

EP1-Ei Ei San_Evelyn

00:00:00.000 --> 00:00:02.580

(upbeat music)

Evelyn

00:00:02.580 --> 00:00:16.880

- Hi, and welcome to Untold Hong Kong Stories,

00:00:16.880 --> 00:00:19.800

multimedia narratives from the margins.

00:00:19.800 --> 00:00:21.980

This is a podcast series where we hear the stories

00:00:21.980 --> 00:00:24.160

of people in our community,

00:00:24.160 --> 00:00:26.280

from Hong Kong's non-Chinese locals

00:00:26.280 --> 00:00:29.240

to marginalized members of our community.

00:00:29.240 --> 00:00:31.040

We hope that by sharing their stories,

00:00:31.040 --> 00:00:33.080

we can think about the way we live ours

00:00:33.080 --> 00:00:36.680

and create a more inclusive and diverse society.

00:00:36.680 --> 00:00:38.840

I'm Evelyn Kwok from the Academy of Visual Arts

00:00:38.840 --> 00:00:40.600

from Hong Kong Baptist University.

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And our guest for today's podcast is Ei Ei San,

00:00:43.840 --> 00:00:45.160

a journalist from Myanmar

00:00:45.160 --> 00:00:47.520

who's lived in Hong Kong for 10 years.

00:00:47.520 --> 00:00:49.880

Here, she shares her story.

Eisan

00:00:49.880 --> 00:00:51.320

- My name is Ei Ei San.

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I'm from Myanmar and I've been in Hong Kong

00:00:53.800 --> 00:00:56.320

for almost 10 years now.

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It would be 10 year in August.

00:01:00.040

I am a journalist.

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I work for Agence France-Presse, AFP in short.

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And that's pretty much about me.

00:01:09.040 --> 00:01:11.480

(laughing)

Evelyn

00:01:11.480 --> 00:01:13.840

- How long have you been in Hong Kong for?

Eisan

00:01:13.840 --> 00:01:16.080

- Well, in August, it would be 10 years.

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So I moved to Hong Kong in 2013 for my college degree,

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so for my university and have not left.

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Since.

Evelyn

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I just noticed you call yourself,

00:01:32.600 --> 00:01:34.320

well, I know you as Ei San.

Eisan

00:01:34.320 --> 00:01:35.560

- Yeah.

Evelyn

00:01:35.560 --> 00:01:38.560

- But you introduced yourself formally as Ei Ei San.

Eisan

00:01:38.560 --> 00:01:39.400

- Yeah.

Evelyn

00:01:39.400 --> 00:01:41.600

Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Eisan

00:01:41.600 --> 00:01:46.440

- So in where I come from in Burmese culture in Myanmar,

00:01:46.440 --> 00:01:49.840

we don't really have family names.

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I mean, well, that is not completely true, I would say.

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There are so many ethnic groups in Myanmar.

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Some ethnic groups have family name,

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like Kachin group in the north,

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they do have family name that trace down their generation.

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But for my ethnic group,

00:02:11.920 --> 00:02:15.480

I am a mix of Burmese and Karen.

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We don't really have a family name.

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So you would notice that my dad's name,

00:02:22.920 --> 00:02:26.240

who his name is Lam Yit.

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So his name is not a part of any part of my name.

00:02:29.600 --> 00:02:32.440

So we, well,

00:02:32.440 --> 00:02:38.120

so it's a bit hard to explain it to people from,

00:02:38.120 --> 00:02:39.440

like, especially in Hong Kong,

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because here family name is such a thing,

00:02:41.680 --> 00:02:43.920

and that is how they sort of identify you

00:02:43.920 --> 00:02:47.320

and sort of trace their family back down.

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But for us, there's no way to do that.

00:02:49.440 --> 00:02:53.640

And my name is very different from my sibling's name.

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Well, sometimes we will incorporate, like,

00:02:56.320 --> 00:03:00.200

a part of our parents' name into our name.

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For example, my mom's name is Ma San.

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So San is in her name, and it's also in my name,

00:03:07.080 --> 00:03:11.880

and also in my sister's name, whose name is Ei Ei San.

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So yeah, it is a bit confusing,

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but we just sort of roll with it.

00:03:16.240 --> 00:03:18.360

Yeah.

Evelyn

00:03:18.360 --> 00:03:23.240

- Right, 'cause family names are such a,

00:03:23.240 --> 00:03:25.200

are such an important, I guess,

00:03:25.200 --> 00:03:27.680

way of belonging or identifying, right,

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in certain cultures.

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And I think, like you said,

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in Hong Kong culture, in Chinese culture,

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you know, the sort of, the surname that you have

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is like, "Ooh, this is where I'm from.

00:03:35.600 --> 00:03:36.760

"This is where I belong."

Eisan

00:03:36.760 --> 00:03:37.600

- Yeah.

Evelyn

00:03:37.600 --> 00:03:40.960

- And also there's a sense of, like, heritage to it, right?

00:03:40.960 --> 00:03:44.920

So not having that, does that,

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does that change or, like,

00:03:46.840 --> 00:03:49.320

how does that build up this sense of belonging

00:03:49.320 --> 00:03:52.360

to a family in your world?

Eisan

00:03:52.360 --> 00:03:56.640

- I think, like, it is a different way of, you know,

00:03:56.640 --> 00:03:59.920

different tradition.

00:03:59.920 --> 00:04:02.720

I don't think, like, names, for us,

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names doesn't necessarily tie us as a family.

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But then, for me, my name is still very important

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because it was given to me by my dad.

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So, like, I never really changed my name.

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Like, although I have some friends

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who may adopt easier names, like, for us Asian,

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you know, whenever we are in a foreign country,

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it is so much easier to have an English name.

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But then, for me, I never felt the need to have that

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because my name is me and it's very much, you know,

00:04:42.880 --> 00:04:45.120

how I identify myself.

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And I'm very proud of the name given to me.

00:04:47.880 --> 00:04:49.880

And I think changing that,

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so sort of, like, would take that away from me.

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But for me, I think it is just,

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I think it's because we came from this culture of,

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you know, family being the most important thing to you.

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Although we don't have this naming system

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or, like, this, you know, having, like,

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family name as a thing,

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we stay are very, very, like, bonded, you know,

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really strongly in our core.

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And whenever I, like, wherever I go,

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I am always reminded of who I am,

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like, from my parents all the time.

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And they, I don't know,

00:05:32.040 --> 00:05:34.320

I don't know how we bond as a family.

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I never really thought of it that way.

00:05:38.600 --> 00:05:41.840

But then, whenever we are in need, whenever I'm in need,

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I know, like, I can call on to my siblings.

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And I think that is how we show each other as we care.

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So, for example, like, I, like, my,

00:05:54.680 --> 00:05:57.880

for me, I'm, like, the person, because I made it out,

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you know, I made it out of my country,

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made it out of my hometown,

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which is just a small town with a few thousands people.

00:06:05.600 --> 00:06:10.600

So, like, in my family, I'm the one who earned the most.

00:06:11.160 --> 00:06:14.000

So, for me, being able to help them back

00:06:14.000 --> 00:06:18.080

in, like, financial sort of, like, way is how I help,

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you know, how I show that I'm grateful for them.

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And that's the same way, like,

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throughout my time here in Hong Kong,

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I've not always been, you know,

00:06:28.120 --> 00:06:32.040

this successful with my career or, like, with, you know,

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whatever I do.

00:06:33.240 --> 00:06:36.240

So, like, I have struggled before, too,

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but then my family were there every step of the way,

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and they were, they check in on me,

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and when I need sort of, like, you know,

00:06:45.080 --> 00:06:49.360

emergency sort of, like, fund or whatever,

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my parents will somehow make it happen,

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although they don't really have much, you know,

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they are just farmers, so, like,

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they are not a rich or, like, wealthy family at all.

00:07:01.000 --> 00:07:05.920

So, for us, we show each other that we care in,

00:07:05.920 --> 00:07:08.000

you know, different kind of way,

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but I think money is, you know, a big part of it as well.

Evelyn

00:07:12.280 --> 00:07:13.480

- Typical Asian culture.

Eisan

00:07:13.480 --> 00:07:14.320

- Totally, yeah.

Evelyn

00:07:14.320 --> 00:07:15.160

- Can't escape that.

Eisan

00:07:15.160 --> 00:07:16.000

- Totally, yeah.

00:07:16.000 --> 00:07:21.040

Yeah, I think, hopefully, that answer your question.

Evelyn

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- Oh, yeah, no, of course.

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I mean, like, I think it's so interesting

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as soon as you start unpacking this idea of

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what does it mean to belong, what does it mean to care?

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It's not so much about in the name, right?

00:07:32.520 --> 00:07:36.080

It's not so much about, I guess, a sense of, like,

00:07:36.080 --> 00:07:39.160

that sort of big sense of pride, you know,

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but there is still a sense of deep,

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sense of home and connection, you know,

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through knowing that you can call on them,

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knowing that wherever you go, your name, you know,

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is Eisan and you didn't change it, you know,

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to make it easier for other people, you know,

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and to assimilate, you know, I think that's very,

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a lot of, I guess, immigrant kids, you know,

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probably grew up with wanting to change their name,

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you know, to be like, oh, I just wanted to be Amy,

00:08:09.160 --> 00:08:12.840

you know, no offense to Amy's out there, lovely name.

Eisan

00:08:12.840 --> 00:08:13.680

- Lovely name.

Evelyn_Eisan

00:08:13.680 --> 00:08:14.520

(laughing)

Eisan

00:08:14.520 --> 00:08:16.880

- All the Amy's I know are, like, amazing.

Evelyn

00:08:16.880 --> 00:08:18.640

- Right, exactly.

00:08:18.640 --> 00:08:20.680

But yeah, there is that sense of

00:08:20.680 --> 00:08:22.840

needing to change yourself to fit in

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and I think it's very courageous to constantly be reminded

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and to be proud of, you know, your name,

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even though it's in a different language.

Eisan

00:08:31.400 --> 00:08:36.400

-Even when, you know, when people miscall,

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mispronounce my name, I just sort of, like,

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take it as something funny and say,

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ha ha, Ihsan, no, it's not Ihsan, it sounds so wrong.

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Yeah, it's like, Ihsan, it sounds a bit like, you know,

00:08:48.280 --> 00:08:52.160

icy, yeah, I'm like, it's kind of cool, yeah.

00:08:52.160 --> 00:08:56.120

And, but then I would just be like, no, it's Ei San,

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you know, just, yeah, just correct them

00:08:58.360 --> 00:09:00.680

and if you correct them enough,

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they will get the hang of it, yeah.

Evelyn

00:09:03.280 --> 00:09:04.760

- I mean, two syllables, Ihsan.

Eisan

00:09:04.760 --> 00:09:05.600

- Yeah.

Evelyn

00:09:05.600 --> 00:09:11.040

- So, in terms of being a minority in Hong Kong,

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and again, I like to address that up front,

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the minority in this sense that we're talking about

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is a statistical minority because,

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and I think I always get this statistic wrong,

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but it's something like maybe 50 Burmese people in Hong Kong

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or like 100 Burmese people in Hong Kong.

Eisan

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- I think, like, even I don't know the exact numbers,

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but we're a rare breed here in Hong Kong.

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I don't know, I think, like, the last time

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when I went in to the Burmese embassy to vote,

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I think they had, like, how many people,

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like, just hundreds, like, 300, like,

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sign up to vote in Hong Kong.

00:09:52.040 --> 00:09:54.800

So, like, that is not just, like, me,

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young professional Burmese living in Hong Kong,

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but there are also students who are in here studying,

00:10:02.200 --> 00:10:04.760

a lot of them are on scholarship,

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and we also have, like, older, sort of, like,

00:10:09.360 --> 00:10:13.960

older generation who have migrated here many, many years ago

00:10:13.960 --> 00:10:17.520

and have family here and stuff like that,

00:10:17.520 --> 00:10:21.640

and those people, they probably identify themselves

00:10:21.640 --> 00:10:25.080

as more of a Hong Konger now than, like, Burmese,

00:10:25.080 --> 00:10:27.920

but then we also have those older, sort of,

00:10:27.920 --> 00:10:32.920

generation here, more like Burmese-born, like, Chinese,

00:10:32.920 --> 00:10:36.640

or, like, born in Myanmar, and they migrated back here,

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or that sort of crowd as well.

00:10:39.800 --> 00:10:42.640

So it's very, like, in hundreds,

00:10:42.640 --> 00:10:46.920

I think that generalization is correct, I would say.

Evelyn

00:10:46.920 --> 00:10:51.000

So what is it like to be an ethnic minority

00:10:51.000 --> 00:10:54.000

in Hong Kong in this sense,

00:10:54.000 --> 00:10:56.960

that knowing that there might only be

00:10:56.960 --> 00:10:58.560

a few hundred of you here,

00:10:58.560 --> 00:11:00.640

and you've been here for a decade,

00:11:00.640 --> 00:11:05.320

so how does it feel to not have,

00:11:05.320 --> 00:11:08.680

yeah, I don't know, I mean, I don't wanna make assumptions,

00:11:08.680 --> 00:11:10.800

because I personally understand what it's like

00:11:10.800 --> 00:11:12.760

to be a minority in a different space,

00:11:12.760 --> 00:11:16.440

but there are plenty, there are way more people like me

00:11:16.440 --> 00:11:18.880

where I was a minority, but whereas, yeah,

00:11:18.880 --> 00:11:22.240

so what is it like for you in Hong Kong?

Eisan

00:11:22.240 --> 00:11:26.960

- Well, I never really felt particularly, sort of,

00:11:26.960 --> 00:11:31.680

different from, like, the majority here, I would say,

00:11:31.680 --> 00:11:35.880

although, yeah, like, statistically, I'm a minority,

00:11:35.880 --> 00:11:40.880

I think a lot of people mistook me for, like, being Chinese,

00:11:40.880 --> 00:11:44.920

but then I felt very,

00:11:45.920 --> 00:11:49.800

I felt this feeling of being a minority

00:11:49.800 --> 00:11:56.480

very strongly at the start of the military coup in Myanmar,

00:11:56.480 --> 00:12:01.920

so if some people have not heard about this,

00:12:01.920 --> 00:12:05.920

so Myanmar had gone through, like, a military coup,

00:12:05.920 --> 00:12:08.720

and it's still ongoing for two years already,

00:12:08.720 --> 00:12:12.320

and at the beginning of that in 2021,

00:12:14.240 --> 00:12:19.240

I wanted to sort of rally up, you know, do something,

00:12:19.240 --> 00:12:25.400

you know, just to show our solidarity with our,

00:12:25.400 --> 00:12:28.200

you know, people back home and our family back home,

00:12:28.200 --> 00:12:31.760

because my family has stayed there, so,

00:12:31.760 --> 00:12:35.040

but then it was, and then you start to think about,

00:12:35.040 --> 00:12:37.800

oh, who is here, who is Burmese, who is here,

00:12:37.800 --> 00:12:42.480

and it's very, like, small number of us,

00:12:42.480 --> 00:12:46.160

and it's really hard for us to organize anything,

00:12:46.160 --> 00:12:51.160

also, like, because, like, when we look at our,

00:12:51.160 --> 00:12:54.520

sort of, fellow Burmese living in Thailand

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or living in other countries in the US or in Australia,

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they would be, like, gathering crowds and, like,

00:13:04.200 --> 00:13:07.920

rallying up and, like, doing, like, peaceful protests

00:13:07.920 --> 00:13:12.080

and stuff like that, voice out their, you know, grievances,

00:13:12.080 --> 00:13:14.480

and we would like to do the same thing, too,

00:13:14.480 --> 00:13:15.840

but then it's harder here,

00:13:15.840 --> 00:13:19.840

because we don't have enough people or, like, yeah, like,

00:13:19.840 --> 00:13:24.840

you know, have the platform, like, in Bangkok or in Thailand,

00:13:24.840 --> 00:13:29.520

there are already, like, existing groups, so it's, you know,

00:13:29.520 --> 00:13:31.880

they can sort of, like, connect with those people

00:13:31.880 --> 00:13:33.840

and just easily organize the sort of things,

00:13:33.840 --> 00:13:37.360

but here, everyone is on their own, sort of,

00:13:37.360 --> 00:13:41.560

so that was when I felt the most, sort of, like,

00:13:41.560 --> 00:13:46.400

I wish, you know, we have bigger community here,

00:13:46.400 --> 00:13:49.040

so even with a small, you know, community,

00:13:49.040 --> 00:13:53.760

we did manage to sort of organize some fundraisers

00:13:53.760 --> 00:13:57.960

in the past, and that was, you know, very, like,

00:13:57.960 --> 00:14:02.800

touching for me, and, yeah, I think even I sort of, like,

00:14:02.800 --> 00:14:06.280

well, even if we are small here, we could, you know,

00:14:06.280 --> 00:14:08.840

our will are very strong,

00:14:08.840 --> 00:14:11.280

and we can still manage to do something,

00:14:11.280 --> 00:14:14.520

even if it's small, but, yeah, in that sort of, like, moment

00:14:14.520 --> 00:14:16.400

when your country is going through something,

00:14:16.400 --> 00:14:20.320

you wanna be this collective solidarity,

00:14:20.320 --> 00:14:22.080

you just wanna be with everyone,

00:14:22.080 --> 00:14:25.400

and in that moment, you feel kind of alone

00:14:25.400 --> 00:14:28.200

in this sort of space, yeah.

Evelyn

00:14:28.200 --> 00:14:32.240

- And without having that physical solidarity,

00:14:32.240 --> 00:14:36.040

I know you do other things to connect with your family

00:14:36.040 --> 00:14:37.720

and to connect to your roots.

00:14:37.720 --> 00:14:39.840

Could you talk a little bit about that?

Eisan

00:14:39.840 --> 00:14:42.920

- Well, like, the most sort of obvious way

00:14:42.920 --> 00:14:47.400

I connect with my family is all, like, my friends,

00:14:47.400 --> 00:14:52.400

all I with my root is, you know, calling them every week

00:14:52.400 --> 00:14:56.160

as much as I can and just talk to them

00:14:56.160 --> 00:14:59.920

and trying to just sort of absorb as much

00:14:59.920 --> 00:15:02.800

of their daily life than, you know,

00:15:02.800 --> 00:15:04.920

but it's been harder lately

00:15:04.920 --> 00:15:08.080

because of the internet shutdown

00:15:08.080 --> 00:15:12.480

and also because of the electricity blackout

00:15:12.480 --> 00:15:15.360

happening all the time in my country.

00:15:15.360 --> 00:15:18.360

And another thing that I like to do,

00:15:18.360 --> 00:15:20.800

which I've been doing, like, since I left home,

00:15:20.800 --> 00:15:25.800

and which I have sort of, I think, refined, you know,

00:15:25.800 --> 00:15:28.600

since I left home is cooking,

00:15:28.600 --> 00:15:32.280

cooking the food that I grew up with.

00:15:32.280 --> 00:15:36.400

I did not learn to cook from my mom,

00:15:36.400 --> 00:15:40.000

like a lot of people would have,

00:15:40.000 --> 00:15:45.000

but I have seen my mom cook or my sister

00:15:45.000 --> 00:15:48.160

or, like, my grandmom cook when I was growing up

00:15:48.160 --> 00:15:51.040

and I have tasted their food.

00:15:51.040 --> 00:15:55.360

And what I like to do is sometimes I would just sort of

00:15:55.360 --> 00:15:58.680

imagine a dish that I've eaten in the past

00:15:58.680 --> 00:15:59.920

when I was really young.

00:15:59.920 --> 00:16:03.800

I would then just sort of, like, reconstruct

00:16:03.800 --> 00:16:06.480

what kind of ingredient they might use.

00:16:06.480 --> 00:16:10.200

And based on that, I would recreate those dishes.

00:16:10.200 --> 00:16:13.640

And that's what I've been doing quite a lot lately.

00:16:13.640 --> 00:16:17.960

And that is also a way that I share

00:16:17.960 --> 00:16:23.360

what I've experienced to my friends as well.

00:16:23.360 --> 00:16:26.920

So I like also inviting my friends over for dinner.

00:16:26.920 --> 00:16:28.480

That's one thing I love doing.

00:16:28.480 --> 00:16:31.760

And if you ask, you know, and if you ask other friends,

00:16:31.760 --> 00:16:34.800

you know, they will tell me, like, "Is that love to cook?"

00:16:34.800 --> 00:16:37.040

And I love cooking for my friends.

00:16:37.040 --> 00:16:42.040

One main reason is because I love that it is sort of,

00:16:42.040 --> 00:16:47.320

like, an easy way for me to express or, like, share them,

00:16:47.320 --> 00:16:52.560

like, what I have experienced, my experience, my childhood,

00:16:52.560 --> 00:16:55.480

my life back home with these dishes.

00:16:55.480 --> 00:16:58.560

And it's sort of like a visual sort of presentation,

00:16:58.560 --> 00:17:02.240

you know, and they can also, like, see and taste

00:17:02.240 --> 00:17:07.240

and, yeah, and experience and get to know me more that way.

Evelyn

00:17:07.240 --> 00:17:09.800

- And I feel like in Hong Kong,

00:17:09.800 --> 00:17:13.840

there aren't many Burmese restaurants around.

00:17:13.840 --> 00:17:16.480

I think it's even more special that you're able

00:17:16.480 --> 00:17:21.480

to create your experiences to also, you know,

00:17:21.480 --> 00:17:25.560

from a personal point, you are making food for your friends

00:17:25.560 --> 00:17:27.000

and, you know, dishes that you've made,

00:17:27.000 --> 00:17:29.280

but also for other people to experience that

00:17:29.280 --> 00:17:31.280

because we can't, you know, in Hong Kong,

00:17:31.280 --> 00:17:33.800

rarely experience Burmese food.

00:17:33.800 --> 00:17:36.880

And I think what's also wonderful is that perhaps

00:17:36.880 --> 00:17:39.840

every time you are creating these dishes

00:17:39.840 --> 00:17:42.120

or this sort of gathering of a food,

00:17:42.120 --> 00:17:45.640

it's almost like you're constantly recreating the memories

00:17:45.640 --> 00:17:47.680

and, you know, your connection with home.

00:17:47.680 --> 00:17:50.400

So it's like every time you lay out a dish,

00:17:50.400 --> 00:17:52.080

every time you explain what a dish is,

00:17:52.080 --> 00:17:55.640

every time you're making it, shopping for the ingredients,

00:17:55.640 --> 00:17:59.880

it's like this reliving, you know, re-celebrating,

00:17:59.880 --> 00:18:03.000

constantly celebrating your culture

00:18:03.000 --> 00:18:05.080

and your home and your family,

00:18:05.080 --> 00:18:10.080

which is so, I guess, so sensual

00:18:10.080 --> 00:18:13.800

as a way of creating a memory, you know,

00:18:13.800 --> 00:18:17.680

it's literally involving all of your senses.

Eisan

00:18:17.680 --> 00:18:22.680

- Totally, and like, it has helped me so much

00:18:22.960 --> 00:18:27.440

this past years and sort of like calming me down.

00:18:27.440 --> 00:18:30.280

And it's sort of, even when I'm like really stressed,

00:18:30.280 --> 00:18:34.600

when I have a hard day at work or in my life

00:18:34.600 --> 00:18:38.560

or whenever I'm feeling like down,

00:18:38.560 --> 00:18:42.200

I would just be like, I would make mohinga, you know,

00:18:42.200 --> 00:18:44.560

and I would just be cooking for myself

00:18:44.560 --> 00:18:49.200

and just, you know, it's sort of like a very,

00:18:49.200 --> 00:18:53.040

like I'm meditating through cooking, you know,

00:18:54.920

and I love that process.

00:18:54.920 --> 00:18:59.160

And yeah, I think, yeah, I'm the one who,

00:18:59.160 --> 00:19:01.760

like that kind of person who just sort of like

00:19:01.760 --> 00:19:04.280

takes so much pleasure in just cooking.

00:19:04.280 --> 00:19:06.400

And I don't like cleaning though.

00:19:06.400 --> 00:19:07.240

(laughing)

00:19:07.240 --> 00:19:08.720

So I like cooking, and after that,

00:19:08.720 --> 00:19:11.720

I would just leave the pile of mess in the kitchen.

Evelyn

00:19:11.720 --> 00:19:12.560

- To someone else to do it.

Eisan
00:19:14.680

- Yeah.

Evelyn
00:19:14.680 --> 00:19:16.400

- That dish that you just described,

00:19:16.400 --> 00:19:17.880

I mean, that you just mentioned,

00:19:17.880 --> 00:19:20.400

can you describe that a little bit for us?

00:19:20.400 --> 00:19:21.240

What is that?

Eisan
00:19:21.240 --> 00:19:22.600

- So it's called mohinga.

00:19:22.600 --> 00:19:27.080

It's, I would say, an official national dish

00:19:27.080 --> 00:19:30.920

because you can get it anywhere in the country,

00:19:30.920 --> 00:19:33.000

like in every corner of the country,

00:19:33.000 --> 00:19:37.160

but the like local variation on it.

00:19:37.160 --> 00:19:39.680

It is basically a noodle dish.

00:19:39.680 --> 00:19:44.680

So it's a rice noodle with fish and lemongrass broth.

00:19:44.680 --> 00:19:47.360

So those are like the main ingredients.

00:19:47.360 --> 00:19:52.360

And my family used to have a house shop sort of thing

00:19:52.360 --> 00:19:57.760

where they sell this noodle for breakfast every morning.

00:19:57.760 --> 00:20:01.560

And I grew up helping in the kitchen every morning.

00:20:01.560 --> 00:20:05.000

They would wake me up at like six in the morning

00:20:05.000 --> 00:20:06.680

and just like chopping things,

00:20:06.680 --> 00:20:09.560

getting the soup ready, heating the soup up again,

00:20:09.560 --> 00:20:12.280

and like getting ready for the shop to be ready

00:20:12.280 --> 00:20:16.320

so we can serve the customers just in front of our house.

00:20:17.200 --> 00:20:21.120

And so that is a dish that I love cooking over and over.

00:20:21.120 --> 00:20:24.240

Every time I have like a big crowd

00:20:24.240 --> 00:20:27.840

because it's easy to cook in like a large quantity

00:20:27.840 --> 00:20:31.640

and you can just have 10 or 20 people over

00:20:31.640 --> 00:20:35.360

and it's really easy to impress people as well.

00:20:35.360 --> 00:20:39.320

So the broth, the main ingredient in the broths are like fish

00:20:39.320 --> 00:20:41.680

and you just sort of like mush the fish.

00:20:41.680 --> 00:20:45.040

You cook the fish in like ginger, garlic,

00:20:45.040 --> 00:20:48.400

and like turmeric powder and like lemongrass

00:20:48.400 --> 00:20:49.920

with a bit of shrimp paste.

00:20:49.920 --> 00:20:52.440

And like you cook it until they are cooked.

00:20:52.440 --> 00:20:54.120

After that, you just take out the bones

00:20:54.120 --> 00:20:57.520

and then you mush them so that you can't tell that it's fish.

00:20:57.520 --> 00:20:59.120

You can taste it, of course,

00:20:59.120 --> 00:21:02.400

but there's no like fish, whole fish in there.

00:21:02.400 --> 00:21:05.080

And then you just eat it with the rice noodle

00:21:05.080 --> 00:21:06.720

and it's very soupy, it's very,

00:21:06.720 --> 00:21:10.080

but the best for the summer because of the lemongrass

00:21:10.080 --> 00:21:11.800

is just, you know, but for me,

00:21:11.800 --> 00:21:14.600

I can eat it any time of the day, any time of the year.

00:21:15.600 --> 00:21:18.120

And you eat it with lots of garnishes,

00:21:18.120 --> 00:21:21.520

like boiled egg or like crunchy,

00:21:21.520 --> 00:21:24.040

like fried beans and stuff like that.

00:21:24.040 --> 00:21:25.440

And it's the best.

Evelyn

00:21:25.440 --> 00:21:27.800

- Hmm, yeah, I can attest to that.

00:21:27.800 --> 00:21:28.840

It is the best.

00:21:28.840 --> 00:21:30.960

(laughing)

00:21:30.960 --> 00:21:34.040

Yeah, I mean, I'm getting like a lot of visual imagery

00:21:34.040 --> 00:21:35.480

as you're talking about that, you know,

00:21:35.480 --> 00:21:38.000

the shop front and you looking at your parents

00:21:38.000 --> 00:21:40.360

and then you helping chopping and all of that.

Eisan

00:21:40.360 --> 00:21:41.240

- Yeah.

Evelyn

00:21:41.240 --> 00:21:44.200

- I'm imagining that when you make that in Hong Kong,

00:21:44.200 --> 00:21:47.760

it's part of your way of being able to express

00:21:47.760 --> 00:21:50.240

your cultural identity, right?

00:21:50.240 --> 00:21:52.040

With, you know, with your friends

00:21:52.040 --> 00:21:56.360

in a totally different setting, which is very special.

Eisan

00:21:56.360 --> 00:22:00.000

- Yeah, and also with sometimes with different ingredients,

00:22:00.000 --> 00:22:03.120

because that is one thing you'll find about like

00:22:03.120 --> 00:22:06.680

being an immigrant, wanting to make your food

00:22:06.680 --> 00:22:10.640

in a different land where they have different produce.

00:22:10.640 --> 00:22:14.000

You have to be flexible, you have to be creative,

00:22:14.000 --> 00:22:15.800

you have to be adaptable.

00:22:15.800 --> 00:22:19.320

And with this dish, one of the main ingredient

00:22:19.320 --> 00:22:21.920

is the banana stem.

00:22:21.920 --> 00:22:26.800

So like we use the bark of the banana tree

00:22:26.800 --> 00:22:30.640

and we sort of like boil with the soup

00:22:30.640 --> 00:22:33.520

and you just sort of got that crunchy flavor

00:22:33.520 --> 00:22:36.720

of the banana stem in your soup as well.

00:22:36.720 --> 00:22:39.760

So like one thing Burmese love is mixing

00:22:39.760 --> 00:22:44.160

all different texture of like different ingredients.

00:22:44.160 --> 00:22:47.600

And that is one of the, you know, example of that.

00:22:47.600 --> 00:22:52.520

And I cannot find banana stem or banana tree anywhere here

00:22:52.520 --> 00:22:56.280

because we only get banana in supermarket.

00:22:56.280 --> 00:22:58.760

I mean, when I go to Lamma, I do get,

00:22:58.760 --> 00:23:01.240

I do see the banana trees, but then yeah,

00:23:01.240 --> 00:23:02.680

I can't just ask in like,

Evelyn

00:23:02.680 --> 00:23:03.520

- You should.

Eisan

00:23:03.520 --> 00:23:05.840

- Can I just get that? Maybe.

00:23:05.840 --> 00:23:10.120

So what I do is I think about what kind of ingredient

00:23:10.120 --> 00:23:15.120

can I replace instead of using banana stem

00:23:15.120 --> 00:23:20.680

and what kind of produce we have similar texture

00:23:20.680 --> 00:23:25.200

that we give like the same vibe as, you know, banana stem.

00:23:25.200 --> 00:23:27.560

And I thought of lotus root.

00:23:27.560 --> 00:23:29.080

And that's where I use these days

00:23:29.080 --> 00:23:31.360

because it got like this crunch.

00:23:31.360 --> 00:23:34.400

Banana stem and a lotus root,

00:23:34.400 --> 00:23:36.840

they just sort of like soak in different sort of flavor.

00:23:36.840 --> 00:23:38.960

They're a bit more bland, you know,

00:23:38.960 --> 00:23:42.200

bland sort of like slick and you can just sort of do it

00:23:42.200 --> 00:23:44.760

and shape it to like, you know, whatever you like.

00:23:44.760 --> 00:23:46.480

And I think that's the best.

00:23:46.480 --> 00:23:49.760

And I'm very proud of that adaptation.

00:23:49.760 --> 00:23:51.440

I think it works really well.

Evelyn

00:23:51.440 --> 00:23:53.000

- It's like a Hong Kong adaptation.

Eisan

00:23:53.000 --> 00:23:54.760

- Yeah, totally.

Evelyn

00:23:54.760 --> 00:23:56.760

- That's great. Cause I was thinking that too.

00:23:56.760 --> 00:24:00.760

How do you replace or find certain ingredients

00:24:00.760 --> 00:24:03.480

that you can't get that are very specific

00:24:03.480 --> 00:24:06.040

or very local, right?

00:24:06.040 --> 00:24:08.400

Like literally it could be from your parents' farm, right?

00:24:08.400 --> 00:24:10.840

And how can you recreate that

00:24:10.840 --> 00:24:13.080

and doing it justice as well, right?

00:24:13.080 --> 00:24:15.960

Rather than, oh, you know, not having an ingredient,

00:24:15.960 --> 00:24:19.040

you know, but to in a way not replace it,

00:24:19.040 --> 00:24:22.440

but find, you know, something else to also keep it going,

00:24:22.440 --> 00:24:23.400

which is amazing.

Eisan

00:24:23.400 --> 00:24:24.600

- Yeah, totally.

00:24:24.600 --> 00:24:27.720

Well, I would say Thai grocery shops

00:24:27.720 --> 00:24:32.440

or the South Asian grocery shops really helped me.

00:24:32.440 --> 00:24:35.120

I don't know what I'm going to do without them.

00:24:35.120 --> 00:24:39.640

Yeah, because we share a lot of similar flavors

00:24:39.640 --> 00:24:42.760

and similar sort of ingredients.

00:24:42.760 --> 00:24:45.520

So I like going to like Thai grocery shops

00:24:45.520 --> 00:24:49.000

to find, you know, the basic ingredients that I need,

00:24:49.000 --> 00:24:52.200

like the shrimp paste that I mentioned,

00:24:52.200 --> 00:24:54.320

I would not find it in Wellcome.

00:24:54.320 --> 00:24:57.760

And you just, for me, whenever I walk past a wet market,

00:24:57.760 --> 00:24:59.640

I would just keep an eye out

00:24:59.640 --> 00:25:04.640

for like any sort of produce that I'm familiar with

00:25:04.640 --> 00:25:07.120

from like my childhood.

00:25:07.120 --> 00:25:08.760

If I see it, I would just grab it.

00:25:08.760 --> 00:25:09.960

You know, I would just,

00:25:09.960 --> 00:25:11.920

I might be on my way to something else,

00:25:11.920 --> 00:25:15.200

not really, you know, for shopping, groceries or anything.

00:25:15.200 --> 00:25:17.000

I would still grab it

00:25:17.000 --> 00:25:19.600

because I don't know when I'm going to come across

00:25:19.600 --> 00:25:21.760 to
this produce.

00:25:21.760 --> 00:25:23.280

So yeah.

Evelyn

00:25:23.280 --> 00:25:26.840

- Apart from cooking as a way to fully express

00:25:26.840 --> 00:25:30.640

your sort of sense of belonging and community in Hong Kong,

00:25:30.640 --> 00:25:33.920

are there other things that you do specifically to you

00:25:33.920 --> 00:25:37.920

that is really special for you to fully express

00:25:37.920 --> 00:25:39.640

a kind of cultural identity?

Eisan

00:25:39.640 --> 00:25:44.560

- Well, another thing I like doing is I like sewing

00:25:44.560 --> 00:25:45.920

and knitting.

00:25:45.920 --> 00:25:48.760

I sew in not just so much these days,

00:25:48.760 --> 00:25:53.520

but what I like to do is I like to collect fabrics.

00:25:53.520 --> 00:25:56.560

You know, I just sort of like ask my friends

00:25:56.560 --> 00:26:01.560

to send me a few like currant fabric pieces.

00:26:01.560 --> 00:26:08.000

Like, so we wear it as sarong and like Burmese currant tops

00:26:08.000 --> 00:26:10.040

so that I can sort of wear it here

00:26:10.040 --> 00:26:12.480

and I can just sort of like sew it myself

00:26:12.480 --> 00:26:14.240

and stay ongoing the process.

00:26:14.240 --> 00:26:15.760

Like I will wear it one day,

00:26:15.760 --> 00:26:20.200

but like that's one thing that I'd like to do more

00:26:20.200 --> 00:26:25.200

and just sort of bring in these beautiful hand-woven

00:26:26.200 --> 00:26:29.920

fabrics to my life more.

00:26:29.920 --> 00:26:34.920

So I have quite a few Burmese traditional sarong these days

00:26:34.920 --> 00:26:36.560

which I can no longer wear

00:26:36.560 --> 00:26:40.200

because I've gained a few, like some weight, but it's okay.

00:26:40.200 --> 00:26:43.200

And I'm just gonna alter them so that I can, you know,

00:26:43.200 --> 00:26:44.800

just wear it all the time.

00:26:44.800 --> 00:26:48.560

And I've been thinking a lot about, you know,

00:26:48.560 --> 00:26:52.640

because in the past I can freely go home

00:26:52.640 --> 00:26:55.120

and these days it's a bit more restrictive

00:26:55.120 --> 00:26:59.080

and all I don't feel as safe anymore to go home.

00:26:59.080 --> 00:27:04.080

So I do wanna surround myself with like, you know,

00:27:04.080 --> 00:27:06.160

things that I love from home.

00:27:06.160 --> 00:27:09.960

And I do regret not getting a lot of souvenirs

00:27:09.960 --> 00:27:13.280

from back home whenever I go there.

00:27:13.280 --> 00:27:17.080

So these days, one thing I like to do is just, you know,

00:27:17.080 --> 00:27:22.080

find online, either online or like through friends

00:27:22.080 --> 00:27:24.920

who are living in Thailand, who are a bit more closer

00:27:24.920 --> 00:27:29.640

and I have more access to, you know, stuff back home.

00:27:29.640 --> 00:27:33.320

I would just be like asking them to send me stuff

00:27:33.320 --> 00:27:37.600

and collect, have a bit more of a collection of,

00:27:37.600 --> 00:27:40.440

you know, things that I, yeah, I love.

00:27:40.440 --> 00:27:45.920

Yeah, so like fabrics, because Burmese fabrics

00:27:45.920 --> 00:27:50.320

are like some of the most vibrant.

00:27:50.320 --> 00:27:51.680

If you go and visit the country,

00:27:51.680 --> 00:27:54.240

you will see people wear colors,

00:27:54.240 --> 00:27:59.240

like three or four colors every day in their outfit.

00:27:59.240 --> 00:28:04.080

A lot of women, they wear traditional clothing

00:28:04.080 --> 00:28:07.160

and I think it is amazing to see

00:28:07.160 --> 00:28:10.520

because like the surround we have like incorporate

00:28:10.520 --> 00:28:14.600

all kinds of primary colors and all kinds of bright colors

00:28:14.600 --> 00:28:16.840

and it's just so bright and vibrant.

00:28:16.840 --> 00:28:21.840

And I, one thing that I miss in Hong Kong is the colors.

00:28:22.640 --> 00:28:25.720

I like to also like collect more colors

00:28:25.720 --> 00:28:28.640

and bring that part of me here as well.

00:28:28.640 --> 00:28:32.240

So like I am known to wear a lot of bright colors

00:28:32.240 --> 00:28:34.440

within my friends, among my friends

00:28:34.440 --> 00:28:38.280

and I wanna keep it a thing.

Evelyn

00:28:38.280 --> 00:28:42.200

- To be able to fully express yourself in color and food.

00:28:42.200 --> 00:28:46.160

Yeah, sounds like, yeah, it's pretty tasty.

Eisan

00:28:46.160 --> 00:28:47.440

- Yeah. (laughing)

Evelyn

00:28:47.440 --> 00:28:50.400

- And visually stimulating. - Tasty and fun, yeah.

00:28:50.400 --> 00:28:53.400

Do you feel like you can fully express yourself in Hong Kong?

Eisan

00:28:53.400 --> 00:28:57.320

- Yes, more so I would say.

00:28:57.320 --> 00:28:59.520

That is one thing I love about Hong Kong.

00:28:59.520 --> 00:29:05.040

It's pain me to say that because I love my country

00:29:05.040 --> 00:29:09.560

and I love like the culture that I grew up in

00:29:09.560 --> 00:29:14.560

but then I feel more restricted whenever I go home

00:29:14.560 --> 00:29:18.960

because it's more, it's a very Buddhist country,

00:29:18.960 --> 00:29:22.400

very conservative and especially for woman,

00:29:22.400 --> 00:29:24.400

there are a lot more rules than,

00:29:24.400 --> 00:29:26.560

you know, it's also true for like the, you know,

00:29:26.560 --> 00:29:31.040

Western culture but like there is more so.

00:29:31.040 --> 00:29:34.040

And every time I go back home,

00:29:34.040 --> 00:29:38.040

I sort of like switch into a different personality

00:29:38.040 --> 00:29:41.720

where I'm like more, I would tone myself down

00:29:41.720 --> 00:29:45.160

and I don't wanna sort of draw attention to me

00:29:45.160 --> 00:29:48.640

because I know people are judging me

00:29:48.640 --> 00:29:50.120

just because I'm a woman

00:29:50.120 --> 00:29:54.080

and they have their preconceived idea

00:29:54.080 --> 00:29:57.320

about what a woman should look

00:29:57.320 --> 00:30:00.160

and how they should behave.

00:30:00.160 --> 00:30:04.440

And sometime I don't necessarily fit into those mold

00:30:04.440 --> 00:30:08.520

but in Hong Kong, being able to like live on my own

00:30:08.520 --> 00:30:11.160

and I feel like I can express.

00:30:11.160 --> 00:30:15.400

And I think in that way, I love my culture more

00:30:15.400 --> 00:30:17.880

because I'm at a distance, you know.

00:30:17.880 --> 00:30:22.520

At a distance, so I only sort of absorb the good thing.

00:30:22.520 --> 00:30:24.120

You know, I only bring in the good thing.

00:30:24.120 --> 00:30:26.960

If I live there, you know, of course I would always

00:30:26.960 --> 00:30:30.600

be surrounded with the good and the bad

00:30:30.600 --> 00:30:34.400

and I will always be like, you know, in conflict.

00:30:34.400 --> 00:30:37.320

But here, because I'm here, I can just sort of like

00:30:37.320 --> 00:30:40.440

take what I want and sort of make it,

00:30:40.440 --> 00:30:42.680

turn it into something that I really love

00:30:42.680 --> 00:30:46.080

and express in sort of like in a safer,

00:30:46.080 --> 00:30:49.360

like all like in a freer sort of environment.

00:30:49.360 --> 00:30:52.600

Here, I have to say I live in my bubble

00:30:52.600 --> 00:30:55.640

because I surround myself with friends

00:30:55.640 --> 00:30:59.480

who are really so open about, you know,

00:30:59.480 --> 00:31:03.880

different ideas, new ideas and different things.

00:31:03.880 --> 00:31:05.400

And that's just beautiful.

00:31:05.400 --> 00:31:10.280

And I'm very proud that I've created a space for myself.

00:31:10.280 --> 00:31:11.640

Yeah.

Evelyn

00:31:11.640 --> 00:31:14.320

- Do you see your future in Hong Kong,

00:31:14.320 --> 00:31:17.880

your new future in Hong Kong and what does that look like?

Eisan

00:31:17.880 --> 00:31:24.560

- More dinner party and more colorful clothes

00:31:24.560 --> 00:31:29.400

and more talking about Myanmar

00:31:29.400 --> 00:31:32.760

and myself and my country.

00:31:32.760 --> 00:31:39.160

I think, yes, I feel much more like home here than,

00:31:39.160 --> 00:31:43.200

because for me, there are two homes.

00:31:44.080 --> 00:31:48.400

Homes where my home, where my family is

00:31:48.400 --> 00:31:51.200

and there's home where I am, you know,

00:31:51.200 --> 00:31:54.920

where the truest version of me is.

00:31:54.920 --> 00:31:59.400

And Hong Kong is like my home because of that,

00:31:59.400 --> 00:32:02.880

where I can express myself freely,

00:32:02.880 --> 00:32:07.120

where, yeah, I feel safe, warm, cozy,

00:32:07.120 --> 00:32:09.840

you know, all of those positive thing.

00:32:09.840 --> 00:32:11.680

I mean, of course, there are like bad days

00:32:11.680 --> 00:32:14.360

where I feel, you know, not myself or whatever,

00:32:14.360 --> 00:32:17.040

but most of the time I love it here.

00:32:17.040 --> 00:32:22.040

And for now, I only see myself living here.

00:32:22.040 --> 00:32:26.400

Don't really see myself anywhere else,

00:32:26.400 --> 00:32:29.440

but I don't know, maybe in the future,

00:32:29.440 --> 00:32:34.440

I might wanna sort of live closer to my other home

00:32:34.440 --> 00:32:37.640

and maybe build a different home somewhere else.

00:32:37.640 --> 00:32:41.600

But for now, I love my dinner parties

00:32:41.600 --> 00:32:45.800

in Hong Kong and live my life boldly

00:32:45.800 --> 00:32:48.160

and bright in Hong Kong.

00:32:48.160 --> 00:32:50.680

So yeah, that's how it's gonna be,

00:32:50.680 --> 00:32:52.880

I think for a couple more years.

Evelyn

00:32:52.880 --> 00:32:57.520

- So to wrap up, can I ask,

00:32:57.520 --> 00:33:02.520

how would you describe your being in Hong Kong

00:33:02.520 --> 00:33:06.120

in three words?

Eisan

00:33:06.120 --> 00:33:09.800

- Three words?

00:33:11.000 --> 00:33:13.040

Currently I feel free

00:33:13.040 --> 00:33:23.320

and I feel grateful

00:33:23.320 --> 00:33:26.920

and I feel loved.

Evelyn_Eisan

00:33:26.920 --> 00:33:35.520

- Wow. - Yeah.

Eisan

00:33:35.520 --> 00:33:37.320

So all good things.

00:33:37.320 --> 00:33:41.680

I think I am in a good place in Hong Kong right now

00:33:41.680 --> 00:33:46.680

and I am here to absorb all this positive energy

00:33:46.680 --> 00:33:53.480

and I hope, yeah, it will be here for a long time.

00:33:53.480 --> 00:33:54.760

And I think it will.

00:33:54.760 --> 00:33:59.120

And these things has not been here always

00:33:59.120 --> 00:34:02.200

and it has only sort of like starting to,

00:34:02.200 --> 00:34:07.160

it's only started like a year or two ago

00:34:07.160 --> 00:34:10.760

and also ironically enough,

00:34:10.760 --> 00:34:14.200

like I started to feel all these things.

00:34:14.200 --> 00:34:17.760

One, my home, like my,

00:34:17.760 --> 00:34:21.160

where my family is started to sort of like crumble

00:34:21.160 --> 00:34:26.160

and this home feel much more like grounded

00:34:26.160 --> 00:34:31.960

and like this is a place that hold me close

00:34:31.960 --> 00:34:36.400

and make me feel alive

00:34:36.400 --> 00:34:38.920

and make me feel safe and warm.

00:34:38.920 --> 00:34:43.040

And yeah, so yeah,

00:34:43.040 --> 00:34:45.960

those are what I'm feeling right now, I think.

Evelyn_Eisan

00:34:45.960 --> 00:34:49.560

- Free, grateful and - Loved.

Evelyn

00:34:49.560 --> 00:34:51.800

- Loved, wow.

00:34:51.800 --> 00:34:53.360

It's perfect note to end on.

00:34:53.360 --> 00:34:54.720

Thank you so much, Ei San.

Eisan

00:34:54.720 --> 00:34:56.720

- Thank you for this, you know,

00:34:56.720 --> 00:35:00.880

letting me speak on this amazing podcast

00:35:00.880 --> 00:35:02.360

and I feel really honored

00:35:02.360 --> 00:35:05.320

and thanks for listening to my story.

00:35:05.320 --> 00:35:20.460

(upbeat music)