

BFA Senior Thesis Conversations featuring Yifan Chen

Questions by Daniela Segovia



Yifan Chen is a photographer/artist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Born and raised in Guangzhou, China, Chen immigrated to the United States with her family. She is intrigued by her experience of being the first generation Chinese-American. Coping with a new environment makes her ultra aware of her relationship with her family. With her multicultural experience, Chen's work delves into the ideology of family, the controversies of cultures as well as how immigrants find their way to manage homesickness. She is currently a student studying at California College of the Arts, San Francisco, and is pursuing her Bachelor of Fine Art, Photography degree.

See more of her work on Instagram [@yifann_chenn](https://www.instagram.com/yifann_chenn) or visit her website yifanchenphotography.com.



Bak Chit Gai #4, 2021.

What is your thesis investigating?

I used to think of my mother as a very strong and undefeated woman. I realize now that I took all that for granted. The truth is that I know her as a mother, but not as a woman. I started to ask questions like: how does she feel in the family? What is she always complaining about? Do I pay enough attention to my own mother? Does she regret moving to this country? Does she mean it when she says something cruel to me? Am I suppressing my own mother in a way that I don't even realize?

My thesis work demonstrates the transpacific relationship between three generations in the context of an immigrant family. *Bak Chit Gai* is a Cantonese dish that is often served in family gatherings. By documenting the complex process of my mother making this chicken, I am breaking the ideal image of motherhood that is often promoted in our society. By juxtaposing transcribed quotes from my mother on encountered anecdotes and health concerns, my work removes her role as a mother and re-identify her as an individual woman.

What or who are your major influences?

My mother has been the consistent influence in my work since sophomore year. My thesis idea started from a photo album of her. The experience of being new immigrants and going through major difficulties together with my mom led me through loops of self-questioning and trying to replicate the ideal family image that we see in the media.

Another recent inspiration is Abigail Han's work. She is an artist based in Singapore. Her use of Chinese food in her work really inspires me to investigate the food culture as well as stories related to food in my family.

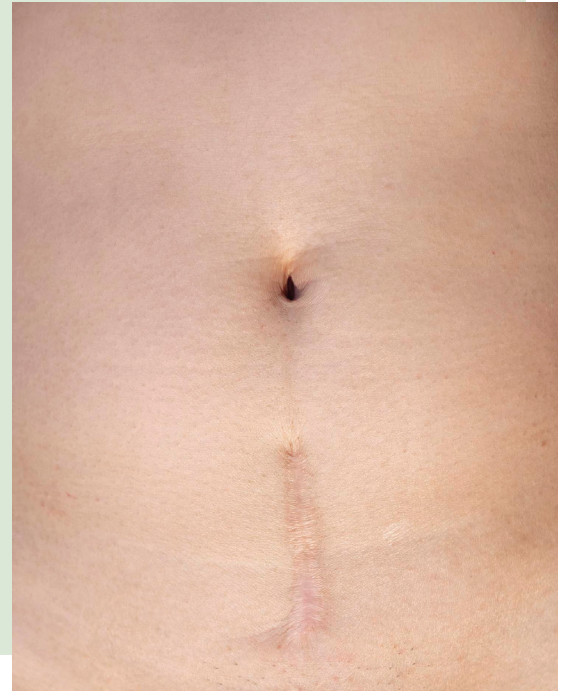


"No one taught me how to make Bak Chit Gai. I just watched my dad making it over and over again so I remember all the process".

Bak Chit Gai (spread), 2021.

How has your project evolved?

Originally, my project started with all the questions I have about my mom. I was using photographs as a container to hold on to the questions and wanted to echo the same questions in the audience. I was eager to understand what the ideal mother-daughter relationship would look like. Through investigation and conversation with my mom, my work has become the reconciliation of my self-questioning. I have learned to cope with the imperfect family relationship.



Untitled (C-Section), 2020.



Untitled (Mom's Hair), 2020.



Bak Chit Gai #18, 2021.

What's next for you?

I am currently making a physical cookbook where I will continue my research on food and family relationships, which my thesis will eventually become a part of. Through images of my mom making different culturally significant dishes along with transcribed conversations, I hope to break through the traditional image of family, specifically in the Chinese culture. After graduation, I would like to continue drawing from my experience of being first generation Chinese-American. I want to use my work to explore my family's ideology, the controversies of cultures and struggles in immigration.