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〈Research Note〉

Culinary Memory, Gendered Identity, and Cultural Rupture in Chinese American Women's Literature

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Abstract

This study examines the shifting symbolism of food in Chinese American women's literature from the 1980s to the 2010s through a comparative literary lens. Food transcends its role as a mere sustenance marker to become a dynamic site of cultural memory, maternal authority, gender norms, and the tensions between assimilation and resistance. In foundational Chinese American women's literary works from the 1980s, culinary rituals function as mnemonic anchors and therapeutic models of continuity. By contrast, as the new millennium approached, food and foodways were reconfigured as signifiers of assimilation, hybridity, and desire. This article particularly focuses on Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You* (2014), introducing a radical departure by foregrounding the absence of food as a semiotic marker of silence and rupture, thereby challenging the conventional association of food with cultural transmission. Drawing on feminist theory, postcolonial studies, and memory studies, this research demonstrates how food operates as a contested, fluid, and affective medium through which diasporic identities are negotiated and reimagined.

Keywords: Chinese American literature, food symbolism, gender performativity, cultural memory, diaspora, identity

1. Introduction

Food plays a significant semiotic role in Chinese American women's literature, carrying cultural memory, maternal subjectivity, and diasporic identity. Over the decades, these evolving dynamics have been shaped by the works of Chinese women writers since the mid-twentieth century. In the late 1970s and 1980s, foundational texts such as Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) established a healing model of food, in which culinary practices serve as mnemonic tools that sustain cultural memory and maternal authority. In these narratives, food is not merely a necessity for survival but also a narrative strategy to resist cultural erasure and to revalorize domestic labor as a site of female empowerment. However, the 1990s had a shift. Gish Jen's

novels, *Typical American* (1991) and *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996), foreground food as a marker of assimilation and cultural negotiation, dramatizing the tensions of middle-class mobility and identity reconstruction. By the late 1990s, Mei Ng's *Eating Chinese Food Naked* (1998) further complicated these paradigms, transforming food from a symbol of cultural continuity into an expression of desire, hybridity, and psychological ambivalence. Entering the new millennium, Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You* (2014) radically departs from earlier portrayals, which make food become a site of rupture, silence, and emotional estrangement, rather than a medium of cultural transmission.

This literary trajectory reveals a complex theoretical framework. Feminist theory elucidates how culinary rituals intersect with gender performativity and maternal identity, while postcolonial studies situate these narratives within broader dynamics of cultural negotiation and hybridity. Memory studies further clarify food's mnemonic function, demonstrating how it both preserves and destabilizes diasporic subjectivity. Together, these perspectives illuminate how everyday practices such as cooking and eating become contested sites of power, desire, and identity in Chinese American women's literature.

Previous studies have extensively examined identity, diaspora, and cultural hybridity. Asian American critics such as Sau-ling Cynthia Wong (1993), Lisa Lowe (1996), and Shirley Geok-lin Lim (1997) have explored how culinary practices resist assimilation and sustain cultural memory. Wong's concept of "food metaphor" places cooking labor within the context of survival politics, while Lim emphasizes its role in reinforcing matrilineal authority. Lowe's studies of immigrant family life highlight how food mediates tensions between cultural transmission and Americanization. More recent research has further expanded the field. Pi-Li Hsiao (2000) analyzes food imagery in Amy Tan's works as symbolic of mother-daughter relationships and cultural conflict. Wenying Xu's (2008) *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature* theorizes food as a vehicle for cultural memory and gendered subjectivity, emphasizing oscillation between cultural continuity and assimilation. Anh Hua's (2013) examines mnemonic traces in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, while Timothy K. August (2019) approached food from the perspective of racial performance and cultural representation, highlighting its political entanglements in identity formation. Sima Aghazadeh (2024) introduces the concept of "food performativity" in diasporic women's writing, emphasizing the intersection of culinary rituals and transnational identity.

Despite the rich body of studies, limited attention has been paid to the symbolic volatility of food in later Chinese American Women's writing. Few studies trace the evolution of food's symbolic meanings across generations, particularly its capacity to signify rupture, silence, and emotional estrangement. This paper argues that food serves as a dynamic symbolic system encoding intergenerational conflict and cultural negotiation within immigrant families. Adopting a comparative framework, this study examines key works by Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, Gish Jen, Mei Ng, and Celeste Ng, revealing how food evolves from a mnemonic anchor into a symbol of rupture and emotional alienation, ultimately constructing a new grammar of the diasporic narrative. In particular, this paper focuses on Celeste Ng's *Everything I*

Never Told You, which radically diverges from earlier portrayals by foregrounding the absence of food as a powerful trope. This "absence" functions not as a void but as a semiotic marker of silence, emotional estrangement, and the breakdown of cultural transmission, challenging conventional associations of food with continuity and maternal authority. Through this lens, the paper explores how absence reconfigures diasporic subjectivity and narrative strategies in contemporary Chinese American women's literature.

2. From Memory to Rupture: Intergenerational Transformations of Food Symbolism in Chinese American Women's Literature

In foundational works from the late 1970s and 1980s, such as Maxine Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, food functions not merely as sustenance but as a mnemonic device that sustains cultural memory. For instance, Kingston vividly recalls her mother's shopping trips: "When my mother had gone to the Canton market to shop, her wallet had unfolded like wings. She had hunted out the seed shops to taste their lichees, various as wines, and bought a sack that was taller than a child to bedazzle the nieces and nephews. A merchant had given her one nut fresh on its spring of narrow leaves. My mother popped the thin wood shell in her curled palm. The white fruit, an eye without an iris, ran juices like spring rivers inside my mother's mouth. She spit out the brown seed, iris after all. She had bought a turtle for my grandfather because it would lengthen his life." (Kingston, 1976: 77) Here, the sensory detail of taste and texture transforms food into a conduit for memory, linking familial bonds to cultural heritage. Moreover, food also operates as a form of maternal authority, shaping domestic life and moral codes. Kingston writes: "'Eat! Eat!' my mother would shout at our heads bent over bowls… she had one rule to keep us safe, such: 'If it tastes good, it's bad for you; if it tastes bad, it's good for you.' We'd have to face four- and five-day-old leftovers until we ate it all." (Kingston, 1976: 92) Through such imperatives, domestic labor and oral tradition converge, turning maternal care into a performative act of cultural transmission. Consequently, culinary rituals serve not only as daily routines but as vessels for carrying and preserving cultural stories across generations.

Similarly, Tan's fiction situates food at the heart of mother-daughter relationships. Mahjong gatherings, shared meals, dumplings, soups, and steamed fish become textual sites of relational bonding and the transmission of values. For example, a mother's admonition: "You must eat more rice. It will make you strong." (Tan, 1989: 152) In another scene, a daughter recalls her mother insisting she eat bitter melon, despite her dislike. "She said it would make me smart, but I hated the taste. Still, I ate it because she was watching." (Tan, 1989: 174) Here, food becomes an act of respect and obedience, reinforcing family hierarchy. These moments reveal food as both a medium of emotional exchange and filial piety, embodying the ambivalence of care and control. The daughter's compliance, despite her preferences, signals the tension between individual taste and collective expectation.

By the 1990s, this therapeutic model began to unravel. In Gish Jen's *Typical American*, food serves as a marker of assimilation and middle-class aspiration. The protagonist, Ralph Chang, prefers hamburgers and casseroles in pursuit of an American identity, while his rejection of Chinese food signals a psychological distancing from his heritage. In one scene, Ralph mocks his sister's dumpling: "We are Americans now. We eat meatloaf" (Jen, 1991: 132), dramatizing the conflict between cultural transmission and assimilation. Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* further explores this negotiation through improvisational cooking, as Mona blends Chinese and Jewish culinary in playful, hybrid forms. (Jen, 1991: 145) These culinary inventions function as rituals of self-making and cultural conversion, dramatizing the tension between continuity and rupture. As Gonzalez (2001: 225) observes, Mona's improvisation resists essentialist binaries, embracing heterogeneity as a model of identity performance.

By the late 1990s, literary representations of food underwent a more radical transformation. Mei Ng's *Eating Chinese Food Naked* foregrounds food as a vessel of desire and cultural ambivalence. Here, "naked" Chinese food becomes a symbolic gesture of exposure, both erotic and artistic, signaling a break from normative cultural scripts and exposing the fragility of ethnic identity.

In the 2010s, the theme of rupture and silence dominated the culinary domain. Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You* uses minimalist food imagery, such as toast, eggs, and coffee, to challenge previous paradigms. After Lydia's death, Marilyn's (Lydia's mother) failed attempt to cook reflects her emotional collapse and the instability of maternal identity: "She tried to stir-fry vegetables, but the taste was wrong, the texture limp." (Ng, 2014: 215) Lydia's untouched birthday cake becomes a haunting emblem of absence, dramatizing the inability of material culture to sustain memory amid silence. Another striking example occurs when James Lee visits Louisa Chen for comfort after Lydia's death. Louisa offers to cook Chinese food, invoking a sense of cultural familiarity, but the meal is never prepared. Their encounter shifts into a sexual relationship, and the promise of Chinese food remains unfulfilled. This absence of Chinese food becomes a metaphor for estrangement from cultural roots. As Astrid Erll (2011) notes, food can act as a medium of cultural memory, linking individuals and collective identity. Yet, here, the lack of cooking accentuates the rupture of that memory. The kitchen, once a space of care, becomes one of avoidance and alienation. Louisa's failure to fulfill the promise to cook and Marilyn's withdrawal from domestic labor reflect the broader themes of broken gender roles and cultural expectations. In this way, the absence of food becomes a powerful symbol of emotional and cultural emptiness in the aftermath of familial trauma.

3. Maternal Authority and Culinary Performativity: Gender and Memory Across Generations

Judith Butler's (1998) theory of gender performativity provides a compelling lens for examining maternal identity in Chinese American women's literature, where domestic rituals such as cooking and storytelling function as embodied acts of cultural transmission. In *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong

Kingston stages maternal authority through these practices. Kingston depicts her mother's meticulous food preparation during a family gathering. "She unbundled a blanket and spread it out to make a bed for herself. On the floor, she had two shopping bags full of canned peaches, real peaches, beans wrapped in taro leaves, cookies, Thermos bottles, enough food for everybody, though only her niece would eat with her. Her bad boy and bad girl were probably sneaking hamburgers, wasting their money. She would scold them." (Kingston, 1976: 113-114) Through these everyday behaviors, maternal subjectivity is not passively inherited but actively constructed and negotiated. Yet, this performativity unfolds within a patriarchal framework that devalues daughters and privileges masculinity. Kingston recalls the gendered logic of feeding practices: "Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds… There's no profit in raising girls. When you raise girls, you're raising children for strangers…I minded that the emigrant villagers shook their heads at my sister and me. "One girl—and another girl," they said, and made our parents ashamed to take us out together. The good part about my brothers being born was that people stopped saying, "All girls," but I learned new grievances. "Did you roll an egg on *my face* like that when *I* was born?" "Did you have a full-month party for *me*?" "Did you turn on all the lights?" "Did you send *my* picture to Grandmother?" "Why not? Because I'm a girl? Is that why not?" "Why didn't you teach me English?" "You like having me beaten up at school, don't you?" (Kingston, 1976: 46)

One more scene underscores this systemic bias when the great-uncle invites the children to go shopping: "Come, children. Hurry. Hurry. Who wants to go out with Great-Uncle? Get your coats, whoever's coming." "I'm coming. I'm coming. Wait for me." When he heard girls' voices, he turned on us and roared, "No girls!" and left my sisters and me hanging our coats back up, not looking at one another. The boys came back with candy and new toys. When they walked through Chinatown, the people must have said, "A boy—and another boy—and another boy!" "At my great-uncle's funeral I secretly test out feeling glad that he was dead—the six-foot bearish masculinity of him." (Kingston, 1976: 47) This passage exposes how culinary rituals, while sustaining cultural memory, also reproduce gender hierarchies. Maternal authority thus operates in tension with systemic sexism, revealing that cultural transmission is never neutral but deeply entangled with power. Butler's framework helps us see that maternal identity emerges through repeated, embodied acts that both preserve tradition and negotiate patriarchal constraints within diasporic contexts.

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* extends this dynamic by situating recipes and shared meals at the heart of mother-daughter relationships. Mahjong gatherings, dumplings, soups, and steamed fish become textual sites of relational bonding and cultural continuity. Yet these rituals also reveal tension: daughters seek autonomy while mothers insist on tradition. Tan foregrounds this ambivalence in scenes where eating bitter melon becomes an act of obedience rather than preference, signaling how food mediates care and control. In both Kingston and Tan, culinary practices operate as gendered archives of memory—performative acts that sustain cultural identity while exposing the fragility of maternal authority under conditions of change.

Ng's *Everything I Never Told You* radicalizes this paradigm by introducing absence and silence as central tropes. Doris's recipe book initially enacts maternal authority through the codification of domestic knowledge, functioning as a mnemonic object and a site of intergenerational tension.

"Furious at the smallness of her mother's life. This she [Marilyn] thought fiercely, touching the cookbook's cover. This is all I need to remember about her. This is all I want to keep" (Ng, 2014: 83) captures Marilyn's deep resentment toward her mother, Doris's circumscribed existence. "…in the kitchen, she discovered her mother's Betty Crocker book, the spine cracking and mended twice, with Scotch tape. On the first page of the cookie section, a deliberate line in the margin of the introduction, the kind she herself had made in college to mark an important passage. … She flipped through the other chapter, looking for more pencil lines. In "'Pies,' she found another: *if you care about pleasing a man, bake a pie. But make sure it's a perfect pie. Pity the man who has never come home to a pumpkin or custard pie.* Under "'Basic' Eggs": *The man you marry will know the way he likes his eggs. And chances are he'll be fussy about them. So, it behooves a good wife to know how to make an egg behave in six basic ways.*" (Ng, 2014: 82-83) The cookbook operates as a potent symbol of domesticity, reducing Doris's identity to recipes and household labor. Marilyn's anger reflects a generational and ideological rupture: her determination to pursue a career emerges as a rejection of the gendered expectations embodied by her mother. By choosing the cookbook as the sole artifact of remembrance, Marilyn simultaneously acknowledges and repudiates the cultural script that confines women to the kitchen. From a feminist perspective, this moment critiques the structural limitations imposed on women's lives, while from an artistic standpoint, it foregrounds how culinary objects encode memory, intimacy, and loss. This tension resonates with broader immigrant narratives, where women's aspirations are often subordinated to normative ideals of family and care, rendering food both a site of continuity and constraint.

Lydia was significantly aware of her mother's inner conflict. She understands that the cookbook, for Marilyn, is not a neutral object but a symbolic weight—a "stone" anchoring her to domesticity. In an attempt to ease her mother's burden, Lydia hides the cookbook, believing that its removal might liberate Marilyn from the constraints of inherited gender roles. Lydia's behavior reveals her desire to protect her mother. "*Your book*, Lydia had said. *I lost it*. Mailyn had been thrilled, had considered it an omen: her daughter had read her mind… She [Lydia] flips the pages she has not seen in years, tracing her mother's pencil marks with her fingertip, smoothing the pockmarked pages where she had tried all those nights, in the kitchen, alone. Somehow, Lydia had known that this book had pulled on her mother like a heavy, heavy stone. She hadn't destroyed it. She had hidden it, all those years; she had piled book after book atop it, weighting it down, so her mother would never have to see it again." (Ng, 2014: 247) Marilyn's rejection of these recipes signifies an attempt to escape the chains of postmemory, as defined by Marianne Hirsch (2008)—the transmission of trauma and aspiration from one generation to the next. However, this rejection does not free her; instead, Marilyn places her own ambitions on Lydia,

sustaining a new type of generational pressure. Building on this tension, the narrative explores how these unresolved conflicts manifest after Marilyn gives birth to her children. Her attempt to leave home becomes a performative gesture of agency, dramatizing the double bind of gender: the impossibility of fully inhabiting both private and public spheres without loss. Lydia internalizes her mother's absence as a personal failure, believing that Marilyn left because she was not "good enough." Such self-blame underscores how maternal choices produce intergenerational consequences. "Everything that she [Marilyn] had wanted for Lydia, which Lydia had never wanted but had embraced anyway. A dull chill creeps over her. Perhaps—and this thought chokes her—that had dragged Lydia underwater at last." (Ng, 2014: 246) Ultimately, Lydia's death can be read as a tragic outcome of these unresolved tensions—a narrative where the mother's thwarted ambitions and the daughter's internalized guilt converge, exposing the emotional costs of gendered expectations in immigrant families.

Taken together, these texts reveal that domestic practices—whether cooking, storytelling, or eating—are dynamic sites of cultural negotiation. They do not simply juxtapose disparate examples; rather, they collectively illustrate how maternal roles are both reproduced and destabilized through performative acts. Through Butler's lens of gender performativity and Hirsch's concept of postmemory, food emerges as a medium through which identities are staged, contested, and remembered across generations. In Kingston and Tan, culinary rituals sustain continuity. However, in Ng, their absence signals rupture. This trajectory underscores the precariousness of maternal authority and the complex interplay between gender, memory, and cultural identity in Chinese American women's narratives.

4. An Analysis of Culinary Hybridity and Cultural Negotiation

Food in Chinese American women's literature evolves beyond its mnemonic and maternal functions to become a transnational medium of cultural negotiation. This chapter examines how culinary hybridity destabilizes the essentialist notion of ethnicity and opens what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls the "third space," where identity is reconfigured through improvisation and translation.

In *Typical American*, Ralph Chang's embrace of hamburgers and casseroles dramatizes not only assimilation but also the performative nature of identity construction. His rejection of dumplings, "We are Americans now. We eat meatloaf." (Jen, 1991: 102), serves as a symbolic act of cultural disavowal, revealing how food choices are deeply implicated in the politics of belonging. Rather than a mere dietary preference, Ralph's culinary decisions are a ritualized enactment of what Sau-ling Cynthia Wong terms the "food metaphor", where eating becomes a strategy of survival and self-fashioning (Wong, 1993: 49). By privileging meatloaf, Ralph's act of culinary conversion encapsulates the tension between ethnic continuity and the seductive promise of assimilation. In Contrast, *Mona in the Promised Land* transforms into a playful site of hybridity and transforms culinary practice into a medium of cultural translation

rather than a maker of loss. Mona's decision to serve egg rolls at a bar mitzvah dramatizes Bhabha's "interstitial passage between fixed identifications." (Bhabha, 1994: 4) The egg roll's presence at a Jewish rite of passage unsettles the notion of cultural purity and opens the "third space," where hybrid practices generate new forms of belonging. Here, identity is no longer inherited but negotiated, enacted daily through rituals that blur ethnicity and religious boundaries. Mona's culinary creativity exemplifies hybridity as agency, rather than passively assimilating, she actively reconfigures cultural codes and asserts a selfhood rooted in fluidity, not essentialism. As Gonzalez observes, Mona's negotiation of descent and consent through food foregrounds a model of identity that is neither oppositional nor assimilative, but relational and contingent (Gonzalez, 2001: 225). Her improvisation transforms the kitchen into a stage for cultural performance, where food becomes a language of affiliation and reinvention. Unlike Ralph's coerced Americanness, Mona's playful hybridity makes a shift from assimilationist logic to a transnational grammar of identity. Both texts demonstrate how culinary practices function as performative acts that reconfigure ethnic identity within transnational contexts, challenging the myth of cultural authenticity and exposing the fluidity of diasporic subjectivity.

Mei Ng's *Eating Chinese Food Naked* radicalizes this discourse by intertwining food with sexuality, exposing the intimate entanglement of cultural identity and bodily desire. The image of lo mein: "The noodles stuck to her fingers like memories she couldn't wash off" (Ng, 1998: 127), collapses nourishment and eroticism, suggesting that food operates not only as a cultural signifier but also as a tactile medium through which identity is negotiated at the level of the body. Unlike Ralph's eagerness for Americanness or Mona's playful improvisation, Ng's narrative foregrounds hybridity as a deeply embodied and affective process. Consuming Chinese food in moments of sexual intimacy dramatizes Bhabha's concept of the "unhomely," where the intimate and the cultural intersect (Bhabha, 1994: 13). Lo mein becomes a metaphor for cultural residue, clinging to the protagonist's fingers like an inescapable trace of ethnic memory. This sensual engagement with food destabilizes normative scripts of ethnicity and gender, revealing identity as fluid, open, and deeply tied to desire.

Ng further complicates this discourse with the image of "naked" Chinese food left uncovered in the refrigerator, a metaphor for cultural vulnerability, and scenes where Chinese dishes are eroticized by lovers who exoticize her heritage. These episodes underscore food as a site of negotiation between intimacy and cultural otherness, challenging the binary of assimilation versus resistance by introducing pleasure as a disruptive force. In Ng's narratives, food is no longer just a nostalgic reminder or a sign of cultural rupture; it becomes a space for self-expression, where culinary scenes challenge the simple opposition of assimilation and resistance by introducing pleasure as a disruptive force. Food is no longer just a nostalgic reminder or a sign of cultural break; it becomes a space for bold self-expression, where cultural rules are reshaped through acts of eating that blur the lines between tradition and modernity, self and other. This interpretation draws on Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space," which explains

how hybrid practices create new cultural meanings by destabilizing fixed identities (Bhabha, 1994: 4). In Ng's narrative, eating lo mein after sex exemplifies this principle; the act merges intimacy and ethnicity, turning food into a language of desire and cultural negotiation. In this way, Ng's narrative pushes the idea of hybridity beyond cultural mixing into the realm of emotion, showing how diasporic identity is shaped through the interplay of taste, touch, and desire.

5. Reconfiguring Culinary Memory in Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You*

Unlike earlier narratives where culinary rituals function as mnemonic anchors or sites of negotiation, Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You* introduces a radical shift in the symbolic meaning of food. Ng foregrounds the absence of food as a powerful semiotic device. This absence operates as a marker of silence, estrangement, and cultural rupture. One of the most telling examples occurs when Marilyn attempts to cook: "She tried to stir-fry vegetables, but the taste was wrong, the texture limp." (Ng, 2014: 215) This failed act of cooking dramatizes more than grief; it signals the collapse of maternal identity and the impossibility of restoring domestic order. The kitchen, traditionally a locus of care and continuity, becomes a space of disorientation. In contrast to earlier texts where recipes and shared meals sustain cultural memory, Ng presents cooking as an act that falters under the weight of loss, exposing the fragility of gendered roles when severed from inherited scripts.

Additionally, the motif of the untouched birthday cake amplifies this dynamic. Intended as a celebratory object, the cake becomes a haunting emblem of absence, underscoring the futility of material culture in preserving memory. Similarly, when James visits Louisa Chen seeking comfort, her offer to cook Chinese food evokes a promise of cultural familiarity. Yet the meal is never prepared; their encounter shifts into intimacy, leaving the promise unfulfilled. This unmade meal functions as a metaphor for cultural disconnection, revealing how even gestures of care fail to bridge the gap of estrangement. In these scenes, absence becomes a signifier—a silent language articulating rupture more forcefully than any feast. Astrid Erll's theory of cultural memory helps illuminate this inversion. If food traditionally mediates between individual and collective identity, its absence in Ng's narrative constructs what might be termed a "negative mnemonic," where silence replaces tactile rituals of cooking and eating. This reversal destabilizes the nostalgic paradigm of food as a repository of cultural continuity, revealing its vulnerability to erasure. Moreover, Ng's representation of absence intersects with gender politics. Domestic labor, once valorized as a performative act of maternal authority, becomes a site of failure and avoidance. When Doris died, "it struck her [Marilyn] then, as if someone had said it aloud: her mother was dead, and the only thing worth remembering about her, in the end, was that she had cooked. Marilyn thought uneasily of her own life, of hours spent making breakfasts, serving dinner, packing lunches into neat paper bags. How was it possible to spend so many hours spreading peanut

butter across bread? How was it possible to spend so many hours cooking eggs? Sunnyside up for James. Hard-boiled for Nath. Scrambled for Lydia. It behooves a good wife to know how to make an egg behave in six basic ways. Was she sad? Yes. She was sad. About the eggs. About everything." (Ng, 2014: 85-86) Marilyn's withdrawal from cooking and Louisa's deferred promise dramatize the instability of gender norms within diasporic families. Through these absences, Ng critiques the idealized image of maternal care and exposes the emotional costs of assimilationist aspirations. In this way, *Everything I Never Told You* reconfigures the grammar of diasporic narrative. Food, once a symbol of healing, negotiation, or desire, becomes a sign of rupture and loss. By transforming absence into a semiotic presence, Ng challenges the foundational assumption that culinary practices inherently sustain cultural memory. Instead, her narrative reveals how silence, embodied in the unmade meal, the untouched cake, the failed stir-fry, speaks more powerfully, articulating fractures of identity, memory, and belonging in contemporary Chinese American literature.

Conclusion:

Through analyzing Chinese American women writers' works from the 1980s to the 2010s, this study reveals their transformation of food and foodways in literature. Food evolves from simple sustenance or heritage to a dynamic site for negotiation, hybridity, and emotional ambivalence. Eating and cooking acquire layered meanings of nostalgia, adaptation, and cultural interplay. Food serves simultaneously as both a bridge and a barrier, evoking comfort and belonging while signaling tension and loss. This study shows food and foodways as contested, fluid, and deeply connected to gender, identity, and affect in diasporic narratives.

By interpreting food through the lenses of gender performativity, cultural hybridity, and postmemory, this research underscores how material culture, domestic labor, and affective practices intersect in immigrant literature. Ultimately, the shifting representations of food from the 1980s to the new millennium not only chart significant transformations in Chinese American women's writing but also highlight the enduring power of food as a lens for understanding identity, community, and cultural change.

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食と記憶、文化的断絶
―中国系アメリカ人女性文学の再考―

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要旨

本研究は、中国系アメリカ人女性文学における「食」の象徴性の変遷を、1980年代から2010年代にかけて比較文学的視点から考察する。食は単なる生存手段の記号にとどまらず、文化的記憶、母性の権威、ジェンダー規範、同化と抵抗の力学をめぐる複雑な意味を帯びてきた。Maxine Hong KingstonやAmy Tanの作品では、食は文化的連続性と母娘関係を支える治癒的モデルとして機能するが、Gish JenやMei Ngの作品では、食が同化、ハイブリディティ、欲望の象徴へと変容する。さらに、Celeste Ng『Everything I Never Told You』は、食の「不在」を沈黙と断絶の記号として提示し、従来の「食＝記憶・継承」という構図を根底から問い直す。本研究は、ジェンダー・パフォーマティビティ、文化的ハイブリディティ、ポストメモリーの理論を援用し、食がディアスポラ文学におけるアイデンティティ形成と文化交渉の場としていかに機能するかを明らかにする。

キーワード：中国系アメリカ文学、食の象徴性、ジェンダー・パフォーマティビティ、文化的記憶、ディアスポラ、アイデンティティ