



External Space

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Larissa Yeung,

Chicken and Noodles: A Portrait of My Father

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In a backyard shed on a cold day in Whitchurch-Stouffville, a small town in the Greater Toronto Area, Yik-Cheung Yeung is tending to his makeshift chicken farm. We witness his daily chores through the vantage point of his daughter, Larissa, who is following along with a clunky, somewhat heavy camera.¹ He shushes the flurry of excited and hungry *bawks*, and he receives a surprising amount of success. The viewer watches as he retrieves some freshly laid eggs, and pets a curious chicken nearby. He shows off multiple buckets of chicken feed and sprinkles the mix around the ground for his chickens to eat, demonstrating a quiet affection in the way that he takes care of them.

Larissa Yeung's *Chicken and Noodles: A Portrait of My Father* offers up an intimate look into the artist's father's dedicated chicken and farming hobby, his job at a chicken processing facility, and a rice noodle factory. The video work allows the viewer to follow the journey of the artist's own efforts to explore a more nuanced, individualistic depiction of the immigrant experience: one that seeks to favour a personal subjectivity instead of indulging in the common narratives we see prevalent in stories of immigration.

¹ Larissa Yeung, in conversation with the author, January 9th, 2019

Though the story of Yik-Cheung Yeung's life is significantly shaped by his experiences as a Chinese immigrant, this film instead opts to highlight aspects of his identity that exist outside of those experiences: His resourceful and friendly demeanor, his work ethic and his interest in chickens (to name just a few).

Yik-Cheung Yeung has been working in the poultry industry since immigrating to Canada from China in 1980, and has had experiences in farming for even longer.² From overseeing his own poultry facility to raising chickens and other animals with his father in his childhood,³ his working history with food (and chicken more specifically) has been long standing. Now working occasionally assisting in the maintenance of some of the machinery in the aforementioned chicken processing facility and rice noodle factories, his relationship to it has changed significantly. What was originally a laborious, difficult and un-glamorous job necessary for sustaining and supporting himself as well as his family (a need common in many immigrant families) has now become a leisurely activity. Through diligent and dedicated work, he now enjoys financial freedom and personal enjoyment in his semi-retirement⁴, allowing for his fascination in poultry to flourish into his own independent farming endeavor.

The energy of his workplace environment, though they exist as same type of jobs he worked in the past, transforms into something more amicable and enjoyable. This same sense of levity can be felt from the film's footage of the chicken and noodle facilities. As Yik-Cheung gives the roving camera a tour of his two workplaces, many curious employees greet Larissa (offscreen) and inquire about both the camera as well as the project itself. His co-workers chat as they expertly slice and divy up the chicken, and send them cascading down into a comically large pile of other chicken cutlets. The

² Larissa Yeung, in conversation with the author, January 9th, 2019

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

camera focuses on the hypnotic, automated packaging of the chicken legs and the production of rice noodles. Yik-Cheung jokes with his colleagues as he moves around the space collecting the discarded noodle scraps that would later be used in his chicken feed mix – his compensation for his informal work at the factory.

Larissa's camera work isn't perfect. The camera occasionally zooms into miscellaneous spots in order to adjust the camera focus to the lighting of the film's various locations. However, such imperfections are embraced, and become an intentional decision in reminding the viewer that they are stand ins for the artist herself: As a way to examine how her second generation Chinese-Canadian identity has been shaped by how she was raised, Larissa learns more about her father, his profession and his work ethic as she films, just as the viewer becomes acquainted with him through watching. The camera shakes, wanders and readjusts, akin to the filmmaking style of Cinéma vérité, using improvised camera work in order to unveil truth through observing its film subjects.⁵

In 2011's *Samsara*, a non-narrative documentary film directed by Ron Fricke, footage culled from 25 different countries around the world seek to capture moments of human existence that range from the extravagant and wondrous to the mundane and everyday.⁶ This work, channeling the film's approach to illustrating the beauty in even the smallest of moments, Larissa Yeung's *Chicken and Noodles: A Portrait of My Father* concludes with a simple act. The film cuts back to Yik-Cheung patiently washing the eggs that had been laid earlier in the work. He dries each one before placing them into a tupperware container, to be refrigerated and later cooked and eaten at a later date.

⁵ Nam, Yoommy. "Cinéma Vérité Vs. Direct Cinema: An Introduction." Resources. New York Film Academy, April 16, 2018. <https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/cinema-verite-vs-direct-cinema-an-introduction/>.

⁶ "About SAMSARA." About SAMSARA | The official site for the films SAMSARA and BARAKA, n.d. <https://www.barakasamsara.com/samsara/about>

Though this ending isn't climatic, it encompasses much of what this documentary explores. A daughter honoring her father; a Chinese immigrant's narrative as something that acknowledges collective experiences while also honoring a personal history. But most importantly, a quiet moment of a father enjoying a leisurely hobby, now enjoying the rewards of his hard work throughout the years, finding peace and quiet after a long life of labour.

- Philip Leonard Ocampo