



**Yueying Yu**  
Class of 2022  
Shenzhen, China

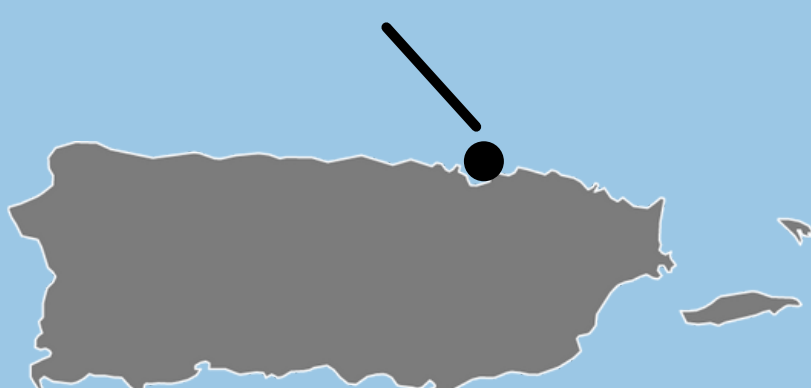
Yueying Yu

Last winter, I traveled to San Juan, Puerto Rico to document the stories of immigrant restaurateurs from different backgrounds. Over a month, I interviewed and photographed seven restaurant and market owners. In this project, food served as a segue into connecting with them and understanding more deeply who they are. Through interviews, I asked these questions: How did they assert themselves in new environments? How have they manifested their philosophies in their businesses and personal lives? The ultimate goal of asking such questions was to understand this: How did they become who they are today?

During the project, I interviewed and photographed seven individuals who owned Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Mediterranean, and Puerto Rican restaurants and markets. They are Lisa Lee,

**Continued**

San Juan, PR



## Immigrant Restaurateurs in San Juan, Puerto Rico: A Feature Journalism Project

owner of Asia Market, Siguang Lin, owner of Kyoto, Angie Mok, co-owner of the Oriental Food and Arts Inc., Keiho Yanagawa, owner of Da i majian, Matt, owner of Mai Pen Rai, and David Li, owner of Shogun cuisine and Señor Paleta. I sat



down to talk with them, sometimes for a whole afternoon, and took photographs of them and their businesses, which are being compiled into a web collection of feature stories. These stories could be used by my interviewees for record or marketing purposes. And as I continue my own interviewing projects, I also hope to add these stories to my portfolio and build credibility as an interviewer.

One of my most important takeaways from this experience was to remain autonomous and creative while looking for sources. I learned not to rely on others for recommendations of sources, and instead to reach out to people that fit into my vision for the feature project. This meant thinking about the variety of channels where I can meet and connect with people from the local

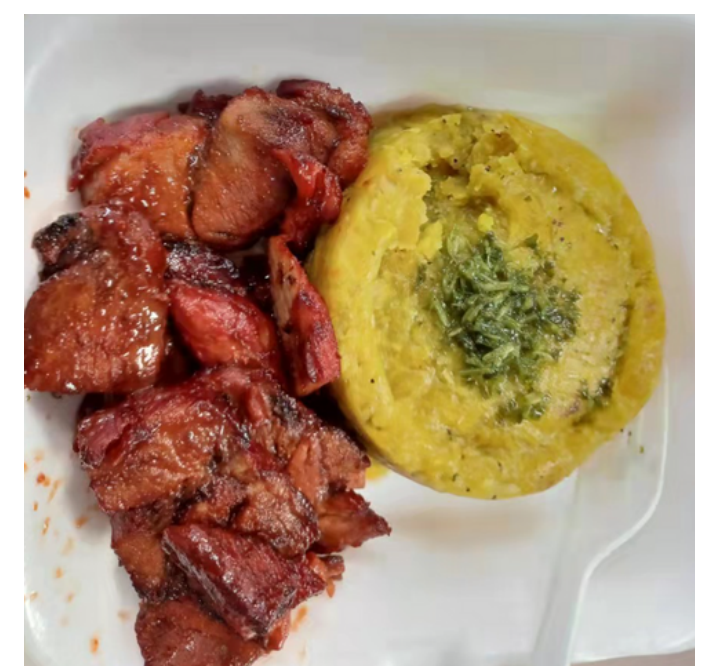


communities, like through universities or in-person visits to restaurants.

I also realized that being a good interviewer requires presence, compassion, and a strong will to connect. In the past, when I interviewed people, I always prepared a list of questions and anticipated how the conversation would go. During the fellowship, I decided to take a more present approach. I wanted to avoid extensive thinking and planning beforehand. Instead, I focused much more on the one objective of having a good conversation with my interviewees. I also tried not to limit the conversation to what they felt most comfortable sharing, or to what they usually talk about with others. Instead, I strived to ask questions that could lead them to share experiences or opinions that were true to themselves. These techniques proved to be incredibly useful and effective in conducting interviews.



do as much in the future in-person as possible, as many vulnerable populations struggle with Wi-Fi and accessibility issues. Failure to conduct in-person meetings eventually is counter-intuitive to the goal of better incorporating at-risk, most-vulnerable populations.



During this project, I saw the potential in connecting with people from completely different cultures and attempting to understand our common natures as human beings. This was a powerful experience. I feel motivated to create a career path that would allow me to continue connecting with others and understanding their stories. This experience also gifted me with insights into interviewing, connecting, and building relationships that are honest, ethical, and true to the people involved. I'm thankful for this experience and the people who made it possible.