

Alayna Y.

Interview by Anna Speciale

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Macaroni Soup (通心粉湯, 2021) is a wholesome, animated short film by Emily Carr University graduate, Alayna Y. The film follows a young woman who falls in love with a waitress in a Hong Kong-style cafe despite the language gap between them.



Alayna Y. Used with permission.

The film mixes delicious-looking food, language, and queer love into a warm and embracing story. Underneath the sheer cuteness, we can find deeper meanings and themes. We see food as something more than just food. Food is shown as a way of communication and connection and can be seen as a love language between the two women in the film.

Alayna has affirmed this film as something deeply personal, made by her, for her. One would see the exploration of Chinese roots and identity. Although it is a personal film for Alayna, it is a film that queer Asian identities would be able to connect with. I selected this film to view and watch for this reason. I instantly connected to the short description on the ReelQ film page and when I watched it I connected with it further. I found a film that I could personally connect to and I am glad I was able to interview Alayna to get more insight into the film.

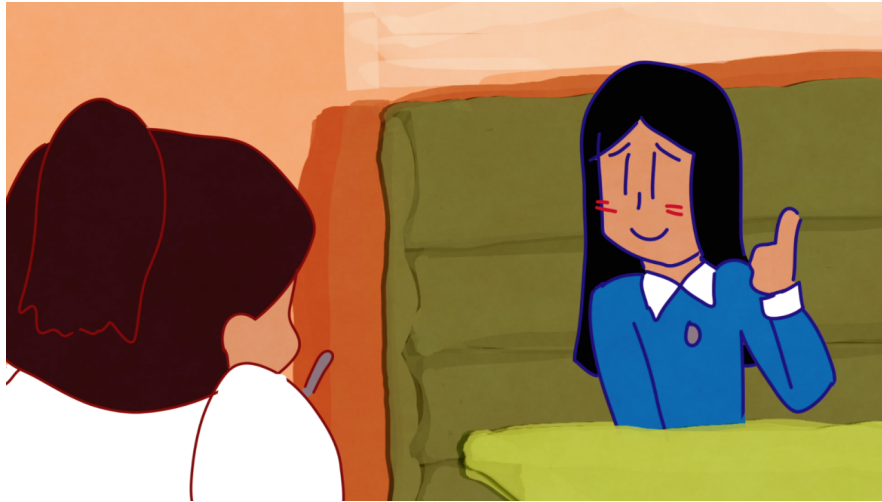
This interview took place via Zoom on October 19th, 2022.

First, can you introduce who you are and any general information about yourself?

Sure! I'm Alayna and I made the film called *Macaroni Soup*. Also, in Cantonese called 通心粉湯. I'm a graduate of Emily Carr University of Art and Design and I graduated in 2021. Location-wise, I live in BC, Canada.

Great introduction. So, how did the creation of *Macaroni Soup* come about?

One of the big things is that I wanted to see myself in a film and tell a story that I wanted to tell. That's always the big thing I tell people. More technically, the reason it came about was that our teacher told us to start thinking about our graduation film. So I was like, "Well, I like food. I like cute romances. I like queer love." Put it all together and this came out of it in that way.



Scene from *Macaroni Soup*. Used with permission.

That's great. I love that! What were some of your primary inspirations or influences, whether that be other animators or other animated films?

In terms of animated films, there's a grad film from our school, quite a few years ago. It's called *A Cake for Cherry* (2011, Betty Kwong). It's really cute and it's also a food romcom thing that really inspired me. Also, it showed nice backgrounds and places in Vancouver so I was like, "It's local. It's cute. It's a food romcom," so I kind of put those inspirations to my film as well. And definitely inspired by local restaurants and also restaurants in Hong Kong that are doing Hong Kong cafe stuff. In terms of general animator inspiration, there's this one guy on the Internet called [Louie Zong](#), he does really cute stuff. Yeah, those are inspirations for me.

Nice, I love that. So, I read up on the background of this film. I saw the alumni story online from ECU. You were talking about how you love food, and how a lot of these things that you love inspired the story. But can you delve more into that and what were your motivations to create this film?

Going back to my other answers, I just want to see myself in the film. I wanted to do something for my graduation film that was personal to me, and no one could take that idea from me. I just kind of wanted to go all out. I actually got a B plus for the film, even

though it's something I wanted to do. I just wanted to do something personal, for my last year because before that it was more about doing homework and following the lines, doing technical stuff.

I completely understand wanting to do something personal for a project like this. Now, as an artist myself, I know the very surface-level process of creating an animated video or film. So, what was the process like for *Macaroni Soup*?

It was a whole year process. I wrote a lot of it down actually on a [website](#). But because it was like so extensive, I was stressed for the whole year and I basically forgot what I did after it was done. I had to hire a few assistants to do my background and my coloring and my vocal lines. I used the grant money the government was giving at the time to pay them. And it was all online school at that time, so a lot of meetings. I think, one or two meetings every week, and it was also part of the class structure as well. A lot of it, of course, was animating. I use the program called Toon Boom Harmony to animate and I also finished all the composition and editing in Adobe After Effects and Premier.

Yeah, I've delved into videos on YouTube from animators about animation school and how stressful it is to create an animated film. I just know the bare bones of it but it still sounds very intensive.

But going into the film itself. I connected to the film so much as a Chinese American and the food and the love story. It was all just adorable. There are some big themes in your film, such as food, and in some spaces, people say food is a love language, and I think this is especially true in Asian culture. I have my personal view of food as a love language that connects me to my family and friends. And food is also nostalgic at times for me. Can you tell me about how you view food, and how that translated into your film?

Sure! I definitely see that food is a way to connect cultures easily, without having to talk through words or anything. It's just tasty! Everyone likes the language of taste. And nostalgia comes into it a lot because the food I chose to feature in the film was part of my childhood. So like pineapple bun and, of course,



Steak dish from *Macaroni Soup*. Used with permission.

macaroni soup. The fun fact is I actually don't like macaroni soup that much, but it's a classic breakfast thing. My friend once told me that she tried it afterward so I was like, "Awesome! So glad you enjoyed it." So, again, discovering culture in that way is easy but also I think that Hong Kong-style food specifically was also a product of colonization by the British. So I wanted to explore that more in my film, how it's a combination of both cultures, but also in the colonized history as well. I think that food can also be not just comforting and wholesome but also has a history behind it that's pretty important to think about as well.

Yeah, for sure, that's a really interesting insight. I'll also just note that your illustrations of the food were really nice and just in general animated food always looks good [laughs].

[Laughs] I know, right?

There's also this language barrier, that's a big theme in the film between the two women. That's something I can somewhat relate to because I cannot speak Chinese or Mandarin. And I think a lot of Asian Americans, I can only speak as an American, can relate to not being able to speak their language, which creates a rift between their family or their culture. How was the idea for the language barrier between these two women brought about?

Well, it sparked from my childhood, not knowing a lot of Cantonese. But I'm pretty good with it these days. But even so, I had to ask one of my voice actors' mom to help with the actual like making the script feel like it's natural but also unnatural at the same time. Trying to get the lady's voice lines to sound like she kind of knows some, she kind of doesn't know some, was important to me. I feel like it was part of having a nice conflict in there, being split between those two things. But also, because I thought it'd be a nice way to put some language puns in there like the "small toast" versus the "french toast".



Small toast (left) vs. French toast (right). Used with permission.

[Laughs] Oh, yeah! I liked that bit it was so fun.

Do you think that in the film...I mean there's this rift between the woman who comes into the cafe and her parents. There's this implied disconnect between them because she keeps ignoring their calls. It's implied that it's because she is queer but I was wondering did you intend for the language barrier to also be a rift between her and her parents?

Not too much so because it is implied she can hear what they're saying as she understands it. But it's not too big, it's more the gap between her and the waitress, that's more the plot there. Also, when you mentioned that you read that the parents were fighting with her because she was queer, I tried to make that kind of vague, but also, "if you know, then you know." Because when my parents saw it they didn't get it at all. But when my professor saw it she was like, "Yeah, totally get this, it totally makes sense." So it's kind of funny to hear that you also got it, too.

That's interesting, so some people didn't see it as they were divided because of her queerness?

Yeah, my parents saw it as an immigrant thing. Kind of what you said, not feeling Chinese. But it's kind of cool that they saw it that way, even though it wasn't what I intended.

Yeah, that's interesting to hear. Now, moving away from that, I am curious to hear what your experience has been like regarding film festivals. I mean, I saw this from ReelQ. But what has it been like putting your film out into these spaces?

It's been pretty fun honestly!
Well, it's kinda like applying to a job every single time in that you have to write a short cover letter. The only thing is that in most places when you apply to festivals you have to pay them. So I'm grateful that I have some money saved up, and I live at home, that I can actually do this stuff. It's been pretty fun. I can get connected to more of my city



Scene from *Macaroni Soup*. Used with permission.

in that way, even if some of them are only online. But I've been able to go to theaters, and like different parts of my region, which has been cool. And I'm really glad that I could digitally go to Hong Kong and the U.S.A. Even if I couldn't go, my phone could go and I'm glad that it could touch people like you. That's just really awesome that it could go that far!

Yeah, that's pretty cool! Leading from that, I saw in that alumni stories article that you said something along the lines of that this film might be surprising for others. It's starting to change, but I still feel like there's a lack of queer Asian representation in film in general. Did you ever consider that your film could be seen as relatable to the queer Asian community and what was your mindset like? Because I know you said that this was very personal to you, which is understandable. But was your mindset from the beginning set on this being for you by you?

Basically, yes. For me, by me. But if you find it helpful, if people find it relatable, it's great to hear that! I like to hear that, too. It's just nice to connect with other people if you thought you were alone before but actually, there are some other people just like you. That's pretty great.

Yeah, I think that your film is very important for other queer Asians to see. That connection's needed and I hope that in the future that there's a lot more films with queer Asian representations. That's just my hope.

So you said you recently graduated in 2021. What are your plans and do you have plans to create more animated films like this?

All I have to say is that my next goal is to get a job. I would say that school didn't prepare me too much for what the industry is actually like in terms of animation, but it still helped a bit. If I were to make a film like this in the future, it would probably still be quite a few years down the road when I have financial stability and a job, or maybe more connections. But in the meantime, I'm just doing short little gifs and little fun things to make my portfolio seem nicer.

That's fair enough! But yeah, that's great. Those were all the questions I had. It was nice being able to talk to you about this film. I enjoyed it and I really connected with it.

Thank you for the interview!