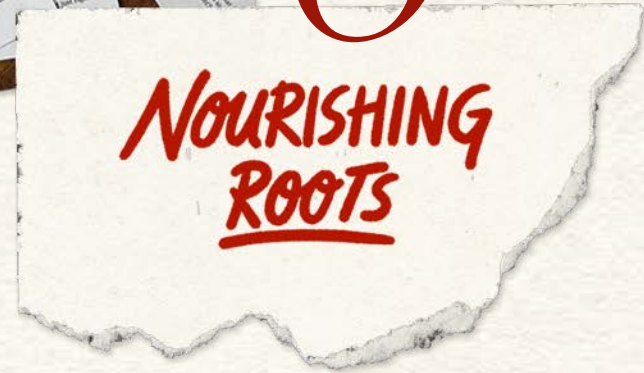


**4** DEVELOPMENT  
of prototypes

**5** REFINEMENT  
of prototypes



**6** DELIVERY  
the intervention



# research phase one.

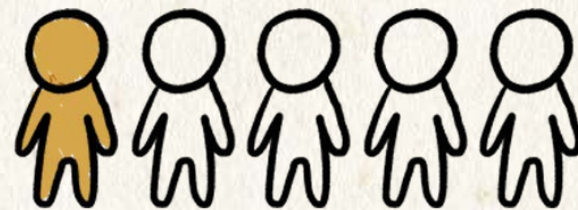


Image: Polina Tankilevitch via Pexels

**How does the lack of cultural competency contribute to the westernization of practices that fail to meet the needs of non-white ethnic communities? How can we use culturally sensitive nutrition to enhance people's relationship with food, empowering them to adopt a healthier, disease-preventative lifestyle that respects their cultural heritage and promotes wellbeing?**

In my early research, I discovered that one in five global deaths is attributable to suboptimal diets, accounting for approximately 26% of preventable mortality (Afshin et al.; Development Initiatives). In the US alone, a staggering \$50 billion is spent annually on diet-related health issues (American Heart Association). There is also considerable evidence of a rising mental health decline exacerbated by poor dietary habits. Furthermore, studies indicate that minority populations in the US face a higher risk of diet-related chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases compared to their white counterparts. While diet is central to people across all cultures, many approach nutrition from a standardized, Western-centric perspective (Kittler et al.). With escalating diet-related illnesses among minorities and persistent disparities in food access, there is a critical need to develop culturally-attuned nutritional interventions to advance health equity and honor the food heritage of diverse communities.

It is also important to identify the key stakeholders. The community members affected by this issue include individuals from minority ethnic/diasporic groups who require culturally competent nutrition care but are underserved by current Western-dominated systems. These individuals, whose traditional foodways and relationships with food are not supported or represented, include immigrants,

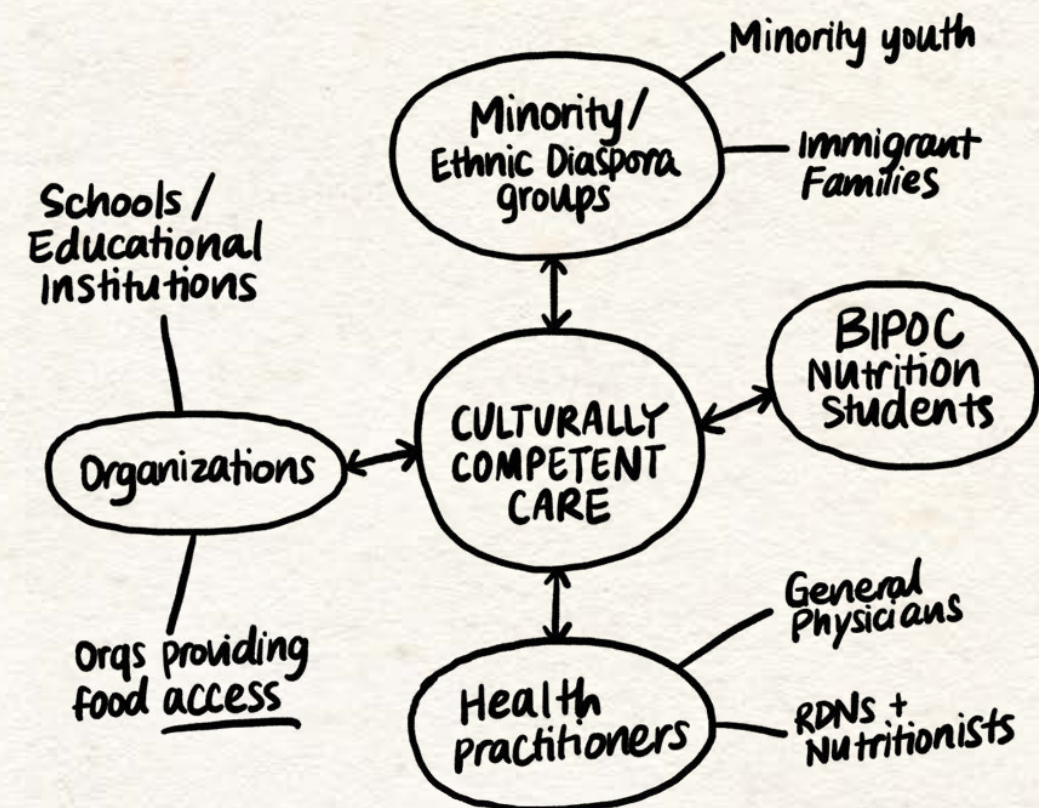


**1 IN 5 DEATHS**  
across the globe is due to  
a suboptimal diet.

first-generation individuals, and people of colour. More specifically, affected communities include minority youth alienated from their food heritage, ethnic minority families struggling to maintain traditional diets in the US diaspora, BIPOC nutrition students lacking role models and curriculum representation, and minority practitioners promoting cultural foodways. Additionally, nutrition and health/wellness practitioners/providers, schools, and organizations providing food access, who currently adopt a more ethnocentric approach to dietary interventions and fail to accommodate cultural needs, are also stakeholders. Health practitioners, particularly registered dietitians and nutritionists, are poised to drive significant change.

Given my initial hypothesis that a lack of cultural competency among nutritional practitioners contributes to a westernization

of nutrition practices that fail to serve non-white ethnic communities, I sought to explore how enhancing cultural competence in nutrition care and restoring traditional foodways could improve health outcomes for minority diaspora communities. Focusing on themes of ethnocentrism in nutrition advice and the underprioritization of nutrition in daily life, I connected with a diverse group of registered dietitians and nutrition experts of colour across the US, including professionals from Hispanic, African American, Chinese, Japanese, and Caribbean backgrounds. Through interviews, I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of this landscape.



# interviewing nutritionists of colour.

**Goal:** To better understand the landscape of cultural competence in nutrition practice and identify opportunities for interventions that enhance the health and wellbeing of diverse communities. Additionally, this goal includes gathering insights that will inform the development of culturally-informed resources.



## Key Domains of Inquiry

### 1 CULTURAL COMPETENCY GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN NUTRITION PRACTICE

To identify the gaps in cultural competency within conventional nutrition training and advice, and explore opportunities to adapt mainstream nutritional guidance to be more culturally relevant. Understanding these gaps and opportunities is crucial for developing interventions that better serve the needs of diverse communities.

- What are the primary gaps or challenges that nutrition practitioners have observed when providing services to minority, ethnic, or BIPOC communities?
- What are the key areas where cultural competency is lacking in conventional nutrition training and advice?
- How could mainstream guidance be adapted to be more culturally relevant?
- What assumptions or misconceptions about foods/diets from certain cultures are important to address and challenge to work towards more culturally sensitive approaches in this field?
- In what ways are clients' cultural backgrounds and food preferences taken into account when delivering guidance?

### 2 CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS IN DELIVERING CULTURALLY-RESPONSIVE NUTRITION GUIDANCE

To understand the challenges and barriers that practitioners face in delivering culturally responsive nutrition guidance, both within their scope of practice and in interactions with clients. Identifying these challenges is essential for developing strategies to overcome them and improve the quality of care for diverse communities.

- What does the typical process of a consultation or appointment with a client look like?
- What challenges or barriers do practitioners encounter either within their own scope of practice or when engaging with external individuals?
- What are the important considerations when working with every client?
- How might their approaches differ from those of general or non-dietetic health practitioners in advising individuals?
- How is success defined in the practice and how is that being measured?

### 3 TOOLS & RESOURCES NEEDED TO SUPPORT CULTURALLY COMPETENT NUTRITION PRACTICES

To explore the tools, resources, and paradigm shifts needed to support culturally responsive nutrition care and practices.

- What tools have been the most helpful and what are some that would really benefit practitioners' process and clients?
- What might future visions be? What paradigm shifts in attitude and behaviours would enable these visions?
- There are many individuals from ethnic and low-income communities who aren't able to see a certified practitioner. What advice should these people be given to have better agency over their dietary and overall health?
- Which physical community spaces might be most receptive to eventually housing and sharing culturally-attuned resources?
- What existing visual nutrition education tools are strongest at resonating across diverse groups? What makes them effective as models?

### 4 ROLE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE, IDENTITY, AND COMMUNITY IN SHAPING HEALTH AND WELLBEING

To understand the role of cultural heritage, identity, and community in shaping one's relationship with food and preventative health.

- How would incorporating themes around ancestral wellness knowledge or intergenerational knowledge transfer resonate in making healthy eating more relatable and desirable?
- How does cultural heritage and identity play a role in one's relationship with food and preventative health?

# insights.

After conducting interviews with a diverse group of registered dietitians nutrition experts of colour, including professionals from Hispanic, African American, Chinese, Japanese, and Caribbean backgrounds, several key insights emerged that shed light on the challenges and opportunities in providing culturally competent nutrition care.



**1** One of the most prominent themes was the importance of **visual tools in engaging clients and patients**, especially those with limited literacy, food knowledge, or education. The RDNs emphasized that visuals, such as pictures, plates, and food models, are powerful ways to connect with individuals, even when language barriers exist. However, they also noted that the available models are often American-centric and lack cultural inclusivity, highlighting a need for more diverse visual resources.

Another significant challenge identified was the **difficulty in archiving and organizing** culturally specific food and herb information. For example, a Chinese RDN mentioned that Asian foods and herbs are often absent from existing databases, forcing practitioners to create their own libraries to better serve their patients. This insight underscores the need for more comprehensive and culturally inclusive visual libraries and databases.

The interviews also revealed a **lack of emphasis on preventative care**, such as education, community outreach, and patient empowerment. Many RDNs expressed that there is insufficient focus on helping people make the connection between their dietary habits and overall wellbeing, leading to an overreliance on medication rather than lifestyle changes. This presents an opportunity to develop interventions that prioritize education and empowerment, enabling individuals to take control of their health through informed dietary choices,

**3** Additionally, the RDNs discussed the challenges of promoting healthy eating habits and facilitating behaviour change, particularly among older adults who may have deeply ingrained habits. They emphasized the importance of understanding each client's unique barriers and stage of readiness to change, and tailoring approaches accordingly. This insight highlights the need for nutrition interventions that are adaptable and responsive to individual needs and circumstances.

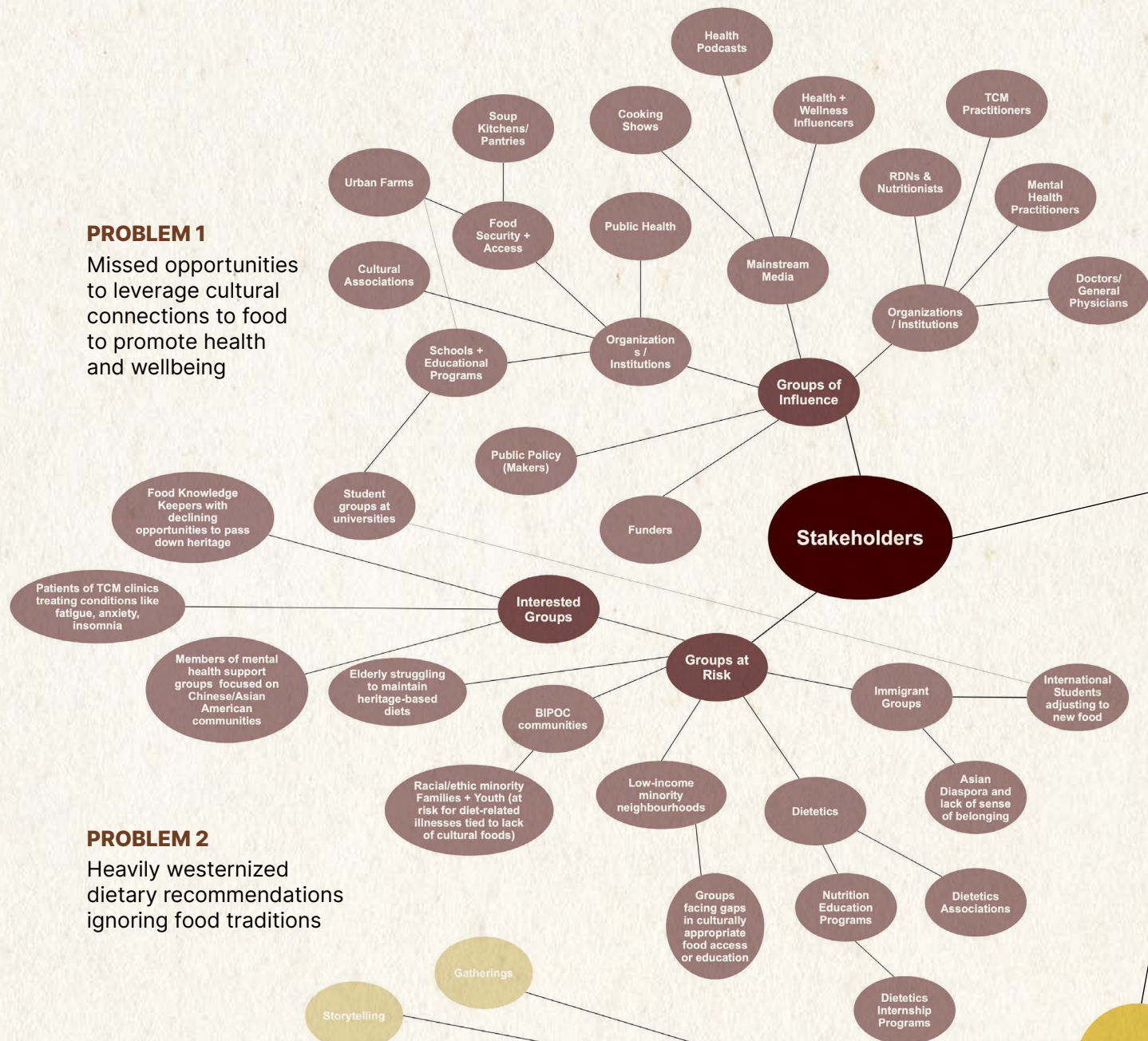
The interviews also shed light on the **role of food companies and social media in perpetuating misinformation** about healthy eating. The general population's exposure to and education on "healthy foods" is often influenced by commercial interests, leading to confusing and misguided choices. This presents an opportunity to develop resources and campaigns that combat misinformation and promote evidence-based, culturally relevant nutrition guidance.

Finally, the RDNs emphasized the importance of **addressing trauma tied to food** and incorporating therapeutic approaches in nutrition counselling. They stressed the need for practitioners to learn and respect each individual's language and boundaries, creating a safe and supportive environment for healing and growth. This insight underscores the importance of integrating mental health considerations and trauma-informed practices into nutrition interventions.

Throughout this process I also synthesized my continuous understanding of the explored themes, which helped me visualize the interconnected factors influencing cultural competence in nutrition care. Below you can see an ecosystem map, based on three issue statements, of the current landscape that serves to help me identify key leverage points and opportunities for my intervention.

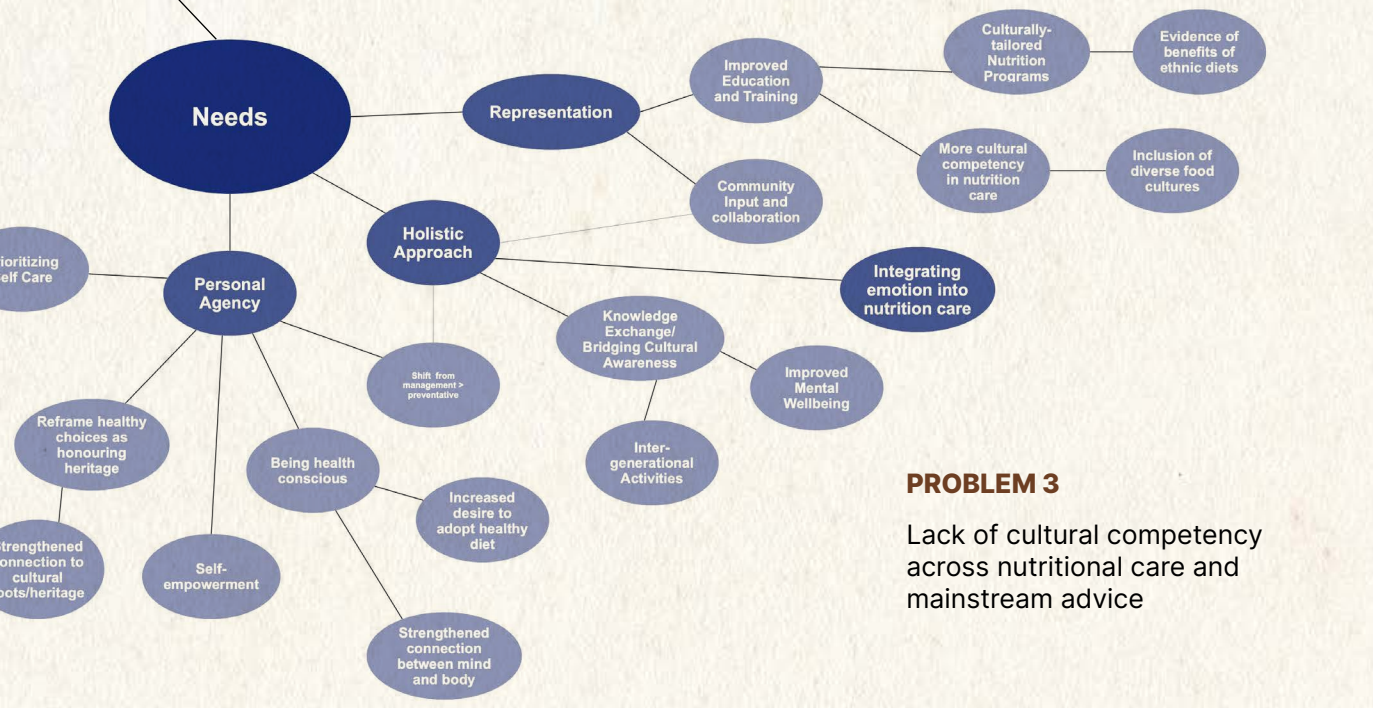
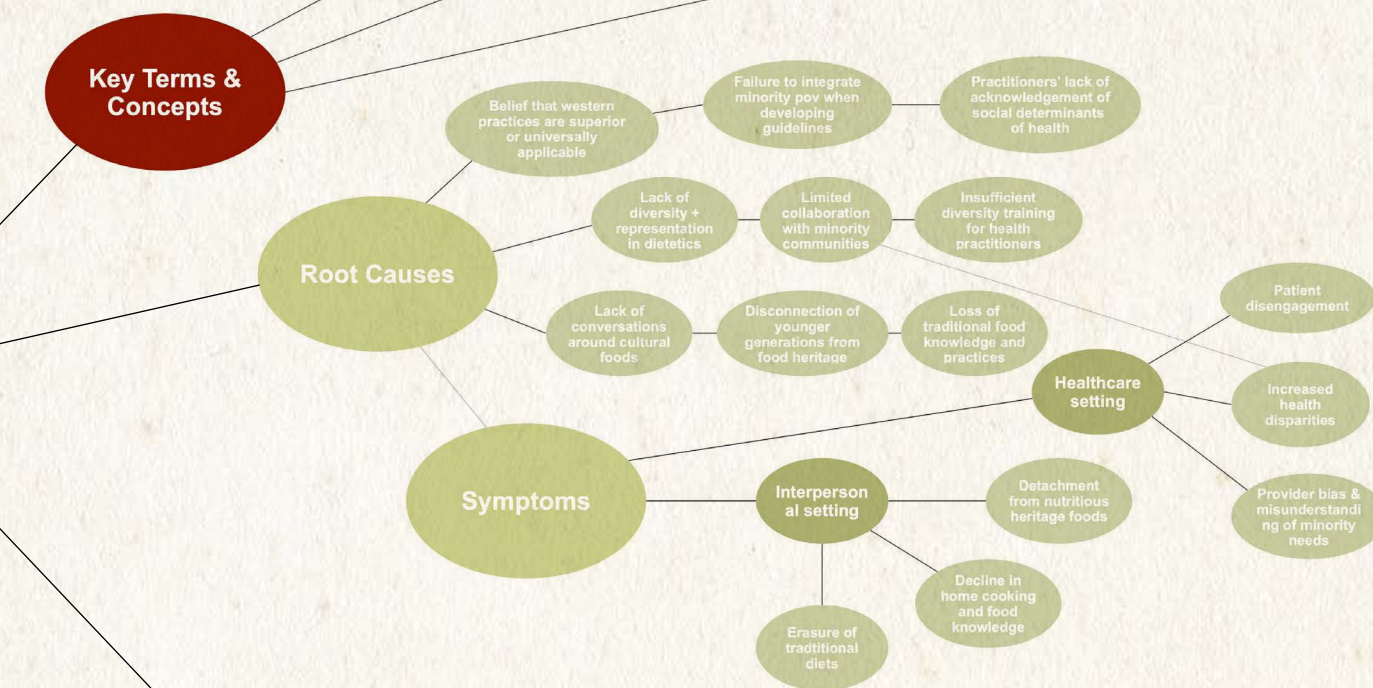
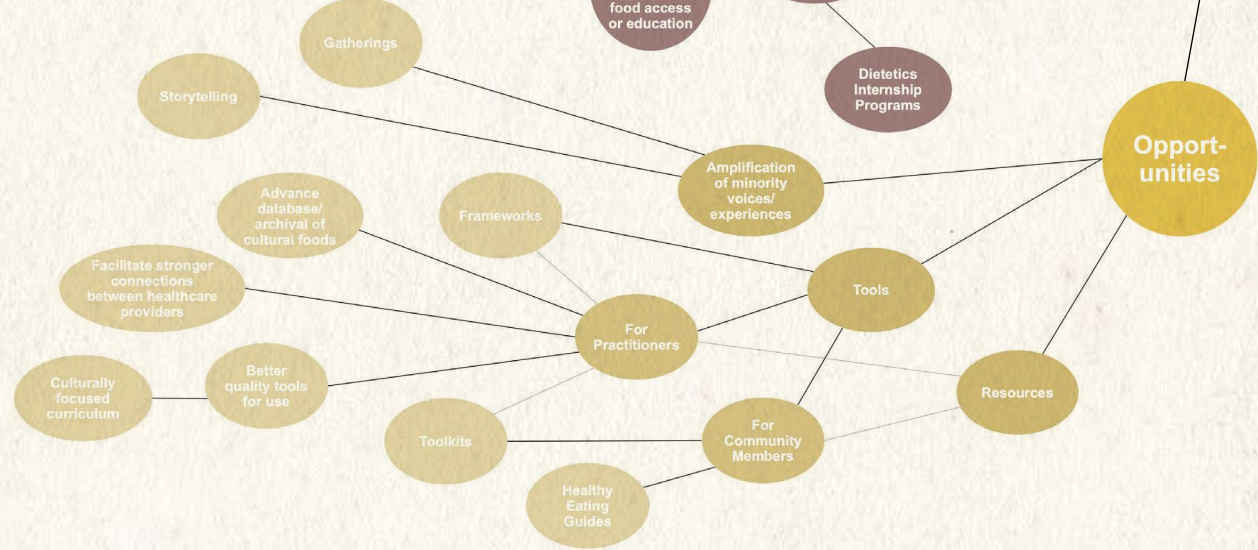
**PROBLEM 1**

Missed opportunities to leverage cultural connections to food to promote health and wellbeing



**PROBLEM 2**

Heavily westernized dietary recommendations ignoring food traditions



**PROBLEM 3**

Lack of cultural competency across nutritional care and mainstream advice

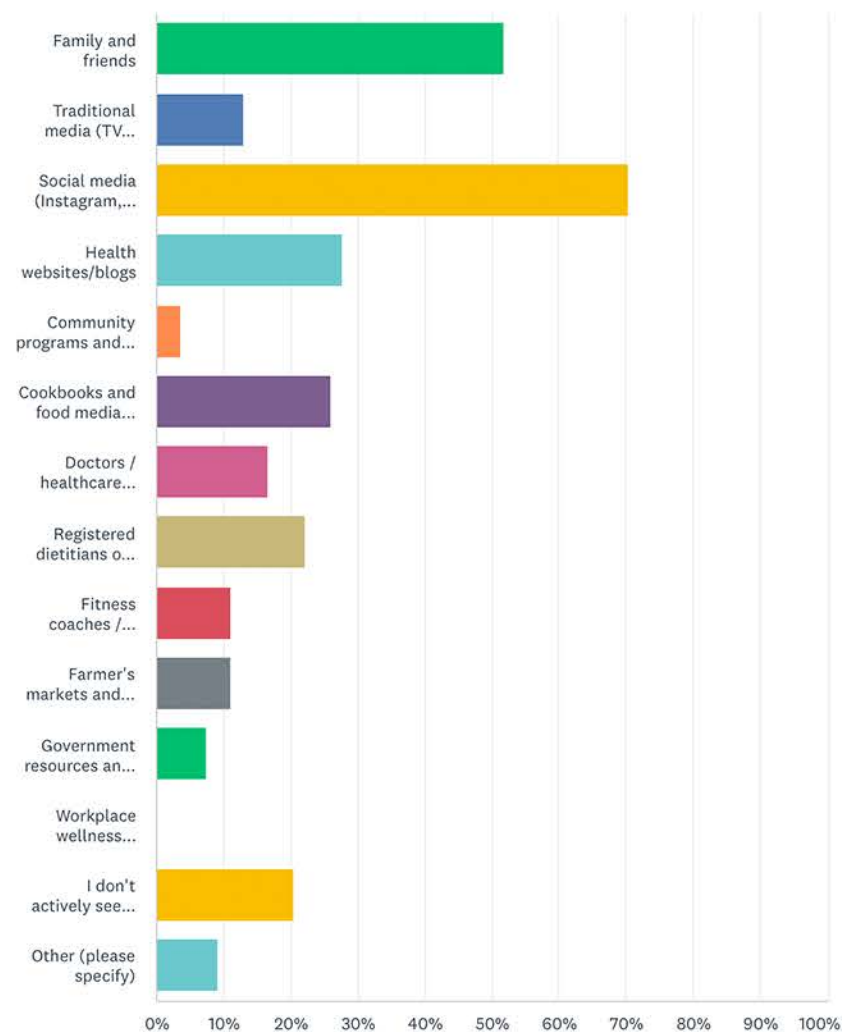


# first survey.

My next research stage involves conducting an online survey on SurveyMonkey to explore the general community's relationship with cultural foods and nutrition. This survey helped me to gather broader perspectives on the challenges, preferences, and aspirations of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, informing the development of culturally attuned nutrition interventions. By combining the expertise of nutrition professionals with the lived experiences of community members, I aimed to create resources and solutions that honour cultural food heritage, promote health equity, and empower individuals to embrace nourishing traditions.

Where you do gain most of your nutrition advice from? Select top 3.

Answered: 54 Skipped: 0



Most nutrition information is white-washed and the majority of health and diet studies are based on white make subjects.

10/30/2023 03:37 PM

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

The focus on raw vegetables or specific cooking methods don't match with how I know my community or my ancestors chose to eat and prep their food.

10/30/2023 04:57 PM

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

Mainstream food advice rarely reflects any culture or background and traditions even for me and definitely for those who are non white. Mainstream food culture and advice seems to operate under the assumption that there is one "right" way to eat and completely ignores the importance of cultural and celebration when it comes to food and nutrition.

10/30/2023 06:55 PM

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

So many ingredients are not familiar to me such as chickpeas, couscous, lentils, and etc.

Sometimes my latinx background introduces meals that are carb-heavy, or sauce-heavy, and these are generally considered as "unhealthy" things by Americans at least.

10/31/2023 05:18 AM

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

Mainstream advice has people scared of carbs but in my culture, rice would be served at every meal. The difference is it's served with fresh vegetables usually home grown and the protein would be smaller in portion because of budget

10/31/2023 01:14 PM

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

I think the media is influential in portraying food a certain way.

10/31/2023 02:03 PM

From these insights, I was able to validate my earlier inquiries about highlighting the importance of cultural identity, the lack of representation in mainstream nutrition advice, and the desire for culturally relevant information. My research so far has also revealed the deep significance of food traditions to identity and the disconnect that many experience with mainstream nutritional guidance. It is clear that cultural food knowledge and accessibility need to be elevated.

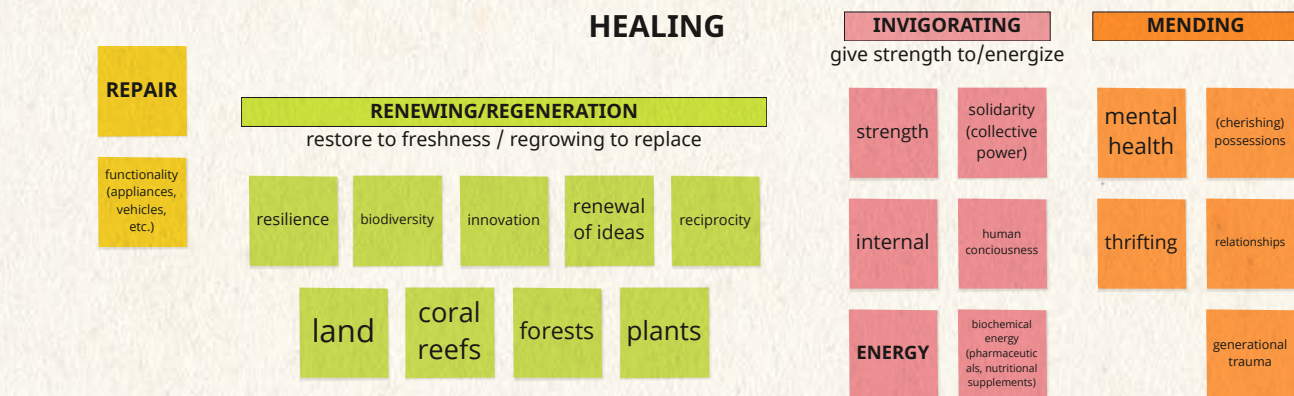
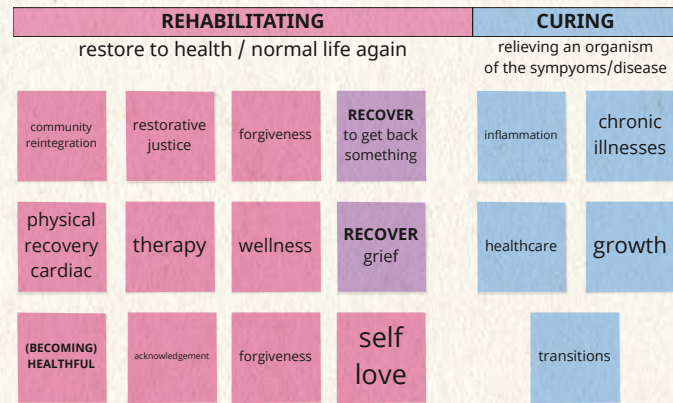
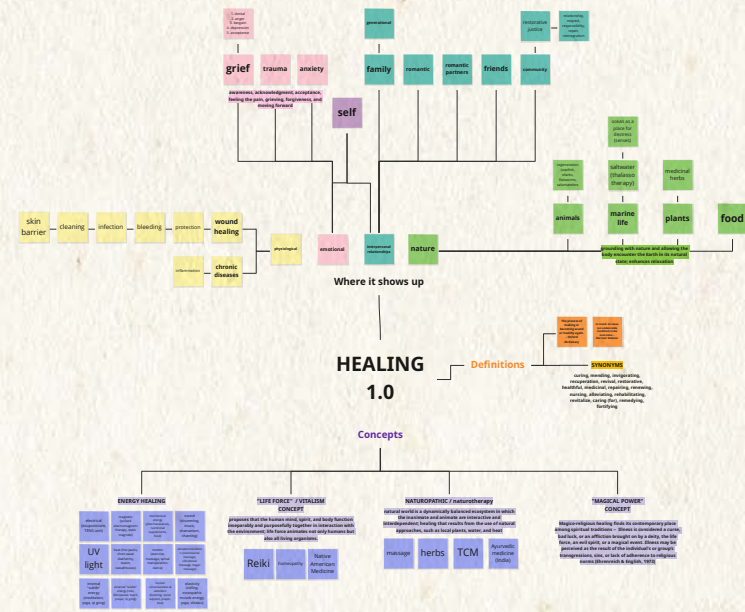
In addressing this social issue, diasporic communities can be strengthened through validation and the spread of cultural food knowledge, while service providers can be supported by the implementation of better quality resources and tools that they can apply to their practices and food-related programs.

**ANALOGOUS RESEARCH**

# what is healing?

Simultaneously, I conducted analogous research on the concept of healing, exploring its meaning beyond the context of healthcare. This research was part of a separate project in collaboration with **Miya Osaki**, my program's Chair, who was interested in investigating healing from a broader perspective.

The research began with mapping out a general ecosystem of healing (pictured), followed by a focused exploration of the synonyms associated with healing. Each synonym was further expanded upon by identifying related themes and concepts. For example, under "revival," we explored ideas such as conservation, heritage, cultural practices, languages, preventing loss, etc. Similarly, under "renewing," we delved into concepts like resilience, biodiversity, innovation, renewal of ideas, and various elements of nature.

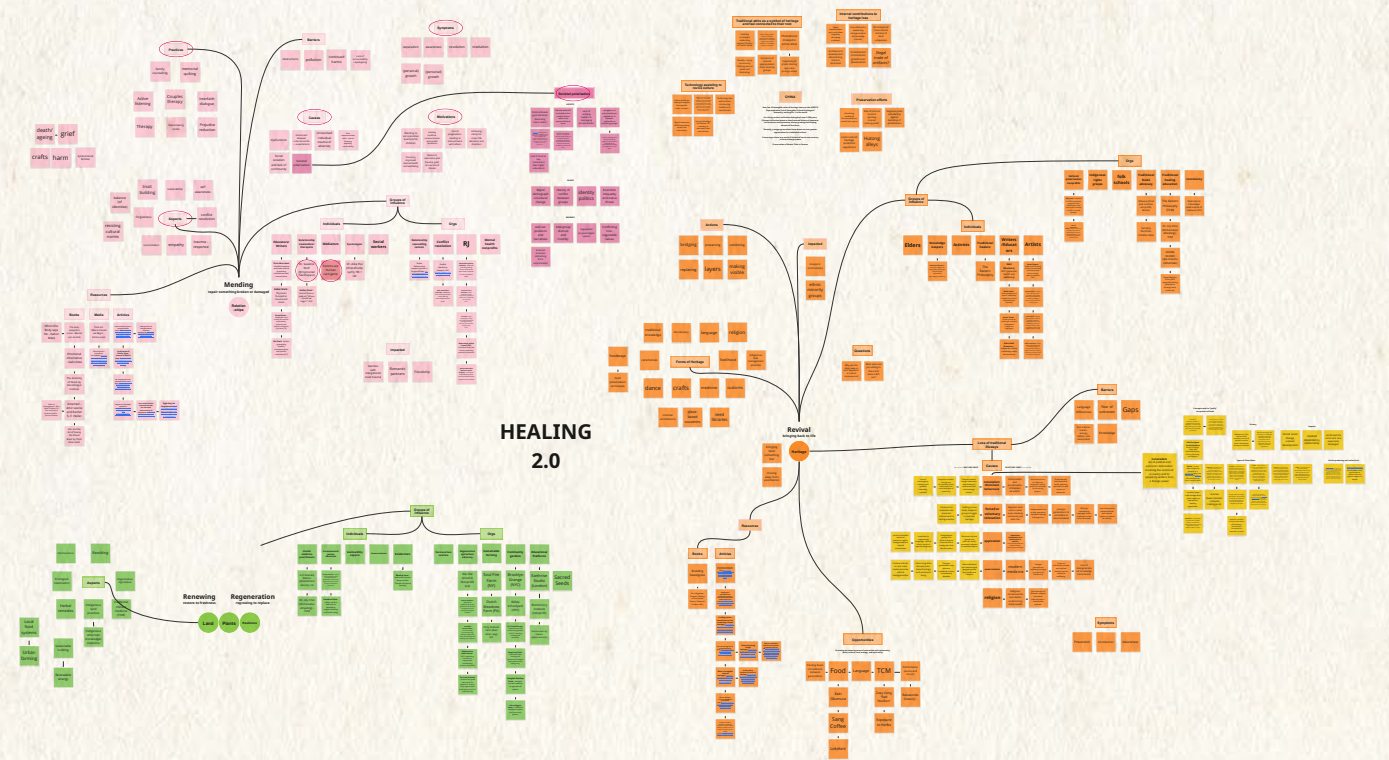


"MAKING VISIBLE"

"BRIDGING"

From this initial mapping, we chose to focus on two specific aspects of healing: **mending relationships and reviving cultural heritage**. Diving deeper into the revival of heritage, I investigated the causes and reasons behind the loss of traditional lifeways, such as colonialism, dominant behaviours, oppression, modernization, and forced or voluntary relocation.

Throughout this research process, I engaged in collaborative meetings with Miya to share insights and synthesize the findings. Together, we identified key principles and qualities that characterize the expression of "revival" and "mending". For revival, we identified terms like "making visible", "preserving", "bridging", "combining", and "layers". These principles became significant takeaways that informed my subsequent work on culture and the revival of heritage.



"LAYERS"

"COMBINING"

"PRESERVING"

Finalized mood board for defining 'healing'



MAKING SENSE OF HEALING

### REVIVAL

Beyond just the definition of "bring back to life", we described revival as something of origin loss, and revealing and preserving what was 'lost' (lifeways). This form of healing was indeed revived through our reflective discussion around traditions from our own cultures, along with our nostalgic memories of family members passing down ancestral knowledge. We talked about forms of heritage we resonate with such as language, crafts by inspiring artists, colonial architecture, seed libraries, indigenous land management practices, and of course, cultural foodways (shiitake)! There was a short but lively moment of excitement towards the concept of utilizing place-based souvenirs as a way to preserve heritage. At the end of our first collaborative session, we identified the barriers to preserving heritage (language differences, fear of unknown, knowledge gaps), but also found motivation in knowing that the result of this healing can bring about prevention, increased awareness, and strengthened connections. We asked ourselves: why was heritage taken away or lost, by whom, and at what consequence(s)? What parts are we willing to share and what is left out during the process? This led us to a deep dive into loss as a result of colonialism, dominant behaviours, oppression, and modernization. We talked about heavy, complex topics, but we look into the future with inspiration from existing individuals, orgs, and countries whose work is rooted in heritage.

How it's expressed

- 'MAKING VISIBLE'
- 'BRIDGING'
- 'PRESERVING'
- 'COMBINING'
- 'LAYERS'
- 'REPLACING'
- 'REWILDING'



### MENDING

We began by describing 'mending' as when something broken or damaged gets repaired or transformed into something different. We were fascinated by the common practice of memorial quilting, where the clothes of someone who has passed are taken to turn into beautifully handcrafted quilts. We talked about the stunning coral reefs and their ability to heal themselves, minus the warming ocean temperatures. We pondered upon other aspects of mending including conflict resolution, self-awareness, trust building, identities, and empathy, along with how they may be practiced through active listening, therapy, peacemaking circles, prejudice reduction, interfaith dialogue, and family counselling. We identified obstructions, continued harms, and the lack of accountability as barriers to mending relationships, and dysfunction, poor communication, lack of empathy, social isolation, and unresolved trauma as major causes. What drove our deepest discussion was the role of family and our experiences with how intergenerational trauma presents itself in our lives. We thought about other aspects of our lives where mending is most needed and landed on societal polarization - its qualities, how they came to be, and why it continues in a vicious cycle. Healthy and fulfilling relationships are vital to our communities, so we share the ongoing desire to facilitate spaces that prevent separation, increase awareness, enable resolution, and promote mediation.

The qualities and how it may show

- 'VULNERABILITY (WEAR TIME FRAGILITY)'
- 'TRAUMA'
- 'RESISTING CULTURAL NORMS'
- 'BALANCE'
- 'GRIEF'
- 'FORGIVENESS'



## why was this helpful?

This analogous research was crucial in providing me with a valuable framework for approaching my thesis work, particularly in understanding the importance of cultural revival and the factors that contribute to the loss of heritage. I was able to:

### BROADEN MY UNDERSTANDING OF HEALING

By exploring healing beyond the context of healthcare, I gained a more comprehensive understanding of the concept. This allowed me to consider the **various dimensions of healing, such as cultural revival, relationship mending, and the factors that contribute to the loss of traditional lifeways.** This expanded understanding also drove my pivot to addressing the challenges faced by the Chinese diaspora community in preserving their cultural food heritage and promoting wellbeing.

### IDENTIFY PRINCIPLES FOR CULTURAL REVIVAL

My insights yielded key principles such as **making visible, preserving, bridging, combining, and replacing.** These principles provided a framework for designing interventions that aim to celebrate, promote, and sustain cultural food traditions within the Chinese diaspora community. By incorporating these principles into my subsequent work, I was able to create solutions that effectively address the needs and aspirations of the community in maintaining their cultural identity.

### DEEPEN MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPACT OF HISTORICAL AND SOCIETAL FACTORS

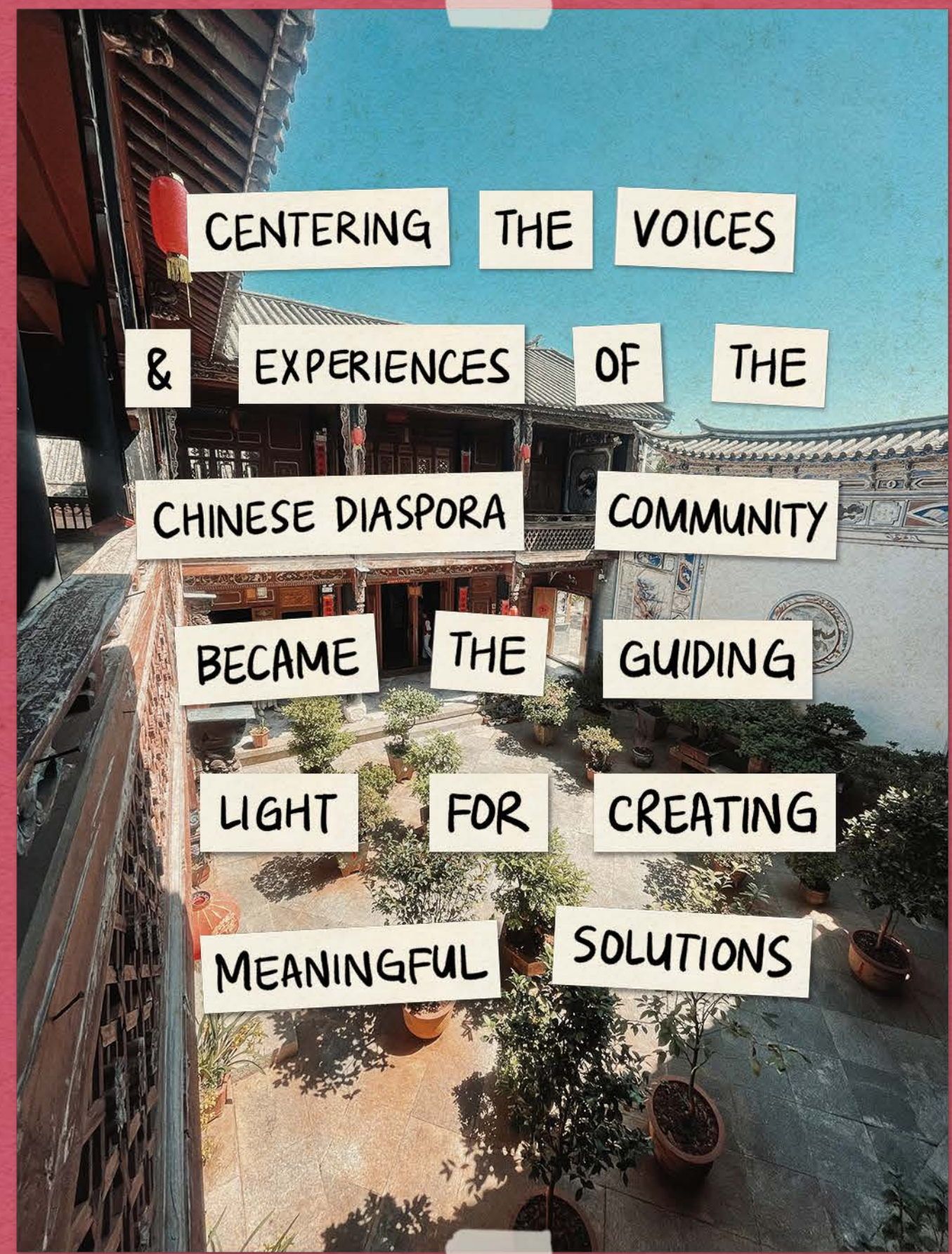
In shedding light on the various factors that contribute to the loss of traditional lifeways and cultural heritage, I was able to **contextualize the challenges** faced by diaspora communities in preserving their heritage. By acknowledging and addressing these historical and societal factors, I can develop interventions that are sensitive to the community's experiences and promote healing and resilience.

### DEVELOP A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH TO WELLBEING

This research process emphasizes the **interconnectedness** of various aspects of healing (like cultural identity, relationships, and resilience). This holistic perspective aligns with my thesis goal of promoting the overall wellbeing of communities through the lens of cultural food heritage. By considering the dimensions of healing, I can develop interventions that address not only the physical aspects of health but also the emotional, social and cultural wellbeing of the community.



The more I delved deeper into the complexities surrounding food heritage and identity, I realized that to create truly meaningful and impactful interventions, I needed to narrow my focus and engage directly with the community I felt most passionate about serving: the Chinese diaspora in the United States. This realization prompted a pivotal shift in my research approach. By centering the voices, experiences, and aspirations of Chinese diaspora community members, I aimed to gain a more nuanced understanding of the unique challenges, preferences, and motivations that shape their relationships with food, health, and cultural identity.



# research phase two.

After conducting interviews with registered dietitians and nutrition experts, and analyzing the results of my initial survey, it became clear that to truly address the complex issues surrounding cultural competency and the preservation of Chinese food heritage, I needed to shift focus from working solely within the healthcare system to engage directly with the Chinese diaspora community members themselves.

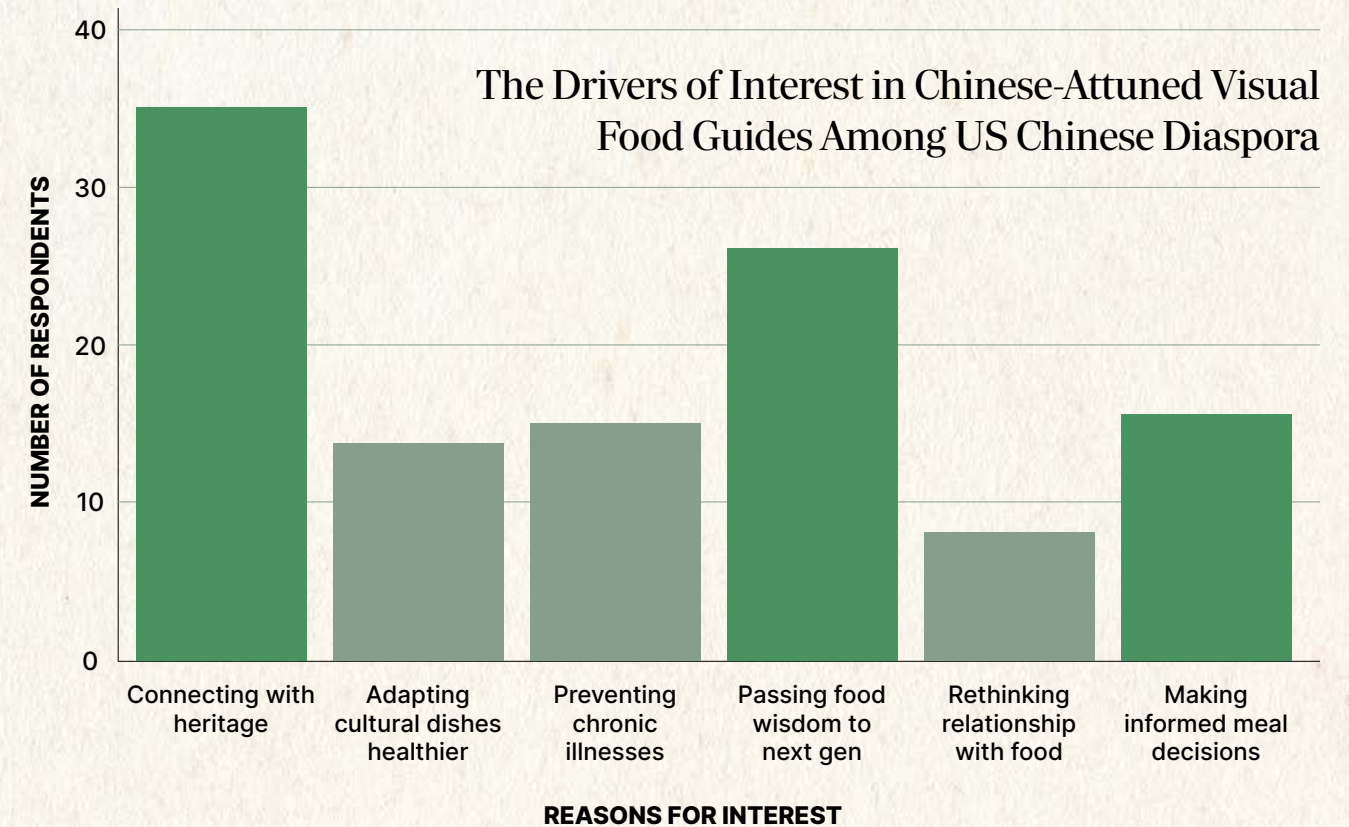
While the insights gained from healthcare practitioners provided valuable context and highlighted the gaps in culturally relevant nutrition resources and guidance, I knew that to create meaningful and impactful interventions, it was essential to center the voices, experiences, and aspirations of the community I aimed to serve. By pivoting my research to emphasize the stories and journeys of US Chinese diaspora members, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges, preferences, and motivations that shape their relationships with food, health, and cultural identity.

The myth about unethical food ingredients in Chinese cooking and the overgeneralization of Chinese cuisine are most frustrating to me. It seems to me the myths are evident that people are not aware of the diversity in the Chinese population.

Claims that MSG/Chinese food as a whole is unhealthy. Most commonly seen in food blogs written by people who are not Chinese that share recipes like "healthy Chinese takeout without the guilt." There's a spectrum of healthy and unhealthy food in every cultural cuisine, but to claim that you have made a recipe 'better' than its origins is a very tone deaf and relies on antiquated falsehoods about MSG.



The survey responses underscore the significance of cultural identity and the role of food heritage in the lives of Chinese diaspora members. They reveal shared experiences of stereotyping and misrepresentation in mainstream nutrition advice, highlighting the pressing need for culturally competent resources and guidance. These insights inform the next phase of research by emphasizing the necessity to develop culturally relevant nutrition resources that celebrate Chinese food heritage, address common misconceptions, and promote healthier adaptations of traditional dishes. Additionally, the research should explore ways to pass food wisdom down to the next generation. It is crucial for the project to focus on creating content and tools that resonate with the community's values, beliefs, and experiences, fostering a sense of pride and connection to their cultural identity.



## PRIMARY RESEARCH

# interviews with *the community.*

Since my earlier interviews were focused on understanding the healthcare space through the lens of registered dietitians and nutritionists of colour, I felt it was important to conduct more in-depth interviews with community members who identify as being part of the US Chinese diaspora community, and who either responded to my survey or I was able to find through various social networking sites. From the **14 community members** I interviewed—including international students, amateur cooks, a Cantonese BBQ restaurant manager, mental health counsellor, pharmaceutical scientist, social worker, and food justice nonprofit strategist—I identified **6 big takeaways**.

**Assimilation pressures** create early distance from traditions before purposeful identity exploration and validation stages.

The barriers to embracing and preserving traditional dishes mostly center on **lacking generational knowledge transfer** opportunities and presence of **communication challenges between generations**.

Motivations for connecting with cultural heritage are rooted in **preserving intergenerational stories and challenging assumptions** to cultivate external pride.

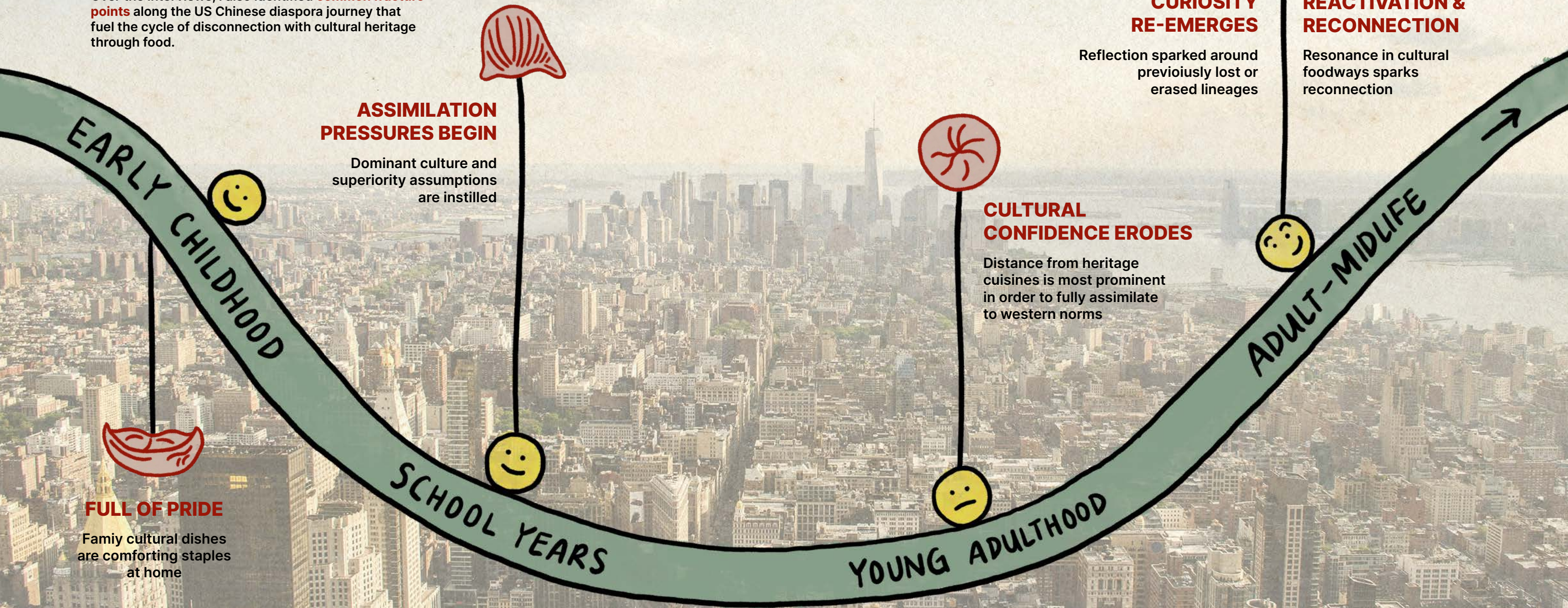
Lasting change requires **spotlighting and celebrating** the richness of Chinese food philosophy through accessible mediums, bridging generations of food wisdom with modern lifestyle.

There is a strong desire for **reliable resources** such as nutrition guides, meal plans, and food glossaries. These resources would support healthy adaptations of treasured traditional dishes and home recipes through accessible ingredient swaps and preparations.



# journey of a Chinese diaspora experience.

Over the interviews, I also identified **common fracture points** along the US Chinese diaspora journey that fuel the cycle of disconnection with cultural heritage through food.





mum teaching me how  
to make 粽子 for the  
first time



# how might we

**preserve** Chinese food identity so that today's Chinese diaspora communities are **empowered** to advocate for their **wellbeing and their cultural truths**?





# the development phase.

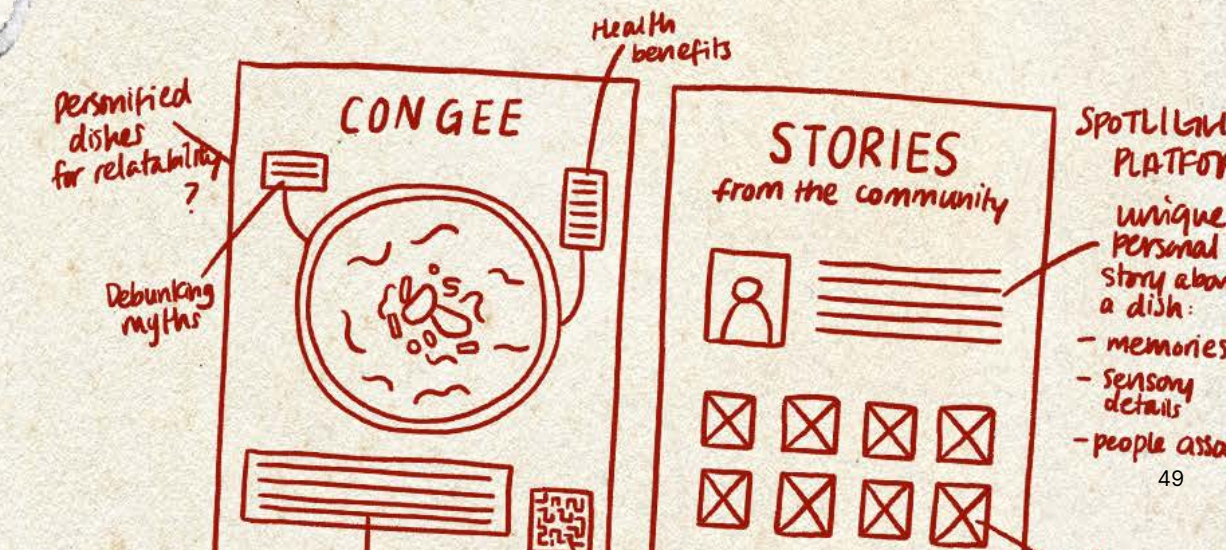
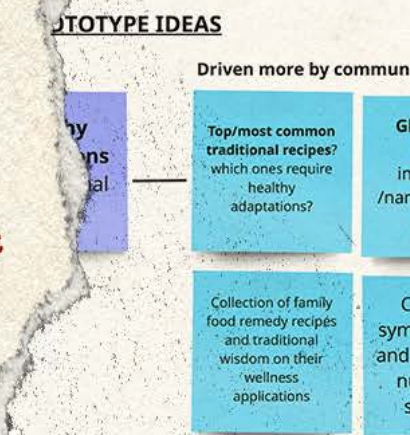
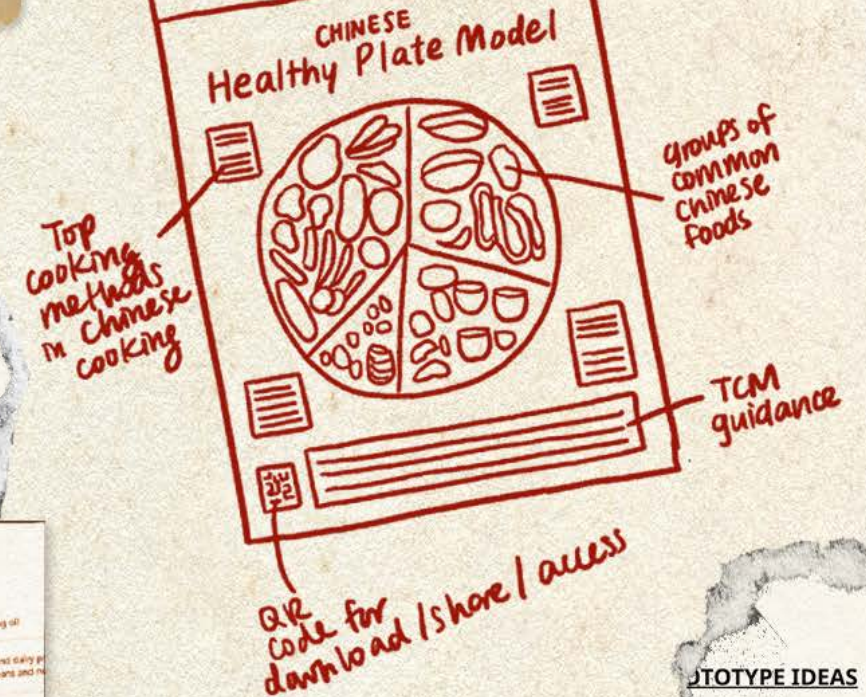
Based on the key takeaways that emerged while conducting interviews with community members, I began brainstorming and mind-mapping ideas for prototypes that would resonate with and address these takeaways. Drawing from the success of visual food guides identified during the first phase of research with registered dietitians, I explored the concept of ideating Chinese-attuned food pyramids, glossaries, food swaps, and portion guides. To inform this process, I conducted a comparative analysis of visual food guides used by government-backed health sources in various countries around the world, followed by exercises that played around with structuring these guides.

Recognizing the potential of storytelling and card games as effective tools for fostering intergenerational conversations and knowledge transfer, I also delved into the development of a card game concept. Inspired by popular games like Parents are Human and We're Not Really Strangers, I started crafting prompts that would encourage dialogue around food rituals, memories, and traditions within families.

Additionally, I explored ideas for spotlighting the nourishing dishes cherished by community members, considering tools and collective formats for gathering and sharing this information — like reflective cards or other forms of archiving stories.

An important question to consider was where these prototypes, if successful, would live.

The **vision that I had for my final intervention** was that these prototypes would serve as the core elements existing on a larger community platform. To further refine and validate these prototypes, I envisioned bringing the community together in a co-design workshop. This workshop would provide a holding space for gaining insights, fostering community participation, and collaboratively building the proposed tools.



# cultural potluck facilitation.

To spark inspiration for my envisioned co-design workshop, I collaborated with my classmate, Madhuri Rao, to facilitate a cultural potluck and reflection activity centered around the foods that nourish us for our program's community at DSI. This prototype event stemmed from our shared passion for exploring the intersection of food, culture, sustainability, and well-being. My focus was on cultural food heritage, while Madhuri's interest lay in promoting a climate-smart diet. During the event, held during an in-class session, our program's Designer in Residence, Mari Nakano, whose practice revolves around food systems, ecology, and civic design, served as our guest speaker. The premise of the community gathering was to invite everyone to bring a plant-based dish that holds significance for them, creating a diverse and meaningful spread of culinary offerings.

To kick off the session, Mari grounded the cohort by offering a dish to our ancestors at our studio space's altar, sparking a discussion about the cultural significance of food offerings. Then, as everybody enjoyed the meal and engaged in conversations, we introduced a reflection activity by providing everyone the opportunity to document the personal stories behind their chosen recipes. The recipe cards captured elements such as key ingredients, preparation steps, seasonal or regional ties, prompting conversations around passing down food heritage to future generations.



This prototype activity was a valuable step in this phase of my project for several reasons:

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

By bringing together individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds to share their cherished plant-based dishes, the potluck fostered a sense of community and inclusivity. This aligned with my project's goal of creating a platform that celebrates and preserves food heritage while encouraging holistic wellbeing.

amplifying community voices, particularly through the use of storytelling tools to capture and share personal stories or cultural knowledge related to food. The positive engagement and rich conversations that emerged during the potluck validated the potential impact of such an approach.

## PLANT-BASED EATING

By focusing on plant-based dishes, the potluck not only showcased the diversity and deliciousness of cultural cuisines but also highlighted the potential for sustainable and healthy eating practices. Throughout this project, I have been increasingly conscious of the environmental impact of food choices and the importance of promoting sustainability through my work. This experience has further solidified my interest in advocating for plant-based choices as a means to support both individual and planetary health.

**KEY INSIGHTS** from this prototype activity include the power of food as a catalyst for community building, cultural exchange, and personal reflection. The recipe cards collected now serve as a beautiful archive of our program's community and provide a tangible example of how we might document and celebrate the diverse food heritage of Chinese diaspora communities while promoting holistic well-being. Moving forward, these insights will inform the further development of the intervention, particularly in terms of designing engaging and culturally relevant features that encourage storytelling, knowledge sharing, and community connection around the theme of cultural nourishment.

## REFLECTION + STORYTELLING

The recipe card activity encouraged the community to reflect on the deeper meanings and connections associated with their chosen dishes. It served as a small-scale test of

# co-design workshop.

To ensure that my proposed prototypes resonated with the community and effectively addressed their needs, I facilitated a co-design workshop with Chinese diaspora members. The workshop aimed to gather insights, foster collaboration, and engage participants in shaping the three core elements of the envisioned community platform: a **visual food guide** for healing, a **spotlighting series** for celebrating, and a **card game** for preserving Chinese food heritage. The workshop was structured around the three pillars of the intervention: healing through heritage, celebrating heritage, and preserving heritage. These pillars have emerged as guiding principles throughout my research and served as the foundation for the workshop activities.



**CELEBRATING**  
*heritage*

**HEALING**  
*through heritage*

**PRESERVING**  
*heritage*

You're invited to a **co-design** workshop

## **NOURISHING ROOTS:**

### **A MORNING OF CHINESE FOOD STORIES, CULTURAL REFLECTION & CONNECTION**

**Saturday, March 30 from 11AM-1PM in NY 10010**

Join Jenny Lau, MFA '24 Candidate at SVA's Design For Social Innovation, for a collaborative, hands-on morning of honoring and preserving **Chinese food heritage for health and wellbeing**.  
**Light snacks & drinks will be provided!**

Have you heard people say certain cultural foods are unhealthy? Are you tired of the "MSG is bad" or "stop eating white rice" narrative? If you have **Chinese roots** and your food heritage is important to you, come along and together we will explore the nourishing power of our culinary traditions. Through engaging activities and discussions, we'll share our love for cherished dishes and ingredients that soothe us while fostering a sense of community and belonging.

**Space is limited to 15 participants – RSVP now to reserve your spot on a first-come, first-served basis!**

**SCAN TO RSVP OR GO TO:**  
<https://forms.gle/VjXHJcNjLCddATNz8>



Email [clau2@sva.edu](mailto:clau2@sva.edu) for all questions.  
The workshop will be in English.



## HEALING *through heritage*

The 'healing' activity focused on exploring different visual nutrition food guides from around the world and gathering insights to inform the development of a culturally relevant guide for Chinese diaspora communities. Participants were divided into groups and given laminated food guides to critique and annotate using dry-erase markers. They discussed elements they found effective or appealing, aspects that could be improved or were missing, and how well the guides represented Chinese cultural perspectives on food and nutrition.

After critiquing the existing guides, each group had the opportunity to rapidly design their ideal visual food guides based on their collaborative work.

They incorporated insights from their discussions and used provided materials to create rough concepts and ideas, prioritizing cultural relevance, accessibility, and nutritional guidance.



## CELEBRATING *heritage*

The 'celebration' activity aimed to spotlight Chinese food heritage and its power to heal and strengthen communities. Participants were invited to reflect on Chinese dishes known for their healing properties and choose one that held special significance to their Chinese heritage or identity.

Using provided templates, participants shared personal stories, memories, and reflections related to their chosen dishes, focusing on how these dishes nourished and healed them both physically and emotionally, and how they connected them to their cultural roots and sense of home.

After completing their templates, participants had the opportunity to share their stories with the group and collectively envision how to celebrate these healing dishes on the community platform. They brainstormed ideas for structuring and designing a dedicated space on the platform, considering types of content, organization, interactive features, and community-building elements.

## PRESERVING *heritage*

The 'preservation' activity focused on preserving Chinese food heritage through a card game that sparks meaningful conversations and captures precious food memories and wisdom. Participants were introduced to the concept of the game and its goal of encouraging storytelling between generations to uncover cherished recipes, traditions, stories, and knowledge passed down through families.

Divided into small groups, participants tested question prompts and shared their own family food stories. They reflected on the memories and emotions evoked by the questions and provided feedback on refining the game to ensure it resonated with their experiences and needs.



## TAKEAWAYS

The workshop was a success, with participants actively engaging in the activities and contributing valuable insights and ideas. Throughout, participants demonstrated a deep commitment to preserving and celebrating Chinese food heritage, and a genuine desire to contribute to the development of resources and tools that serve their community. The collaborative and inclusive nature of the workshop fostered a sense of ownership and investment in the community platform where these tools would eventually live, setting the stage for continued community engagement and co-creation.

The 'healing through heritage' activity generated a wealth of information on culturally relevant visual food guides, with groups creating innovative concepts that prioritized Chinese cultural perspectives and nutritional guidance. The 'celebrating heritage' activity yielded a collection of powerful personal stories and reflections related to iconic Chinese dishes, showcasing the emotional and cultural significance of these foods in the lives of Chinese diaspora members. Participants also provided thoughtful suggestions for designing a dedicated space on the platform to celebrate and share these stories. The 'preserving heritage' activity allowed participants to test and refine my initial card game prompts, ensuring they effectively sparked meaningful conversations and captured the essence of family food traditions. The feedback and insights gathered were invaluable in further developing the game to resonate with the community.

A close-up photograph of several hands working on a wooden surface, likely a table, to make dumplings. The hands are shown in various stages of the process: some are holding a piece of dough, others are pinching it together. The background is a warm, reddish-orange color. The word "DELIVERY" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font on a white rectangular background that is slightly tilted and has small white tabs at its corners, giving it the appearance of a sticky note.

**DELIVERY**

# introducing the intervention.

## NOURISHING ROOTS

Nourishing Roots is a **food heritage wellness platform and storytelling tool** co-designed with community members and health advocates of the US Chinese diaspora. It empowers people of Chinese descent to preserve and cultivate traditional food knowledge, connect with cultural roots, and strengthen collective wellbeing—all while challenging mainstream narratives.

It stands out by offering a unique, multifaceted approach that weaves together the threads of healing, celebration, and preservation.

Through fostering community engagement, storytelling, and cultural empowerment, we can collaboratively advocate for our wellbeing and cultural truths in a manner that honours the richness and resilience of our shared heritage.



## What is Nourishing Roots?

Nourishing Roots is a food heritage wellness platform and storytelling tool that empowers people of Chinese descent to preserve and cultivate traditional food knowledge, connect with cultural roots, and strengthen collective wellbeing — all while challenging mainstream narratives.

# chinese-attuned food guide.

## SUB-INTERVENTION ONE

In healing through food heritage, we need **culturally-aligned dietary visual guides** like this, providing a relevant framework for embracing the nourishing qualities of our heritage foods. This prototype addresses the strong desire for relatable resources like nutrition guides and meal plans that support healthy adaptations of traditional dishes, as well as the need for more diverse visual tools to engage clients and patients.

Based on workshop insights, this preliminary guide has been created, sorting common Chinese vegetables, grains, proteins, and fruits in a vessel (wok) that resonates with the community's lived experiences. Participants expressed concerns about the clarity of portions and the desire for more representation of Chinese foods. In response, the guide utilizes the symbolic wok, departing from the hierarchical pyramid format, to better reflect the community's culinary traditions. Additionally, the guide incorporates colours to reflect Traditional Chinese Medicine properties, integrating participants' suggestions for better understanding food properties.

Once finalized, the guide will be available for free download in the healing section of the platform, enhancing accessibility to Chinese-tailored nutrition care and elevating the representation of Chinese food traditions in mainstream health advice.



## A VISUAL GUIDE TO HEALTHY CHINESE EATING



### Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Elements & Food Properties

Element	Taste	Tissues	Season	Yin/Yang Organs
Wood	Sour	Tendons	Spring	Liver/Gall bladder
Fire	Bitter	Pulse	Summer	Heart/Small intestine
Earth	Sweet	Muscle	Late summer	Spleen/Stomach
Metal	Pungent/Spicy	Skin	Fall	Lung/Long intestine
Water	Salty	Bone	Winter	Kidney/Urinary bladder

Foods are also classified by their energies: cold, cool, neutral, warm, and hot. These energies refer to the effect the food has on the body after consumption, not the temperature of the food itself. Consuming foods with a particular energy can help balance the body's energy.

# dish spotlight series.

## SUB-INTERVENTION TWO

In celebrating food heritage, our spotlighting series showcases dishes that have been healing us for generations. These dishes, sourced from reflective sessions across multiple workshops, are presented in a communal, interactive space on the platform, where community members can **share stories, recipes, and insights**. This space aims to cultivate pride in our cultural cuisine and encourage Chinese diaspora members to embrace their traditions confidently.


By highlighting these unique and nourishing dishes, we aim to foster a sense of belonging and reduce assimilation pressures within the community. Community members are encouraged to join in the cultural knowledge exchange by sharing their own stories and recipes. Additionally, there is a growing interest in learning about the origins and history behind traditional dishes, as well as requests for vegan and gluten-friendly adaptations, which are being considered for longer-term integration.

HEAL CELEBRATE PRESERVE **NOURISHING ROOTS** OUR STORY JOIN US RESOURCES

### Celebrate our Heritage

Welcome to Dish Spotlight Series, a heartfelt celebration of the Chinese dishes that have nourished our bodies, minds, and souls for generations. This is a space where we come together as a community to honor the rich tapestry of our culinary heritage, one cherished dish at a time.

RECIPES SHARE YOUR STORY




Each spotlight features a Chinese dish that holds a special place in our hearts. This series is more than just a collection of recipes; it's a treasure trove of stories, memories, and emotions that connect us to our roots and to each other. As you explore each dish, you'll discover the personal narratives and cultural significance behind them, as shared by members of our community. Through these stories, we celebrate the power of food to transport us across time and space, to bring us together in shared joy and remembrance.



HEAL CELEBRATE PRESERVE **NOURISHING ROOTS** OUR STORY JOIN US RESOURCES


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**Din Tai Fung's Shrimp & Meat Spicy Wonton by Sabrina Hong**

"Now that I don't live near a DTF... this spicy wonton dish would be placed on my seat on our dining table even before I step into the room."


READ MORE



**Tomato & Egg with Noodles in Broth by Jack Chen**

"Everything about this dish—from preparation to serving—is pure enjoyment and comfort in their purest forms ... a gastral resemblance of 'home' for me."

READ MORE



**Century Egg & Pork Congee by Jenny Lau**

"This is the only dish that makes me feel comfort and recovered whenever I'm sick with the cold or feeling unlike myself. This dish is what home means to me."

READ MORE





# savoring stories conversation deck.

## SUB-INTERVENTION THREE

The echoing sentiment among the Chinese diaspora community highlights barriers to embracing and preserving traditional dishes, such as the lack of generational knowledge transfer opportunities and communication challenges between younger and older generations. To address this, the Savoring Stories card game **facilitates intergenerational conversations and storytelling**, providing an opportunity to **uncover and document family food rituals, knowledge, and memories**.

The question prompts, categorized into six different themes, were collaboratively refined among workshop participants to stimulate meaningful conversations effectively. Ultimately, the game strengthens bonds between generations and prevents the erasure of intergenerational stories.





# growing forward.



*envisioning next steps*



My work on Nourishing Roots is far from over. It's an ongoing journey filled with passion and purpose, dedicated to refining and expanding the platform through continuous collaboration with our vibrant community.

So, what's next? Well, in the short term, there are some exciting goals lined up. Focus lies on growing the core team, forming meaningful partnerships with organizations and educational institutions, and finetuning the existing sub-interventions so that the community platform is ready for an official launch. It's all about ensuring Nourishing Roots is accessible, user-friendly, and packed with features that resonate with the community. Success will be measured by closely monitoring engagement, witnessing Chinese food traditions take center stage in mainstream conversations, and feeling that deep sense of pride and connection growing stronger among the community.

Specifically, I aim to continue working on the visual food guide so that it becomes even more culturally relevant, versatile, and applicable for community members and health practitioners serving Chinese communities. Similarly, I am interested in developing

the spotlighting series so that it is a fully functional interactive platform bursting with stories, recipes, and history. I also envision integrating more interactive elements to Savoring Stories, including activity prompts and templates for enhanced archival.

But that's not all. In the long run, there are bigger dreams. The aim is to see Nourishing Roots not just supporting Chinese communities, but all cultural communities looking to celebrate their food heritage.

Ultimately, Nourishing Roots isn't just a platform; it's a movement to reclaim and celebrate the power of our cultural food heritage. It's about enabling the community to embrace their cultural identity for a healthier, happier future.

*I see Nourishing Roots as a go-to place for cultural celebration and empowerment.*

# measuring impact.

Nourishing Roots' **success is defined by the increased acceptance and integration of traditional Chinese food as a means to health and wellbeing**, enabling the Chinese diaspora community to guide their own wellbeing and preserve their cultural identity.

Due to the lack of cultural humility in mainstream Western advice, healthy cultural food traditions that diaspora communities rely on are often ignored, contributing to the erasure of generations of knowledge and the severance of ties between identity and wellbeing. To address these challenges, Nourishing Roots comprises three sub-interventions that operate within and across different levels of the socio-ecological model of health, targeting individual, interpersonal, and community levels.

**Sub-Intervention 1** focuses on co-creating Chinese-Centered visual food guides with the community. By engaging community members and health experts in this process, everyone involved gains a better understanding of the benefits of Chinese food. This collaboration equips future health practitioners with improved capacity to create culturally-responsive content that aligns with those they serve, further blending Chinese food wisdom into community spaces.

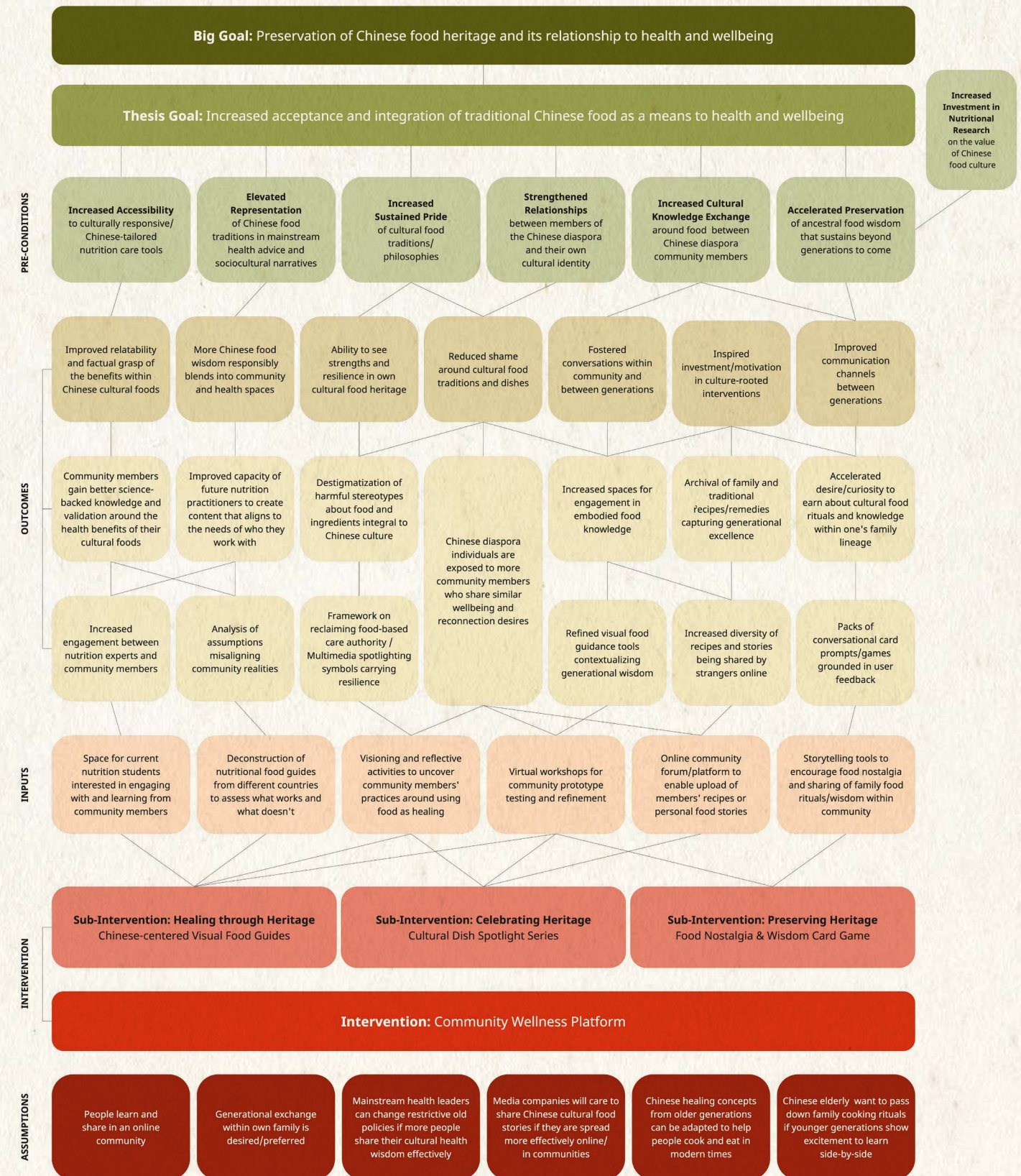
**Sub-Intervention 2** aims to spotlight the unique array of traditional dishes known for their healing properties and have truly nourished the community for generations. Fostering knowledge and story exchange around these dishes helps destigmatize harmful stereotypes and allows the community to recognize the strength and resilience in their cultural foods while reducing shame. This, in turn, facilitates more conversations

about the wellbeing outcomes of Chinese food, fostering better cultural knowledge exchange within the community.

**Sub-Intervention 3** involves creating an engaging card game to enable storytelling between generations. By tackling the lack of support in stimulating intergenerational conversations, the card game increases the desire and curiosity for families to learn about their family food rituals, ultimately improving communication channels between generations. This motivates knowledge exchange, remedy wisdom, as well as strengthened relationships.

These sub-interventions and pathways to change are built on the assumptions that families desire learning together if invited responsibly and that media/policy makers will shift if community excellence is illuminated effectively through the platform's exchanges. Furthermore, rebuilding generational bonds is expected to resuscitate obstructed protective capacities carried in traditional Chinese foodways. The successful implementation of these sub-interventions leads to increased access to culturally responsive nutrition care tools for Chinese diaspora communities seeking better agency over their health through food. It also results in increased representation in mainstream health and social spaces. Ultimately, Chinese diaspora individuals are empowered to reconnect with their cultural roots, guide their own wellbeing, and push back against Western narratives, leading to improved health outcomes and a stronger sense of cultural identity.

## THEORY OF CHANGE



# monitoring & evaluation plan.

To measure the impact of Nourishing Roots and test its Theory of Change, the following **metrics** will be carried out to ensure that the intervention does in fact increase the acceptance and integration of traditional Chinese food as a means to health and wellbeing. By monitoring and evaluating the following key indicators, Nourishing Roots can assess its progress towards achieving its goals and make data-driven improvements to maximize its social impact. The combination of **quantitative metrics and qualitative insights** will provide a comprehensive understanding of how the platform is empowering the Chinese diaspora community to reclaim and preserve their food heritage, improve their health and wellbeing outcomes, and challenge dominant narratives that neglect the wisdom of their cultural traditions.



## MONITORING

How do Chinese diaspora community members engage with and benefit from the Nourishing Roots platform and its sub-interventions?

### Quantitative Indicators

- Number of community members and health advocates involved in the process
- Number of Chinese-centered visual food guides created and distributed
- Number of traditional healing dishes spotlighted on the platform
- Number of intergenerational storytelling card game sets downloaded/distributed
- Number of members engaging with the platform (site visits, interactions, shares)
- Number of health practitioners incorporating culturally-attuned content into their practice
- Frequency of conversations about the wellbeing outcomes of Chinese food within the community

### Qualitative Indicators

- Feedback from community members on the relevance and usefulness of the platform and its resources
- Stories and experiences shared by community members about their engagement with the platform
- Observations of increased cultural knowledge exchange within the community and beyond
- Testimonials from health practitioners about the impact of culturally-attuned content on their practice

## EVALUATION

To what extent do community members find the platform and resources and useful?  
To what extent does the platform influence knowledge and attitudes toward traditional foods and their benefits in terms of health and wellness?

### Quantitative Indicators

- Percentage increase in community members reporting improved access to culturally responsive nutrition care tools
- Percentage increase in the representation of Chinese food traditions in mainstream health and social spaces
- Number of community members reporting increased pride and connection to their cultural roots
- Number of community members actively guiding their own wellbeing through traditional Chinese food knowledge
- Percentage decrease in the prevalence of harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about Chinese food

### Qualitative Indicators

- Stories and testimonials from community members about the impact of Nourishing Roots on their health, wellbeing, and sense of cultural identity
- Observations of shifts in mainstream narratives towards Chinese foodways
- Feedback from media and policymakers on the influence of community-driven content and exchanges
- Accounts of strengthened generational bonds and the revival of protective capacities carried in Chinese foodways
- Reports from Chinese diaspora individuals about their increased ability to push back against Western narratives and advocate for their cultural food traditions

# ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT.



*an assessment & reflection*

As I reflect on the environmental impact of this project, I recognize the importance of considering both the potential positive and negative consequences of my intervention on the environment and the communities connected to my work.

## POSITIVE IMPACTS

### Digital Platform

By primarily hosting Nourishing Roots on a digital platform, I am minimizing the need for printed materials, which reduces paper consumption and the associated environmental impacts of production, transportation, and disposal. The digital nature of the platform also allows for easier dissemination of information and resources, potentially reaching a wider audience without the environmental costs of physical distribution.

### POTENTIAL NEGATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

#### Energy Consumption of Digital Devices

While a digital platform reduces the need for printed materials, it relies on energy-consuming devices, such as smartphones, tablets, and computers, to access the content. To mitigate this impact, I plan to optimize the platform for energy efficiency, ensuring that it loads quickly and does not require excessive processing power. I will also encourage users to access the platform on devices they already own, rather than promoting the purchase of new devices solely for this purpose.

#### Printing

Although the majority of the content will be available digitally, there may be instances where physical copies of the card game or food guides are desired for in-person events or workshops. To minimize the environmental impact of printing, I prioritize the use of sustainable, responsible-sourced paper, such as FSC-certified or recycled paper. I will also encourage the reuse and sharing of these physical materials among community members and explore partnerships with local environmental organizations to ensure responsible disposal or recycling when the materials are no longer needed.

## Food Waste and Packaging

While Nourishing Roots promotes sustainable food practices, there is a risk that increased interest in cooking and trying new recipes could lead to higher levels of food waste if ingredients are not used efficiently. To mitigate this, I will work towards including tips and resources on the platform for reducing food waste, such as meal planning, proper storage techniques, and creative ways to use leftover ingredients. I will also encourage the use of reusable containers and minimal packaging when shopping for ingredients or sharing meals with others.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

On a personal level, this project has heightened my awareness of the environmental impact of my design choices and has encouraged me to adopt more sustainable practices in my work. Moving forward, I will prioritize digital-first solutions, minimize the use of single-use materials in workshops and events, and collaborate with environmentally-conscious partners and suppliers. I will also continue to educate myself on sustainable design principles and seek opportunities to integrate environmental considerations into all aspects of my design process. In conclusion, while Nourishing Roots has the potential to positively influence sustainable food practices and reduce environmental impacts through its digital platform, it is crucial to remain mindful of the potential negative impacts and actively work to mitigate them. By prioritizing digital content, using sustainable materials when necessary, promoting food waste reduction, and continuously evaluating and adapting my design choices, I aim to create an intervention that not only supports the well-being of Chinese diaspora communities but also contributes to a more environmentally sustainable future.



# closing thoughts.

Reflecting on this thesis journey, I've been on quite the ride of personal growth and discovery as a social designer. Right from the start of the program, we learned the importance of collaboration and community, but it wasn't until I dove into this project that I truly grasped its significance.

The heart of this project has been the conversations with Chinese diaspora members. They weren't just interviews; they felt like meeting new friends. Each chat was filled with stories of resilience, courage, and dreams that left me in awe. One particularly striking moment was when an individual who had grown up in the restaurant scene of Philadelphia initially expressed doubt about the significance of their experiences, only to go on and share a captivating narrative that left me in awe. These are the stories, often unheard or unappreciated, that deserve celebration and amplification.

Coming from a more traditional design background, I had to navigate the shift to social design research, immersing myself into understanding the differences between

academic research and social design research. This journey has taught me to prioritize community building, tackling complexities. It's about **ensuring that the work is driven by the community**, rather than simply designing 'for' them. During the process, I also encountered stories of individuals who had struggled with eating disorders, experienced shame or embarrassment about their cultural foods, or felt disconnected from their heritage due to a lack of access to traditional ingredients or cooking knowledge. These experiences underscored the importance of approaching conversations about food with sensitivity, empathy, and respect. As such, I have grown in my capacity to approach sensitive topics, such as food, with care and understanding, especially when it comes to cultural identity and personal experiences, creating a safe space for individuals to share their stories.

Looking back, I wish I had engaged with community members sooner, whether through interviews or workshops. As someone who has always struggled with social anxiety and public speaking, it took me longer to form my community partnership. However, I am grateful

for the valuable lessons I learned through facilitating this project, and I owe a great deal of thanks to Karen Proctor, our leadership class instructor, for her guidance and support.

Overall, this project has been a transformative experience, not only in terms of my growth as a designer but also in my personal journey of understanding my own cultural identity and the power of community. I am grateful for the opportunity to have collaborated with so many inspiring individuals and to have played a role in amplifying their voices and stories. As I continue on this path, **I am committed to approaching my work with humility, empathy, and a deep respect for the wisdom and resilience of the communities I serve.**

On a personal note, this journey has driven an even stronger connection to my food heritage. Conversations with community members have led me to explore new cooking techniques and traditions, strengthening my ties to family and culture. I now feel closer to my 婆婆 (pronounced por-por; grandmother), who passed away in 2020, having uncovered culinary knowledge that's been passed down

to my mother. I also feel much more confident sharing our cultural cuisine, embracing the opportunity to showcase our culinary traditions without reservation.

Although there is still much work to be done, **I hope that my research insights, prototypes, and learnings will serve as a source of inspiration and exploration**, leading to further community building, care, and resilience.

*The connections I've made and the stories I've heard will stay with me, fueling my commitment to using my skills as a social designer to create meaningful change.*

# special thanks!

**To my family, for their unwavering support and constant "add oil / 加油" encouragement** – thank you, Mum, for passing down 婆婆's cooking knowledge and for nourishing me with Chinese soups 24/7. Thank you, Dad, for being my go-to translator and for showing me care through fruits whenever I'm back. Thank you, Jessie, for donning your advisory hat whenever I needed help with my work and for being my courageous big sis and role model!

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**To Karen, Anne, Natasha, and the DSI faculty** – I have so much to take away from all of you and am deeply grateful for your wisdom in embodying good leadership, steering the complex boat of impact measurement, and continuously being our cheerleaders.

**To Miya Osaki** – thank you for your oversight and discussions over the last two years as I navigated the intricacies of designing for social innovation. I deeply appreciate the opportunity to explore the concept of 'healing' through our project, which has been instrumental in deepening my thesis.

**To my '24 classmates** – WE DID IT! I am so proud of every single one of us. I will forever be inspired by your courage, authenticity, and vulnerability. We've grown so much over the last two years and I can't thank you enough for showing up and being on this journey with me. I also hope our WhatsApp group chat is revived from time to time...

**To the DSI community** – thank you for your care, curiosity, and willingness to support us whenever we second-years seem like we're in the rough of it. Avery, I am endlessly grateful for your time and assistance in facilitating my workshop—I would not have made it without you... your furniture-moving strength, dumpling boiling, black sesame rice krispie cutting, and table serving skills are the best I've ever seen!



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**Chan, Ella.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 21 January 2024.

**Charles-Alexis, Amber.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 9 October 2023.

**Chen, Jack.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 24 January 2024.

**Chen, Kelvin (Tao) and Wimson (Bin) Chen.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 17 December 2023.

**Chow, Henry.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 11 January 2024.

**Chu, Eric.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 11 January 2024.

**Foo, Angela.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 1 December 2023.

**Gong, Zoey Xinyi.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 21 October 2023.

**Gutierrez, Areli.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 19 October 2023.

**Hong, Sabrina.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 23 January 2024.

**Huang, Joyce.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 19 January 2024.

**Jiang, Cara.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 5 December 2023.

**King, Abby.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 21 March 2023.

**Lorena, Drago.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 19 October 2023.

**Ng, Carmen.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 10 March 2023.

**Okumura, Kaki.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 8 November 2023.

**Song, Shan Shan.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 11 January 2024.

**Teo, Yi Min.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 29 January 2024.

**Valdez, Rebecca.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 5 December 2023.

**Westbrooks, Jasmine.** Conducted by Jenny Lau. 13 October 2023.

**Wilson, Christy.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 12 October 2023.

**Yang, Edith.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 19 October 2023.

**Yuan, Stephanie.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 11 January 2024.

**Zhang, Stephanie.** Personal Interview. Conducted by Jenny Lau. 2 February 2024.

This page is a shoutout to the amazing chefs, health experts, and community heroes whose work has kept me energized and overflowing with ideas throughout my project. While you won't find them cited in the body of my thesis, their influence is woven through every part of my journey.

## COOKING + RECIPES

### **ChihYu Chiang | I Heart Umami®**

ChihYu Smith, founder and author, shares healthy Asian dinner recipes that are also Paleo, gluten-free, and/or low carb. [@iheartumami.ny](https://www.iheartumami.ny) & [iheartumami.com](https://www.iheartumami.com)

### **Hannah Che 車美惠**

Chef and James Beard award-winning author, Hannah, explores vegan Chinese cuisine from Yunnan, China. [@hannah.che](https://www.hannahche.substack.com) & [hannahche.substack.com](https://www.hannahche.substack.com)

### **Karen (daigasikfaan)**

Hong Konger sharing easy Asian recipes to help those abroad reconnect with their culinary roots. [@daigasikfaan](https://www.daigasikfaan.co) & [daigasikfaan.co](https://www.daigasikfaan.co)

### **Made With Lau**

Randy Lau documents authentic Chinese recipes and life stories from his father, Chung Sun Lau, a seasoned chef and restaurateur. [madewithlau.com](https://www.madewithlau.com)

### **Omnivore's Cookbook**

Maggie Zhu writes about authentic Chinese recipes, Chinese-inspired American comfort food, and easy dinner recipes. [omnivorescookbook.com](https://www.omnivorescookbook.com)

### **The Woks of Life**

A family blog by Bill, Judy, Sarah, and Kaitlin sharing recipes and culinary adventures. [thewoksoflife.com](https://www.thewoksoflife.com)

## FARM + SUSTAINABILITY

### **Choy Commons 菜樂市集**

A nonhierarchical farm cooperative engaging AAPI communities in building food sovereignty. [@choycommons](https://www.choycommons.com)

### **Choy Division 車美惠**

Diversified farm cultivating organic East Asian vegetables, herbs, and seeds. [@choydivision](https://www.choydivision.com)

## HEALTH + WELLNESS

### **Zoey Xinyi Gong**

NYC-based TCM chef, food therapist, and registered dietitian hosting pop-up dinners and workshops on TCM food therapy. [@zoeyxinyigong](https://www.zoeyxinyigong.com) & [zoeyxinyigong.com](https://www.zoeyxinyigong.com)

### **Cindy 周昀**

Cancer Dietitian Nutritionist and chef who helps individuals reduce cancer risk and optimize recovery after cancer with confidence while eating foods they love. [@nutritioninabowl](https://www.nutritioninabowl.com) & [cancernutritioninabowl.com](https://www.cancernutritioninabowl.com)

### **Laura Iu**

Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, certified intuitive eating counselor, and yoga teacher dedicated to helping individuals heal their relationship with food and their bodies. [lauraiu](https://www.lauraiu.com) & [lauraiu.com](https://www.lauraiu.com)

### **The Eastern Philosophy**

A website focused on evidence-based Traditional Chinese Medicine, offering in-depth research on wellness practices from ancient China. [theeasternphilosophy](https://www.theeasternphilosophy.com) & [theeasternphilosophy.com](https://www.theeasternphilosophy.com)

### **Yi Min Teo**

Registered Dietitian Nutritionist specializing in GI health and culturally-sensitive nutrition counseling for all. [@herbsandfood](https://www.herbsandfood.com) & [yiminteonutrition.com](https://www.yiminteonutrition.com)

### **Jenny Tzu-Mei Wang**

Psychologist, speaker, and author dedicated to destigmatizing mental health within the Asian diaspora and among immigrant children. [@asiansformentalhealth](https://www.asiansformentalhealth.com)



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CENTERING THE VOICES

& EXPERIENCES OF THE

CHINESE DIASPORA COMMUNITY

BECAME THE GUIDING

LIGHT FOR CREATING

MEANINGFUL SOLUTIONS



MFA Design For  
Social Innovation

Jenny Lau  
Class of 2024