

## **I have a dream**

Jingan Young

Some writers draw from the personal as a gateway to the artistic, others begin by digging into current or historical events, or even neighbourhood gossip, to give architectural foundations to their story. I fall in the middle and find it impossible to separate myself from either the personal – my upbringing as a mixed-race writer in a multicultural city, the former British colony of Hong Kong – or the political, the current situation between the city and its alleged ‘motherland’ and coloniser.

As I enter the sixth year of working as a professionally paid writer, I can now admit that my overarching and inherent interest lies in the socio-political. Through my work I have strived to spotlight two challenges facing a particular community: injustice within society, and oppression under authoritarian power. The process of reconciling these two challenges through writing is what I have struggled with throughout my career. But there is another, unspoken struggle besides the writing of the story – that is to persuade my collaborators, funders and potential supporters of its merit. I’ve had far too many conversations with gatekeepers which concludes with, ‘But why should we *care*?’ As I write this, civil freedoms which existed in the sprawling, diverse metropolis of Hong Kong are being erased in what is widely acknowledged as the most brutal, unlawful and unjust manner possible. This accounts for a recent surge in interest in the

city's history and cultural output, but only up to a point. Hong Kong remains a backdrop for the native Englishman or intrepid American to journey through, as with other former colonies like Singapore or India, reducing its role to that of an 'exotic' location.

I am drawn to the complexities and contradictions of a personal-political focus precisely because it is a challenge to persuade people that these matters are as important as unsolved murders or mental health crises. Yes, the personal as political kitchen-sink drama opened up a vital but suppressed debate around traditional domesticity and the position of women in post-war Britain. Beyond Britain's borders? Not so much. What about the residual impact of Empire on people, including migrants and those who have sought asylum? This exploration continues to be neglected in British drama; and when it does put in an appearance, appears so desperately under-researched and bland that it disappears in a wave of critical negativity, leaving another form of residue – one that causes the industry to again not take 'risks' when it comes to aspects of changing, post-imperial British identity. Things *are* changing, but at a snail's pace, unless there is a global award-winning director such as Steve McQueen at the helm.

I have a dream that the story of Hong Kong, the story of other former colonies and migrant peoples, at home or abroad, will be told in greater volume and confidence and with as much veracity and urgency across all genres as can be achieved by real voices, telling stories rooted in their rich, expansive, thrilling and sometimes traumatic history.

## **Jingan Young**

Jingan writes for stage and screen. Her feature film *No 2 Daughter*, a British East and South East Asian (BESEA)-led romcom, is in development with Greenacre films. She is part of the inaugural Sky Studios Comedy/Birmingham Rep scheme, mentored by Meera Syal, and recently completed the Channel 4 Screenwriting Scheme 2021. She is also writing for CBeebies.

For over a decade, she produced new writing from BESEA writers, under the title 'Foreign Goods', with her company Pokfulam Rd Productions. Jingan spearheaded the publication of *Foreign Goods* (Oberon Books, 2018), the first collection of plays by BESEA authors in the UK, with a foreword by David Henry Hwang.

Her book *Soho on Screen*, on London's Soho will be published in May 2022 by Berghahn Books.

A recording of this talk can be found at **[writersmosaic.org.uk](http://writersmosaic.org.uk)**

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