

EP7-Dawit_Justin Chu_Emily (Part 2)

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Emily

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Hi and welcome to Untold Hong Kong Stories,

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Multimedia Narratives from the Margins.

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This is a podcast series where we hear the stories of people in our community,

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from Hong Kong's non-Chinese locals,

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to marginalized members of our community.

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We hope that by sharing their stories,

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we can think about the way we live ours,

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and create a more inclusive and diverse society.

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I'm Emily from the Department of English Language and Literature

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of Hong Kong Baptist University.

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And our guests for today's podcast are

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Dawit, a youth worker and educator,

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focusing on social and environmental justice,

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and Justin, an MPH candidate at the University of Hong Kong,

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who is also a sex educator.

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Emily

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-And today we're going to make it much more interesting,

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even more interesting,

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when we try to look at,

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dig deeper into the question

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with a little twist of your profession as a teacher,

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and specifically teaching in Hong Kong.

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So my first question to start off this episode

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would be something relevant to what we have talked about previously.

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So if you remember, the last question that we had in the previous episode

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was actually whether you think you are a minority in Hong Kong,

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as an individual and also as a teacher.

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So now if I asked you to think about what you teach,

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again, right,

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do you think you are teaching at the margins of education?

Justin

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-I always say that we are just filling the gap.

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As an echo to a phrase that I used in the last episode.

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So I'm just filling the gap because teachers are not trained to do sex education,

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or let's just say that the current curriculum to change teachers

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in the MA program or MF program,

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or in the PGDA program,

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it's not mandatory.

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So sex-doing education is not mandatory.

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Or sex education itself usually been put into religious studies

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or even like moral studies as a way to, you know,

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like scare students off in terms of their own sexuality.

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And sometimes like these kind of like sex negative education is in fact

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quite damaging towards the sexual life or regarding the kids' life when they grow up.

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So in terms of what we do as sex educators is to fill the gap.

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Should the school let us in, then that's a good start.

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Meaning that they allowed us to, you know,

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penetrate the education system and to fill in what has been left out in,

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you know, educations where the teachers are not trained to do.

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But the thing is, like, I think that would echo my observation is that,

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like for us who do like so-called education that fill in gaps,

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usually school only allow us like one or two sessions per year,

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not just per semester, it's per year.

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And then if we go back the following year to see the same group of students,

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most of the time they already forgotten what we have taught them.

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So like the important part is that like for us educators, we've done our work.

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We have spoken to kids regarding our own issues,

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like our own like respective issues, say sex or race.

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And then teachers in their school should follow or incorporate it in,

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incorporating them into their own teaching or pedagogy whatsoever.

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So, yeah, one of the example that I use,

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especially for international school teachers is about teaching epistemology.

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So say, for example, a lot of kids ask me, where does the word come from?

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What does the word come means? I give them a epistemological answer.

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So it comes from a 1600, I think it's 1600 poem that actually describing premature ejaculation.

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So I have an entire slide talking about this. And then I'll explain that all.

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In fact, copious full is called pre-cum and then something like that going on.

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So this is human biology. Sometimes like sex, it's not a one off issue.

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It's a interconnected things that occurs in multiple disciplinary.

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That's why it is important for teachers to continue our work.

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But going back to your initial question, is that whether we are doing like margin of us

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or marginal work in filling gaps of the current education, then yes, we are doing that.

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And it is still inadequate, but we are trying our best to do our best.

Emily

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-Yes, you're the annual VIP of this group.

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But that sounds like something that is, I mean, it's difficult to sustain.

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And Dawit, do you see something similar in your work?

Dawit

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-Yeah, definitely. Definitely.

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Like we're trying to fill the gap that has been left, I guess.

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And many students do say that, why can't we learn this?

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Why haven't I known about this?

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Especially when you highlight certain things and they have no idea about it,

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but it's so important for them to know about it.

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And they are surprised that they haven't get to discover about it.

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And it's not easy to go there and change some minds, change some hearts with one class.

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But basically for what we do, for example, is like,

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especially when it comes to intercultural learning, it's done.

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It's usually good when it's done in a non-formal education,

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instead of like in a classroom setting, following curriculum.

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So it makes it easier to create that space outside of the mainstream of education,

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especially for intercultural learning.

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Of course, service learning is a bit different. It has its own pedagogy,

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but it also incorporates intercultural learning.

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So how to make it sustainable, it's not easy.

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So for working from Africa Center, usually what we do is after doing a program,

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we tend to push the students and then shed light into African literatures.

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And we make sure the students, the teachers and the school to have some African literatures.

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Why are these people denied this philosophy, this ideology,

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this rich culture and history of an entire continent and people

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also that live in different parts of the world.

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So that's what we try to do to make it a little bit sustainable.

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But usually you have to work around that margin, I guess.

Emily

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-So let's plant the seed in the margins and let it grow.

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In many ways, I think your work also actually aspire to make Hong Kong a more inclusive society

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by filling the gaps that we don't really have in mainstream education.

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In one line, perhaps, how do you understand inclusiveness?

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And yeah, that's a challenge, sorry.

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And do you see a day when Hong Kong may not need you in the margins,

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but may be able to incorporate you in the mainstream education?

Justin

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-One word, one phrase, one line.

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I think inclusivity is constantly changing.

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And then, as Dawit mentioned beforehand, would be about inclusive language.

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We use the word inclusive these days, like diversity and inclusivity.

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But this word, it's more like a chant, right?

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What does it mean by diversity and inclusivity?

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A lot of times, we don't have a legit answer to it.

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And then, for me, inclusivity, inclusivity, it's about respect.

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That is a one-liner. Inclusivity, it's about respect.

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So it is, in fact, that you respect one another.

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That's why you have, which I hate that you use those words, tolerance.

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Because the word tolerance has been used for millennials,

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regarding towards the other.

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But it is, in fact, that you have to understand the others

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in order to have such, maybe tolerance will be the first stage.

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And then, later on, goes to incorporating or to understanding the culture as a whole.

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Or to really include them into the so-called majority.

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So, if I have to put on my academic hat, then it's a sociological thing, right?

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The thing on the orthodox, it's like the majority,

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and the heterodox is the thing that is being excluded.

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But at the end of the day, the orthodox were trying to consume the heterodox into the majority.

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But the thing is, in terms of sexual education, it's still tough.

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Imagine, not imagine, if you see the current system in the US or UK,

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so many parents are going against comprehensive sex education.

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They are saying, "Oh, you are turning our kids into sexual maniacs."

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Or, "Oh, you are turning them this and that."

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Or, "You are doing political correctness this and that."

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And this has, if you are saying that, whether we one day run out of jobs, no, I don't think so.

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It's just that the fight is on and on and on.

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And then, say for example, even in Hong Kong,

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sex or sexuality education or even content has been flying in social media constantly these days.

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Our NGOs, different NGOs have been putting up content regarding sexual health or whatsoever.

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But still, of course, we have the attention, but at the end of the day, pink economy is one thing.

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People consuming our stuff for financial gain is one thing.

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Whether they are really interested in doing systemic change is another thing.

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If we are just a token for people to amp up their D&I score, then I don't think that is useful.

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But still, as I mentioned, being in the margin have their own niche market.

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So in that sense, we will run out of jobs.

Dawit

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-It's very hard to speak about inclusivity in a few words.

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There is this quote, this one trainer who used to say that if diversity is inviting everyone to the ball or to dance,

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and inclusion is when everyone is dancing, maybe I'm moving my shoulders and someone is flipping over there,

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the other one is jumping up and down.

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So it creates that environment and then everybody is feeling it and then felt comfortable enough to be included.

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And that's what kind of inclusion is.

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And then you need to do a lot of things to create that environment where everyone feels comfortable.

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Because like I said, when it's dancing, my culture, I dance with my shoulders.

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And then somebody else will be dancing with their hip.

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Another person will be jumping up and down or moving their hand.

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So everybody needs to be comfortable enough and you have to support that.

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So that might be a thing that I'm doing to say something.

Justin

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-So now I would like to add is that what inclusive according to like something that you spoke about is that it is our role to create a safe space for everybody.

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But the thing is, like this incident just happened yesterday.

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I'll tell you the story off air, but like there will always be like, you know, homophobes.

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There will always be transphobic, there will always be racist, there will always be xenophobics.

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Like those people have their own discourse.

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We are in the age of like big data and algorithms and then likes of Andrew Tate.

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Like they are trying to, you know, like return us back to the age of like those are draconian age or Jim Crow.

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If I have to quote American like racism.

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And then I mean, what we are doing, it does matter, but there is always another power to upset our fruit.

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What we have done. So, yeah, I think the constant struggle is that as long as there is political gain in both parties, like what is considered as inclusivity or it's, I think it will be being weaponized.

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Like in some sense, say people will, the word inclusivity could also turn into wokeness, for example, which has turned into a relatively derogatory phrase.

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So if we are just being nice to people, then we are being woke and we are just, we are, you know, like a bunch of weird hippies.

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Then there will always be this kind of discourse.

Dawit

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-Yeah, I think that's like, yeah, your second question was, will there be a day where you don't need this kind of education?

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I mean, we do. Yeah, it's very hard to be pessimistic as well.

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Like we've come so far. We've come, like it was not long that there was segregation in different parts of the continent.

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There was segregation, South African segregation.

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Yes, even in Hong Kong at one time there was some sort of segregation, I guess.

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And we've come so far. So that's good.

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Of course, there will be a lot of people who would resist change, who will fight change.

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That's why you need education as well. So that's, it's through that you need to bring these people into just, into creating this just society.

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So that's why I also see the power that we have.

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Slowly people are changing and the majority are actually becoming more inclusive.

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But of course, the more people become more inclusive, there will be a lot of polarization because the other people just dig their ground.

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So and try to plant their food, which is not right as well.

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So we have to use our own way to bring these people by bringing them to this direction and creating more awareness in different ways, I guess.

Emily

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-I hear you. I mean, as a person working in education and also research as well, I think what you, I echo a lot what you have talked about for these two episodes.

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It's actually the fact that there is some kind of systemic lack in the education system that kind of institutionalized certain beliefs among us.

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And what we're trying to do here is actually try to undo that, unfold that, unpack that for everyone.

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I wish someday we could all dance in that utopia that we mentioned.

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Probably I was just dancing with my fingers, but whatever.

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And the very last question, we asked this question to our guest.

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Can you try to use three words or three phrases that describe your life in Hong Kong as an individual or as an educator?

Dawit

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-I think as an individual and both, it's really hard to separate as an educator as well for me.

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I always love this quote by Maya Angelou, which is, "I'm human and nothing human is alien to me."

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So I think if we accept that we are all somehow some flaws, we're flawed a little bit, and then we can also, I think, acknowledge there is some good in those people that he was mentioning.

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And we have to see that goodness to bring them, I think, to the right direction.

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And that's why education is a good instrument in that way.

Emily

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-Thank you, Dawit. That's very inspiring. Justin?

Justin

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-It's really hard.

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I don't know. I would say the word that describes my life in Hong Kong, it's about the way of the middle, like 中庸之道 in Cantonese.

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We're just trying to, for us, for me at least, I try to mediate different powers from left and right, from different conservatism or liberalism.

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I think for me, what I wanted to do as an educator or scholar whatsoever, is to find a way that we could talk on the same table.

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I mean, if you are not okay with each other, it's fine. Come to my table, eat.

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And then, you know, let's talk about stuff. Come with one or two solutions.

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I think for me, of course, I have my own agendas regarding sex and sexuality, all this kind of stuff.

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I just want, if there is so-called truth, I just want us to get into a certain truth that is relatively more objective.

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And then just try to make everybody's life happier.

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I always tell my friends or even some of my students or even the participants from my events, I always tell them, I don't matter, you matter.

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I'm here to help you curate your own life or to change your mentality on certain things, so that when you encounter certain issues or when you are in certain issues, then you know where to seek help or what I can help you.

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So, as I said, I don't matter. Okay.

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After listening to all this kind of stuff, I don't matter. But you matter. So please, change your own surroundings.

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After listening to this, if you found us, what we have said is useful, then change your own surroundings, change your own pedagogies and change your life.

Emily

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-With that note on a beautiful utopian vision, thank you so much, Dawit and Justin, for joining us today.

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Thank you so much.

Justin

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-Thank you

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(upbeat music)