

be/longing

An exercise in longing for belonging:
Autoethnographic reflections on storytelling
in/as decolonial praxis

Who are we?



Christine Vicera (she/hers)
Writer, Researcher, Filmmaker
The Chinese University of Hong Kong



Ericka Regalado (she/hers)
Crisis Prevention / Community
Engagement Officer
Pathfinders



Autoethnography

Me and my biases

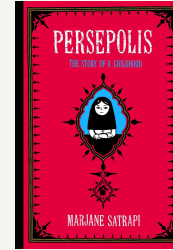


Christine Vicera (she/hers)

Filipino, family migrated to Hong Kong in 1998
(2 years old) Educated in local EMI schools in Hong Kong for primary and junior secondary, transferred to an international school for senior secondary → Where do I belong? What does it mean to be a Hongkonger?

- English major - Being unable to find writing by people *like me* from Hong Kong → Creative Writing, Introduction to World Literature @ CUHK

- Comparative Literature
→ The “Canon,” representation, in/visibility
→ “Post”-coloniality (Hong Kong and the Philippines)
What are the continuities in the discontinuities?



- Migration and Memory
→ 1.75 generation migrant, memory of the Philippines comes from the stories passed down at the dinner table (Marianne Hirsch’s “Postmemory”)
- Working alongside researchers in higher education and communities
→ Relationship between research (the humanities and social sciences), the arts, and community? (Eve Tuck’s “Suspending Damage” and Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s “Decolonizing Methodologies”)

Autoethnography

Me and my biases



Ericka Regalado (she/hers)

Filipino, born in Manila, raised all 23 years in HK
Educated in the same local EMI school all 12 years of
primary and secondary education; was the only “ethnic
minority” (EM) throughout primary, and had only 1 other
EM classmate in secondary
Speaks Cantonese better than my Filipino-Tagalog
mother tongue

- Surrounded by ethnically-Chinese peers → tendency to “hide my Filipino-ness” and switch to Cantonese around HKers - a form of defence mechanism to make sure I fit in and wasn’t treated differently - what aspects of my culture have I perceived to be negative in Hong Kong?
- Comparative Literature major - memory studies and studying how intergenerational trauma creates a culture of silence and sustains a generation’s inability to heal that reflects in the politics of the country - why do most educated Filipinos envision building a career outside of the Philippines? What does it mean for the younger Filipino diaspora to feel an obligation to “give back” to “home”?
- Worked with Peace Generation - organization that strives to build a culture of Peace in Hong Kong through dialogue
Currently working in PathFinders - an NGO that serves Migrant Domestic Worker (MDW) mothers on maternity and pregnancy-related cases



What is *be/longing*?

be/longing (<https://belonginghk.wordpress.com/>) is a community arts-for-education lab that harnesses the transformative power of storytelling to cultivate and co-create cultures of inclusion for Hong Kong's ethnically-diverse communities.

The stories we tell are an important part of the ties that bind – they are revealing of our culture, histories, values, and identities. The stories we tell about ourselves are mirrors that reflect our experiences of *being*, *longing*, and *belonging*. Through participatory storytelling, *be/longing* reimagines the way in which we reflect on what it means to belong to Hong Kong.





“Hong Kong is diverse, but the people who produce its stories are not”



The Best Books About Hong Kong

- John Lanchester – Fragrant Harbour.
- Chris Patten – East and West.
- Han Suyin – A Many-Splendoured Thing.
- Martin Booth – Gweilo, Memories of a Hong Kong Childhood.
- Hong Kong Writers Circle – Hong Kong Highs and Lows.
- Steve Yui-Sang Tsang – A Modern History of Hong Kong.

“Hong Kong is diverse, but the people
who produce its stories are not”

Is it really, though?

According to the 2016 Population By-census, only 8% of
Hong Kong's population consists of ethnic minorities.
Excluding domestic workers, the figure stands at 3.6%



be/longing

The Myth of Multiculturalism


‘This is a visible representation, particularly the memorial, of our contribution to Hong Kong, but people cannot see it unless it is in a state to be seen.’ - Azan Marwah



The Case for Change

Myth of Multiculturalism →
Perfunctory policies of inclusivity
(e.g., de facto segregation in the
education system, see HK Unison,
2014)

Dearth of documentation about
the contributions and historical
roots of ethnic minorities (EM)* in
Hong Kong



Lack of exposure, awareness, and understanding →
Breeds ignorance, racial prejudice, low degrees of racial acceptance,
and **social exclusion**

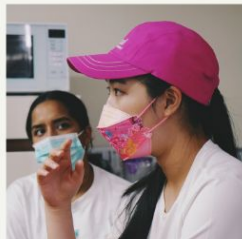
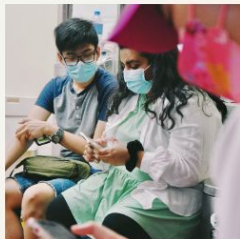
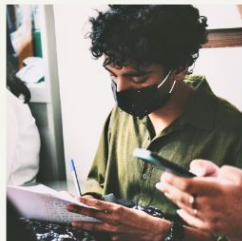
*For lack of better term

Our mission and vision

There exists misinformation, prejudice, and a fundamental lack of understanding and awareness about EMs despite their historical roots in the city. This can be attributed to the lack of documentation about their history and contributions in educational material, popular media, and government literature.

Through **creative arts workshops, exhibitions**, as well as **Chats Over Cha (open forums)**, *be/longing* holds space for intercultural dialogue between ethnic minority and ethnically-Chinese communities. In bringing together a plurality of viewpoints through **stories**, *be/longing* offers an innovative means to **increase cultural sensitivity** and **foster social inclusion**.





Workshops

be/longing believes in the power of stories. Our creative arts workshops guide workshop participants in the visual/artistic or poetic re-representation of their stories about *being* in, *longing* for, and *belonging* to Hong Kong.

Community EC and EM mentors, as well as mentors from *Cha*, an international literary journal based in Hong Kong and *Lensational*, a social enterprise that provides media training to underrepresented communities, facilitated our pilot workshops. Our first round of workshops focused on cultural practices relating to food in relation to the project's central theme of *be/longing* (being, longing, and belonging).



“[Eating and savouring] are not external activities like shopping or travelling; they are — literally and metaphorically — gut experiences. They occur within the person, involving memory, sensation, pleasure.”

– Doreen Fernández, Filipino cultural critic and food scholar



Why food?

Simply put, food gets people talking!

Stories about food offer glimpses into the ways in which we navigate our many identities.

- How has food allowed us to find or create for ourselves a sense of belonging?
- On the flip side, how have our culinary practices become barriers to belonging. Which part of our identities did we have to erase to feel like we belong?



be/longing Creative Arts Workshops (Click to watch video)



conceal something



Words from Participants

“I would have never thought that having food as a medium to connect people – the EC community and the EM community. Which might seem like a very simplistic idea, but it’s really well thought out – the way that activities were created around it, like the poetry workshops, and so on. This is everything that I wanted to do. I think before this, I didn’t write poetry for a year because I had writer’s block. And I don’t write professionally anyways, so I just [forgot about it]. But this made me want to write more”

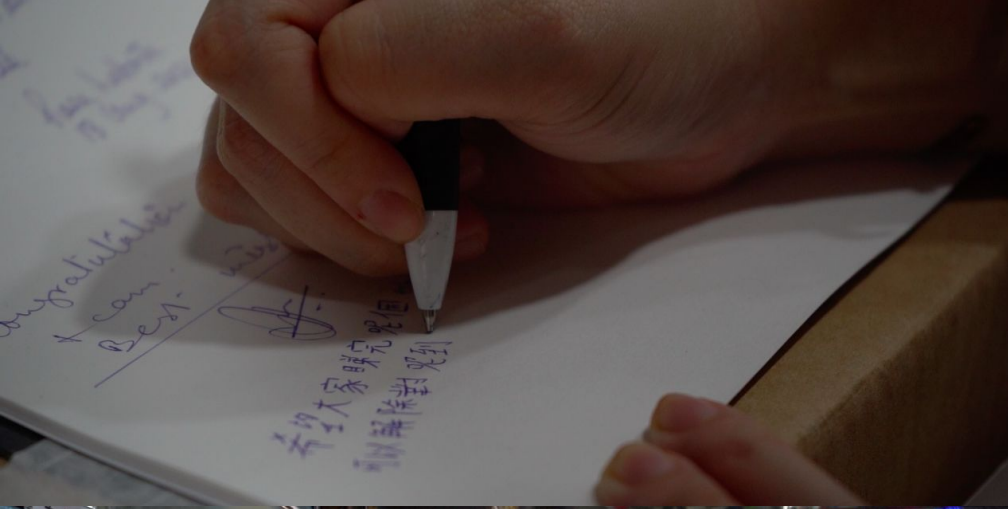
– Anonymous



Exhibition

Works produced during our creative arts workshops which ran from June - July 2022 were displayed at various community spaces around Hong Kong, starting off with the historic Chungking Mansions in Tsim Sha Tsui from 1-22 August 2021.





Words from visitors

“Food is a great way to bring people together by bridging out perceived differences” – Massimo, 1/8/2021

“One of the coolest exhibitions I’ve seen in Hong Kong (as well as exhibition space). More power to all behind this”

“As an ‘international city,’ [exhibitions like these] are how Hong Kong can start living to its name”



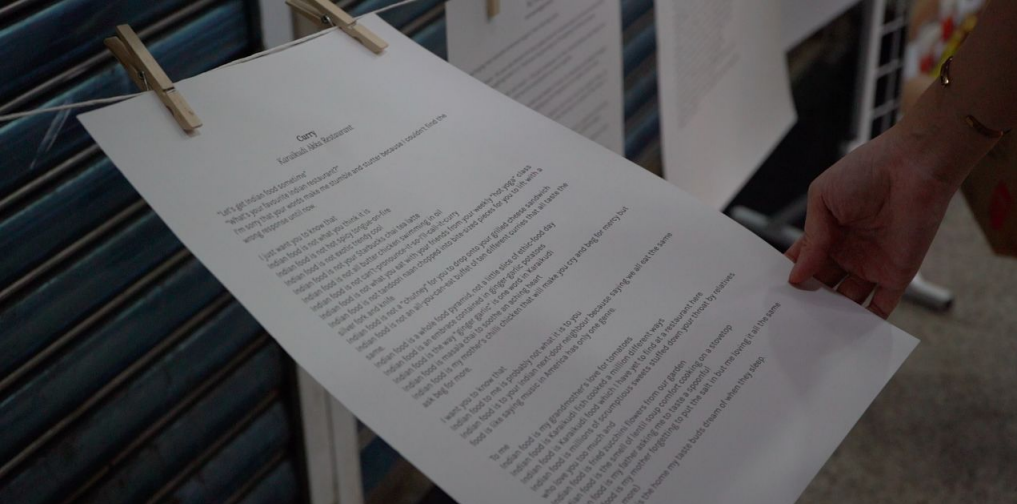
Words from visitors

“Proud to see such diverse representation! Continue building Home Kong one story at a time!”

“Thank you for giving a voice to our fellow EMS!”

“An inspiring exhibition and my first visit to Chungking Mansions. Definitely going to revisit and have a great Indian meal here next time” – Alyssa, 22/8/2021





Words from visitors

“Thank you for the work! And for bridging the gap between communities in Hong Kong, looking forward to more!”

– Suzanne

“Thank you for beginning this initiative, we need more of this.”

– Jealdrin

“Fantastic exhibition! Will have to come back for a good meal!”

– Julie





Hui Gallery, New Asia College
The Chinese University of Hong Kong



Reception by Students

- Communications for English Majors (CENG) class
- All but one student ethnically-Chinese.

Your turn!

- What is home for you?
- Where do you feel like you belong? Or, where do you feel like you don't belong? In the case of the latter, did you feel like you had to erase parts of your identity? Did you feel you have to replace it with something else?
- What are the ways in which you “perform” belonging?
 - Language
 - Cultural norms
 - Religious practices





正正因為這樣，Christine 和同屬菲裔香港人的 Ericka
For this reason, Christine and Ericka, who are both of Filipino descent

LingKee Publishing - 《同一陽光下》'Under the same sun.' (Click to watch video)

Salamat!多謝!

QUESTIONS? WANNA COLLABORATE?

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