

Writing Migrant Domestic Workers of Hong Kong (English) Literature

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Abstract

In view of the rise of localism and strengthening political oppression in Hong Kong, the call for a collective Hong Kong identity is stronger than ever. However, what is Hong Kong? And what is a Hong Kong identity? While Hong Kong literature is supposed to answer these questions, Hong Kong literature itself is just as difficult to pin down, with Ping Kwan Leung even once undefining it into “unknown writing object” due to its complexities. In this research project, I would like to demonstrate how migrant domestic workers, as one of the most discriminated and marginalized groups in Hong Kong, can offer us more insights into the above questions. Arriving in Hong Kong to work since 1970s and now reaching a population of 390,000, migrant domestic workers have shouldered the caring responsibility of our city and become the backbone to our economy yet remain very much segregated with the local population due to their different cultural background and the stigma revolving their occupation and are legally barred from applying for Hong Kong’s permanent citizenship regardless of how many years they have worked here. This essay studies into how migrant domestic workers are represented as a written object in English writings by local writers over the years, as well as how migrant workers represented themselves in their personal writings. While works by Lavinia Chang, Nury Vittachi and Todd Crowell featuring migrant worker characters are included in the former part of this research, works by Ida Raihan and Arista Devi, two migrant writers, are analyzed for the latter part. Other than the two migrant writers featured, it has also been discovered that some Indonesian migrant workers have formed their own writer organization in Hong Kong and published over fifty books on their lives in Hong Kong in Indonesia. As such, given the rigid collection of texts this research considers, these tales on migrant workers in Hong Kong certainly provide insight and spark the discussion on what is Hong Kong literature and who can be Hong Kong writers.

Reflection

I still remember the overwhelming feeling of pride, achievement and relief when I finally finished this capstone project. As a friend of migrant workers and a supporter of migrant worker activism in Hong Kong, I am honored to have this opportunity to channel my political belief and my love of literature into the final project of my undergraduate studies. And I am deeply grateful for the freedom given on my choice of topic by the department and the support provided by Professor O'Sullivan along the way. In many ways, this project could only exist thanks to the education I have received from the English department for it has cultivated my empathy and critical thinking skills which then

allowed me to understand and connect with the struggles of migrant workers. In the future, I will continue to use what I have learnt in the university to walk with our migrant workers and be part of the change in Hong Kong no matter how difficult it becomes.