[Intro music]

Hope St. John (HS; 00:08):

> Hello everyone, and welcome back to Write for You, the podcast from the University of Washington's Odegaard Writing & Research Center where we talk about writing and how it happens. I'm Hope, your host and disembodied writing buddy, and together with the band of fellow graduate students we'll explore the writing processes and experiences of actual graduate writers in their own words. Listen, in, as we talk about the ups, the downs, and the practices that help these writers get words on the page. Maybe you'll even find something that sounds right for you.
>
> On this episode, we'll hear from Christina and Ayda as they talk about the joys of beginnings, challenges of interdisciplinary practice, and seeking out feedback, among other things. It was such a pleasure to hear more about their perspectives and experiences and I'm excited to share this conversation with you. As with our other episodes this season, this conversation was recorded remotely from our respective dwellings, so you may hear occasional sounds of home-life filtering in in the background, as well as the odd technical glitch here and there. Now, without further ado, here are Christina and Ida:

Christina Yuen Zi Chung (CYC; 01:20):

> Hi everyone, my name is Christina, full name is Christina Yuen Zi Chung, and my pronouns are she/her, and I am a Ph.D. candidate in Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies. Specifically, I'm looking at Hong Kong's diasporas, it's visual and material culture, and analyzing all of these through a decolonial feminist lens.

Ayda Apa Pomeshikov (AAP; 01:41):

Hi everyone. My name is Ayda Apa Pomeshikov, pronouns she/her. I'm an international student, a fifth year Ph.D. candidate at UW. And my research is about faith-based humanitarian organizations in Southeastern Turkey helping Syrian refugees to find a place to resettle and feel themselves at home. And how they do it, how they produce belonging and becoming by using this Islamist narratives.

CYC (02:09):

Wow, that's really fascinating. How are you fairing under the pandemic? And what's the writing process been like for you?

AAP (02:18):

I mean, because, like, everyone has to be at home in certain hour and because people have different responsibilities and most people don't use social media that efficiently, it's really slowed down my interviewing. Apart from that, writing started very well. I was very enthusiastic in the beginning. I reviewed my data. I was like, "Yeah, I have so many things to say." But once I started, I lost the enthusiasm. I have a draft, which I don't want to work on anymore. And it's like the third time I'm going over it and it's very frustrating.

CYC (02:50):

Yeah. Gosh, yeah. That process is hard enough as it is in regular times. And then now it's like, you're trapped in a room [laughs] and you're not able to fully, you know, do your research either. So that must be super frustrating.

AAP (03:03):

Yep.

Are you writing anything right now? Are you publishing?

CYC (03:07):

Mm! So, I am supposed to be focusing a lot more on revising my thesis. I'm changing my prospectus, um, which is not a fun process. And I'm also needing to do a lot more background research on the new direction that I'm taking. So I really should be doing a lot more reading than writing, but I have found myself suddenly involved in a lot of different projects outside of school.

[Laughs]

And my advisor is currently just trying to reign me back and like, try to tell me that no is sometimes an answer that you need to give to other people. And so I am working on a few writing projects. I finished the bulk of them, thankfully, but I've got another writing project coming up with the Asian Art Museum. So, I work a lot in contemporary art, visual culture, and so I've got a video art piece that I've worked together on with a bunch of other people that is being shown at the Asian Art Museum soon and they wanted me to write about it. And the good news is that it's in line with my research. Um, I'm going to be writing a lot about diaspora and just really thinking a lot about personal reflections on my positionality now, since I am from Hong Kong and now that I live in the U.S., it's not clear when I'll be able to go home. And so that's going to be really great. I'm really excited about that. But my advisor, every time I tell her, "Oh, I've got this other thing going on!" her face gets more grim.

[Both laugh]

AAP (04:37):

But yeah, these side projects, they sound really fun.

CYC (04:41):

Yeah, no, they're super fun. Yeah.

AAP (04:42):

I can forget about my dissertation.

[Both laugh]

CYC (04:46):

Yeah.

[Laughs]

But the guilt sets in, you know, the guilt is very real. And I think as a Ph.D. student, guilt is, like, the constant companion as you're going through the program and going through the writing process. So, yeah. Maybe that's a good segue in for our first question. Um, how do you describe yourself as a writer?

AAP (05:07):

I think, I don't know how I describe myself, because I'm still experimenting. I just started working on my dissertation and before that it was all papers or proposals and, you know, the genre for that. You know there are some rules that you need to follow. So it wasn't that challenging. But now, coming up with the whole original chapter or the whole original dissertation thing is so challenging and the resources are very limited. Obviously I can't go to library, I can't even go to a cafe to work on my dissertation. So I'm experimenting with different hours, different parts of the room, on the couch, on the bed, on the table. Establishing the working habits -- you know, every day, the first thing you should be writing half an hour or one hour. I'm trying that I'm sometimes trying to write before I go to sleep because somewhat ideas come to my mind right before I fall asleep. Yeah. I'm still working on that.

And how do you describe yourself as a writer?

CYC (06:05):

Chaotic.

[Laughs].

Um, I mean, I resonate a lot with what you shared. I actually came into my Ph.D. program after working in the arts in Hong Kong for around seven years. And so I didn't come into it straight from academia. I feel like that has really shaped my writing style because it meant that I didn't necessarily conform to specific academic formats. And I think, also by virtue of my field as well, like, there's a lot of encouragement to do experimentation, to break academic form, to also challenge, as decolonial practice, how to write and what type of writing is considered scholarly. So, then when I have to return to more scholarly formats in order to be legible, it has made it much harder. And I feel like that learning curve has been really, really steep for me. And so it's been chaotic in terms of, like, the learning process hasn't necessarily been the most orthodox. And then it's chaotic also in terms of timing. [Laughs] I work best at 3:00 AM. I am incredibly nocturnal. We actually have a department-wide writing and community session that takes place every week, and every week I just feel this, again, tremendous guilt that I don't participate

because, I tell them, "I don't write in community. I only write in chaos. You don't want to be writing when I'm writing."

[Laughs]

Like, it's just bad. But I think nighttime is just the time when I feel like everything has been done and everybody's asleep and I just... I feel a lot less pressure and the words come out a lot easier. So, I think that's my style as a writer.

AAP (07:49):

Yeah. And also being an interdisciplinary program is kind of contributing to this chaos. I figured I'm reading ethnographies because I'm hanging with my informants all the time. I'm doing participant observation, everything, but I can't really write like an ethnographer because area studies, near and Middle Eastern studies, they also expect to see this cultural studies elements. I mean, at least that's how I imagine, I actually don't know what is the expectation. But yeah, [chuckles] trying to merge things on the one hand is a good thing, that you can be creative, but being creative is so scary because I just want to follow a format. And, I don't know, I feel like I'm also a chaotic writer.

[Christina chuckles]

CYC (08:31):

Yeah. I mean, I struggle a lot with that as well. I think -- I hate, you know, every single paper sounds like, "In this essay, I will..." You know? I really hate that.

[Chuckles]

And I think a lot of the feminist writers that I really admire really experimented with form and with style. And so I really want to emulate that, and yet I know that as a junior scholar, I am not in the position to really make those interventions yet. And so being in an interdisciplinary field can be really discombobulating. And I think one of the things that I've really learned is to be a chameleon and be very strategic about when you can and cannot be creative. And so I just take the opportunities when I can, and I really cherish them.

AAP (09:13):

Then let me ask you the second question. What is your writing process like? How has it changed over time?

CYC (09:21):

Um... So I really want to say that I do do the whole, like, I wake up and I write for half an hour, but I don't at all. I never used to do outlines. I used to just be like, the thoughts are running through my head. I have the whole essay sort of mapped out in my brain and then I just sit down and then I try to, you know, put it into words. But I think over time, I'm really starting to... learn the virtue of an outline.

[Laughs]

And so developing an outline, and also, like, frantically typing in notes, whenever it just sort of strikes me, popping it into a note or a Google Doc and then developing from there -- I feel like that has been the biggest change for me.

And feeling like I can integrate analysis into descriptive writing. That is also been something that I've really worked on and that has developed over time. But overall, I feel like the writing process has never been something that I really worked on until I did a feminist writing workshop with my advisor, Sasha Welland, who's super intentional about writing. And I think that really helped me understand what specific toolkits are in the writing process. And that helped me to... figure out what I needed to work on. So, that has been, like, a major developmental point.

How has it been for you?

AAP (10:48):

In the past, when I have a paper or a proposal or something, I will taking a month or a month and a half to prepare for it, but not in terms of writing. I was just preparing mentally. Reading things, taking notes here and there -- but you know, the Post-It Notes, not real notes in a Word file or something. And then, just, like, few days before the deadline, I was starting writing. With the panic of not being able to submit anything. But then I realized when I came to grad school that this won't work. If I continue like this, like, probably I won't be able to finish grad school. And right now, I kind of came to a point I am good with. I love beginnings. When I'm in the beginning of the project or idea, I'm very enthusiastic. I can open up a Word file

and put all of those things there. Like, I can just sit and write, two hours. But then when it comes to organizing it and finding a structure or, like, developing the sentences, developing the idea, finding the right empirical data... ugh, I'm not very patient. I'm like, after a few trials, I want it to be done because I'm bored the idea. I just want to submit it and move on. But, obviously, nothing is done with two, three drafts. You need to keep working on it. And that's where I lose all my energy. I feel drained. I hate coming in front of the laptop. I find all the ways to procrastinate. That's the part I'm struggling right now, but I feel like it developed over time. At least now I'm starting in advance. While I'm reading things, I'm actively using, note-taking apps. I'm reflecting on readings. Like, I'm really writing down how I think about this reading or after an interview on my way back to home, I'm taking notes on Evernote and writing, "Oh, she said this and it's very interesting. And it really aligns with this theory that I've been thinking of using for whatever chapter." But yeah, when it comes to keep working on those ideas, I'm very bad. And... I mean, hopefully in few months I will reach another level, I will be able to working on another draft, but I don't know what's going to be the next challenge, you know? I'm sure there will be other challenges.

CYC (13:01):

Yeah. I think drafts are extremely hard. I think my undergraduate experiences were all just like, "Oh, I did a great draft. I read over a few times and then just submit that all good." And then learning how to revise and, like, really radically change a lot of writing is so draining. But it's so essential to the academic process and I think that has been incredibly challenging for me, too.

CYC (13:25):

It's so hard not to lose steam, especially when you get to the end. And, like, I really love writing that has such powerful endings. Like, I feel the same exhilaration that you feel, like, with beginnings. It's great, you know, but good endings are, like, fantastic. And I feel like I'm still grasping at that. It's so hard.

AAP (13:42):

Yeah. I don't know. I wish I could have a workshop just about writing. At the moment, I feel like I haven't taken enough workshops, but...

CYC (13:53):

Yeah. I think the feminist writing workshop that my advisor put together was one of the few that really is offered as a course to work on your writing. Otherwise, I feel like most of it happens in, you know, reading groups and, you know, writing groups. Which is great, but it's not the same as having that space to really be guided through, especially by an established scholar. That's really valuable.

AAP (14:18):

And also getting feedback is so important. If you want to move to another draft, doesn't matter how long you sit in front of your own draft, without that proper feedback, you won't be able to see your own mistakes, which is kind of one of my biggest challenges in writing. I know the draft isn't perfect, but I can't really spot what needs to be rewritten or how it needs to be restructured to be submitted to a journal or something. So, I always need to feedback, because when I'm looking at my second or third draft, I'm not really able to spot my own mistakes. I really need a peer or a professor, an advisor, reading my work and commenting on it so that I can be able to rewrite some parts or change the structure. How is it for you?

CYC (15:06):

Yeah, yeah. I think over the years, I've really come to appreciate the editor-writer relationship. I've written in different capacities in the past. I used to write for a fine dining magazine [chuckles] and I've written for, you know, lots of arts publications and, like, smaller sort of non-academic settings. And I think most of those relationships have really been, "Okay, the editor just, like, needs you to get the work done. Just give me the words. And then like, we'll do what we will with it." Right? And I think coming into academia, I've started to realize that the editor-writer relationship can be really different, and it also can be really nurturing. And I've... found specific editors who I can really trust. And so those people are people who are... people that I feel particularly open to receiving feedback from. Like, it's one thing to say you want feedback, it's another to know whose feedback

you really should be cherishing and is really helpful for your work, you know? And not all feedback is helpful sometimes. Sometimes it's just like, this person just wanted to nitpick. And it's not necessarily [chuckles] gonna really help you achieve your goals with your writing. And maybe they don't even know necessarily the background that you're drawing from. And so I think with the editor relationship, one of the questions that I ask is sort of. "Where are you coming from? Like, what type of editor are you?" Some editors have a very specific mindset about what writing should look like or, like, what messaging they want to get across. And I prefer to work with somebody who will spend more time to try to figure out where I'm coming from.

AAP (16:52):

Yeah. I think at the initial phase, it's the best to get feedback from your adviser and your close peer friends, because, like, they've been witnessing your research.

[Chuckles]

They heard all the complaints and they know about your research.

[Laughs]

So, I think they give like valuable feedback in the beginning. Maybe it's not sufficient to be able to pass an editor or something, but at least, like, sufficient for you to improve your own writing and your own... work.

And also I like peer feedback because, like, it's very kind. It's not very soul-breaking.

[Laughs]

Usually, like, I feel, again, I kind of feel the enthusiasm to go back working on the work after getting feedback, because even if they are critical, they support, like, "Okay, I really like this part, but this needs to be rewritten and stuff." So yeah, I think I like friendly feedback.

CYC (17:43):

Yeah, for sure.

AAP (17:44):

But you have clearly more experienced in that field, but I like friendly feedback a lot.

CYC (17:48):

Oh, no, for sure. The harsh feedback, you know, has me waking up every night at 4:00 AM for four nights.

[Laughs]

You know, just like, "Oh no, I can't believe that person said that thing!" But yeah, I really appreciate the fact that my advisor is somebody who isn't just about tearing you down in their critique, but saying, you know, "Oh, wow. The sentence was really great." And maybe just something as simple as that can really get you going, you know? Make you really believe that like, "Oh, I'm writing something of worth here." You know? And that helps stoke the enthusiasm a little bit more. Yeah.

What experiences, commitments to audience, or scholarly orientations have influenced your approach to writing?

AAP (18:27):

I guess... In my first year I was in a Turkish circle at UW where more advanced students were sharing their article drafts or their grant applications, then we were commenting on them. Although I wasn't doing much commenting, it was nice to hear about what can be done in four or five years at graduate school. And it was very good to hear professors commenting on other people's work. And because I heard some warnings in advance, it was easier for me while writing not to repeat those same mistakes. So I kind of started prepared before I learned the genre of proposal writing, or the genre of a book review, or the genre of, uh, article drafts, by listening other people's experiences and learning from them.

What about you? What experiences helped you and influenced your approach?

CYC (19:23):

I think for me, we talk a lot in my field about making academia, scholarship, and just writing itself very accessible, and to not keep knowledge in the ivory tower, so to speak. And I remember going through what we call a 503 class, which is, uh, feminist methodologies. And actually, it ended up being a really great overview of just such a vast array of different styles of writing. And I

remember specifically Richa Nagar's work, *Muddying the Waters*, um, that book being really transformative for me. Just seeing that you can also play with format in such powerful ways, where she would juxtapose, you know, two different texts that are related to each other, but written in completely different languages and present completely different perspectives on perhaps the same event and put it side by side in the text. And that was like, "Oh wow." Like, it really opened my eyes to what you can do once you have the clout.

[Chuckles]

And it also helped me understand that not only the writing process, but the reading process can perform specific feminist interventions into how knowledge is claimed, how knowledge is presented, and how knowledge is replicated at different places. And so there's Richa Nagar's work, and then there's also another scholar, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who also does kind of a very similar thing. You know, where there's juxtaposing of texts, you know. In one of his books, there is sort of like a high theory version of this specific manifesto. And then on the other side is a sort of more grassroots style, like very accessible, but still an incredibly powerful and theoretically rich version of that manifesto. And that really opened me up to the potential of like, "Oh. Well, first of all, you don't have to write one specific way." Which is the very convoluted, like, "this is academia and this is high theory," but that you can also write in very simple, clear, accessible ways and still not necessarily reduce your ability to explain or to convey some very... complicated concepts, you know?

And so that really opened my eyes. And, even though it opened my eyes and it's still something I really am committed to as part of my discipline and my, like, values as a feminist, I struggled with it a lot, especially when I work with other people who write in the more high theory style. And it does make you feel like, "Oh, you know, am I writing something that has less intellectual rigor?" You know, and things like that. And so I still go through a lot of mental struggle and gaslighting with that, but I feel like in moments like that, what has been really helpful is just to continue to return to those texts that are sort of my guiding lights and to be like, "Oh no, like, they did this thing. I really believe in them. I think they're great. Some of these other people I admire and respect also think they're great, so there's something here. So just keep going." You know?

AAP (22:29):

Mm. Is it easy for you to keep writing accessible and clear from the jargon and theory, or is it more like you are trying to balance between, you know, the learned academic writing and now the accessible writing?

CYC (22:44):

I think I've gotten to a point in my Ph.D. program where I'm like, "Okay, I am very committed to having clearer writing." Um... So I don't know in terms of, like, how accessible it is. I definitely don't think it's jargon-free [chuckles]. There's definitely a lot of jargon 'cause, you know, you do have to signal specific things. But I am very committed to try to make myself as clear as possible. And, you know, in the beginning of my Ph.D. program, we constantly talked about how, if the theory that we're producing and the writing that we're producing, if it doesn't benefit our grandma, if they don't understand it, if undergraduates don't understand it, if people in our immediate lives are not able to understand or benefit from it, then what is the point of what we do?

AAP (23:30):

Mhm.

I mean, I'm having a similar trouble, that I'm trying to write as clear as possible and accessible as possible, but at the same time, the whole question of the research is very academic. And most of the examples out there are written in a certain way and use -- by using certain jargon. That's why it's sometimes difficult to write in simpler way that will be understandable by the general public and also by the people whom I'm conducting research with. And sometimes I'm reading and finding it not academic enough. And when I'm trying to hold onto a certain theory or a certain way, then I find it like, "This is just an academic masturbation and it doesn't mean anything to anyone." And it's very difficult to find a nice balance where you feel comfortable, but I guess this is something we will learn by experimenting with different styles.

CYC (24:20):

Yeah. I think for me, it was just like, I just know outright, I will never be able to write like Ray Chow, but maybe I can write like Shu-mei Shih. You know what I mean? Like there's specific people that I'm like, "Okay, I think I sound more like this person." You know? And if they can make it an academia, maybe I can, too, you know?

[Laughs]

So, I think it's just, for me, it's been really helpful to find specific people I can sort of latch onto and be like, "Oh, okay. This is a style that really works for me." Like, for example, Gayatri Gopinath's *Unruly Visions* -- the writing was just so beautiful and so clear and... so evocative and rich, and it's clearly a deep academic text, but it doesn't lose any of these other creative, beautifully garnished elements of writing that I really love. And so I was like, "Oh, okay. Well, if anything, let this Ph.D. program help me produce something that can look like this." You know? So...

AAP (25:20):

I love that you are so conscious about the style of the author while reading things. I think that's something I'm not paying enough attention to, but starting from now, I will also go reread the books that I love and try to understand the style of the author to be able to replicate it in my own writing. So I will do that.

CYC (25:39):

Oh, thanks.

What is one thing you found, especially challenging about writing in graduate school?

AAP (25:45):

It's definitely, as I said, it's the maintaining the enthusiasm and the good spirit and not feeling crushed. And being consistent and being able to write, like, a certain amount every week, if not every day. That's the biggest challenge for me at the graduate school.

What is one thing you found especially challenging?

CYC (26:07):

Mostly it's just the revision process. I'm really not great at that. And because I know that I'm not great at that, I purposely put myself in the feminist writing workshop class because I knew that the format was bringing one piece of writing in and you will be revising it two or three times throughout the entire quarter. And... the paper that I had at the start and the paper I had at the end was completely different. But it was the same topic. And, you know, I just completely deconstructed it and rewrote it. And it really helped me understand not only the content, a lot better, but also specifically the writing process and the style and the format and the actual mechanics of writing so, so much better. And so I see the value in it, but the process itself, just in terms of the mental and physical toll, is just so taxing. And... It's hard not to feel deflated in the process. It's hard not to question yourself. And that paper specifically was also challenging because I presented it at a conference in honor of Maria Lugones, who is an incredible pioneering decolonial feminist scholar. And one of her students was at my panel and was like, "Oh, we really love your paper. We'd love to discuss it." And I was like, "Oh, okay." I didn't realize that Maria Lugones herself was going to be discussing it with us. So, I'm on this Zoom call, there's like 10 of her students and Maria Lugones, and I'm terrified. I'm only in my second year at this point, completely out of my depth. And she was tearing my paper apart -- like not in a bad way.

[Laughs]

AAP (27:44):

Oh, good.

CYC (27:47):

Yeah. Like, in hindsight, I realized that she was being incredibly generous. But at the time, you know, when you're in your second year of your Ph.D., you don't really know what you're doing, and it just felt like, "Oh my God, I cannot field all of these questions. She must hate my writing. Like, this is terrible." And then at the very end, she just so kindly was like, "Well, once you revise it, we would love to include it in, you know, blah, blah, blah." And I was like, "So do you like this? Is this something you would like to see existing in the world?"

[Laughs]

You know? And I think that process for me was so hard. It's like, "Oh, well, when people tell you to revise something, it's not because they hate it." They just think that there is potential, they want to see it in a different form.

[Laughs]

So, that process taught me a lot.

AAP (28:33):

It's very difficult not to be overwhelmed by people in the field. They point out some, some troubles and like, it feels impossible to revise in the way that will suffice. Because you feel like you don't have the information or like -- I don't know what you think -- but it really feels overwhelming. And that's also one thing I'm trying to tell myself: That my advisors are giving me all this feedback, not to break my spirit, but actually they see a potential in the work I'm doing and they want it to be in the best possible form. And that's why they are, like, pushing so hard sometimes.

I also experienced something similar with my proposal before the prospectus defense. When we submit this proposal, they asked so many revisions and I was already in the point that I didn't want to work more on that specific thing. But now looking retrospectively, I see that every single revision they asked me to do really helped me in the field while I was conducting my research. Everything they forced me to rethink about is now useful because I came to the field prepared, thinking of all those essential questions, which didn't even occur to me while I was drafting that proposal. So yeah... Like now, like knowing that, I'm trying not to take criticism personally while submitting chapters or article drafts. But yeah, it's very difficult because when you first see all the questions, everything they want you to rethink and rewrite, it's like, "I can't do it. I really want to just dropped this paper, start a whole new project about something completely different because the beginning is going to be so good until I come to the point where I need to rethink of."

[Both laugh]

CYC (30:14):

Yeah, no, I totally hear you. I think actually, specifically the revision process for writing grant applications is the most challenging for me. I... find that just soul-destroying.

[Chuckles]

And how much they want you to encapsulate in like 500 words is unbelievable. I've never found anything more challenging than that. And then, you know, you get your rejection letter and you're like, "Great."

[Laughs]

Yeah. I want to believe that that process makes you a better writer, but most of the time, it's just like, "How will this affect my mental health?"

[Laughs]

AAP (30:52):

Yeah.

What is something that helped you become a better or more confident writer?

CYC (31:00):

Hm... I think identifying where I needed to grow. Identifying those areas and having more clarity about it and proceeding with more intent to really work on those areas really helped me. So, I think it was in my second year, I realized that I had a lot of insecurity and really struggled with descriptive writing. Like rich descriptions, I just felt like I was very lost with that. And it was one of the professors that I was working with, Kemi Adeyemi, who is also a brilliant writer and very much in a similar set of thinking about how very complex thoughts can really be written with great clarity. So we would be reading, you know, these incredible scholars in the class that I took with her. And we were, like, completely astounded by the theory, but also just completely hampered by the actual writing itself. Like, it was so hard to tease apart what they were saying. And then, as we're just sort of in awe of this person, like Professor Adeyemi would suddenly be like, "Well, this person clearly needed an editor, but they're still brilliant."

[Laughs]

And I was like, "Oh. Oh, I don't have to write this way."

And then I think at the very end, she very purposefully made the final essay also a mini conference. So it was an in-class conference. And she gave feedback not only on the presentation, but also on the actual quality of the writing. And it was just such constructive feedback. And it made me realize that, "Oh, okay. I really need to work on my descriptive writing." And I can put that right at the front, I don't need to hide it the bottom somewhere, you know, after I've proven my academic chops at the front and done all my lit review, you know, um, but you can sort of meld it in together in this way that makes it less awkward and less disjointed. And so I was like, "Oh, okay." And then after that, I just very purposely sought out opportunities to do rich description. So, I signed up for the workshop that the Kemi Adeyemi put on about writing about blackness in relation to contemporary art and just took every opportunity I could to describe artwork in detail. And just going through that process itself really just made me realize that, "Oh, okay, I can do this. Like, don't be stressed about it." And I realized that it's actually a really beautiful embodied experience of being very attentive to how you feel, what you're looking at, looking at each element. And that made me a better scholar because it directly ties in with the analysis that I do. And so that was a really generative process for me.

AAP (33:41):

Mhm.

I kind of went through something similar, actually. I was noting down how I feel when I don't want to write, or when I write something and then I feel like "This is rubbish. This should go to trash bin right away. No one should ever see this in daylight." And I've wrote down, like, why I feel in this way, all these fears of sounding non-academic, not intelligent enough, lalala, and, like, writing down my feelings really helped me to overcome. Because [chuckles] once you write these things, you kind of hear how stupid they are.

But also I kind of found TAing very helpful. Because you can observe other people's fears and then you see how they're just individual obstacles. They have nothing to do with reality. And when a student comes with a bad written first draft and then improves it over the quarter, I'm impressed. I love the person created this time to work

on it and had the patience. So it's so impressive, I realized that I shouldn't be fearful about showing my stupid drafts to my peers or my professors, because they will see I'm trying to make it better. And even the initial is terrible, by seeing the progress I make over time -- it's not like they're going to end up thinking that I'm stupid or something. So yeah, TAing really helped in that. Then I saw a lot of bad writing and at the same time I saw so many students improving their writing over time.

So yeah, being in the professor's, advisor's, shoe, or like the audience shoe, basically, is really helping to break the chains as a practicing writer, I guess.

CYC (35:18):

Yeah, yeah. That's actually a really helpful perspective. Like, there's room for growth, you know? That's a really beautiful mindset.

AAP (35:25):

And in most cases, those who write excellent work, when I ask them how they produce this, they usually took another course similar to this one. And it's the kind of work they've been working on. It's a topic, they developed an interest in. So actually, the good writers in the class, they are not, like, born Hemingway or something.

But yeah, as professors and advisors and my peers have been so patient with me, so I keep working on it.

[Chuckles]

CYC (35:51):

Yeah. That's such a generous approach to that whole process.

What is one tip or encouragement you have for other graduate writers?

AAP (36:01):

I guess forgiving yourself for the first few bad drafts. Being persistent as much as possible. Trying to sit in front of the Word page you're working on few times a week. I think it's a good start. And, mm, I guess it's better if you start being part of a writing circle in the beginning of your graduate school is going to be really helpful in the

other stages, because you're going to start hearing most advice you will hear in fifth or sixth year as early as the first and second year. And that will really, you know, save some time. And even when you do the mistake, you know, that it's natural and other students went through the same process and you're not the only one.

CYC (36:47):

I mean, I really agree with you. I think being compassionate and forgiving towards yourself is incredibly important. I don't think that that's emphasized enough in graduate school. And it's such a emotionally and mentally challenging and taxing process that we forget to attend to ourselves as emotional beings, you know? And in the writing process itself, it's also where we confront ourselves in the most, you know? It's really just you and the computer or pen and paper, you know, there's no one else. Even if you can find communal ways of doing it by joining a writing group, et cetera, but like the actual nitty gritty of it, there's only just you and it's a very solitary practice. And so, I think one of the things that I found very encouraging and that I share with others a lot is to... remember what are quote-unquote successes for you? You know, if success to you looks like writing 500 words a day, revel in it. You know, like, really cherish and say, "Hey, like, that was an achievement." And really acknowledge it as such. And then, if success to you looks like, "Hey, I wrote a really great sentence today and I love that sentence," then, like, great. You know? So, like, define what success looks like to you and find specific moments in your academic career, in your writing career, where you were like, "That was really great. I stand by it. And that was a fantastic experience. And if I'm capable of that, it means that I'm capable of it again. But I don't have to constantly be successful all the time. I am a complex human being and there are times where my writing will not be as well received or the quality wasn't as good as I wanted it to be." And so allow yourself be complex. You know, you can't be coming out with incredible pieces of writing all the time. You're not Angela Davis or Chandra Mohanty, like, you are you. You know? So, like, define those parameters for yourself.

And then I think the third thing is identifying what type of writer you are. So, if I can't be a Ray Chow, I'm going to be a Shu-mei Shih. Or

like, I don't think I can be a Shu-mei Shih, but I will [chuckles] try to be like these other writers and figure out how to get there, realizing that you can't possibly adopt every type of academic drag, so just be good at the specific types of academic drag that you are committed to doing.

AAP (39:14):

Yeah. Good advice.

I have a question.

CYC (39:21):

Yeah!

AAP (39:21):

You said you've been writing before coming to grad school, you were producing this arts commentaries, I guess? Is it commentaries? [Unintelligible]

CYC (39:30):

Well, it wasn't so much commentary. It was like smaller sort of art or culture-related publications in Hong Kong.

AAP (39:38):

Did it improve your academic writing, or is this a complete different genre that you had to leave behind and now you are in a complete different field?

CYC (39:48):

So, really it depends. So, for example, like, the farther end of the spectrum is writing for a fine dining magazine. And it's very clear, these are promotional, you want to be writing great things, you want to be as embellished as possible. You know? And that's not necessarily something that you can easily transpose into academic writing, but then when I was trying to overcome the rich description roadblock, and I was like, "Wait a minute, I've done this before." So it's like going back into your drawer and realizing, "Oh, okay. I've done this, I've got this in the bag." You know. And then just trying to flesh that out a lot more. And then, I feel like with academic writing, I

am less audience-driven, which may not be a good thing, but that's at least how I approach it. When I'm writing academic work, I'm so much more concerned about making sure that it's clear to me and that I can stand by what I wrote, that the analysis is something that I think is sound, whereas I feel like the other types of, like, more commercial style of writing is entirely audience-driven. How I feel is almost irrelevant. And then especially when it gets to the editor phase of the commercial writing, it's like, "Oh, did I even write this? You completely rewrote it."

[Chuckles]

"But it's got my name on it, so that's fine. And then as long as you're paying me, that's all right." You know? Whereas with the academic work, it's like, "Oh no, like I'm putting my name to it, then it has to be something that I can stand by." Even if it's not completely ironclad, at least I can say that, "No, I had these ideas at this point in time. And this is what I really thought and believed." You know?

AAP (41:21):

Mhm. I see.

HS (41:24):

Yeah. So, one thing that I wanted to maybe pose to you both, that might be related to this idea of navigating genre, is multi-lingual writing. And I'm wondering if there's anything that you want to talk about there with respect to your experiences as multi-lingual writers?

AAP (41:44):

Mm.

I mean, I started with a lot of inconfidence, because English is not my native language, but then after hearing experiences of other graduate students or even more established scholars in my field, I kind of understood that they also have all this inconfidence in writing. They are not able to have this perfect sentence in one trial. That's why now I have, like, a bit more confidence in my English writing, I guess. And when I don't know, I know that I can go seek help. Like everyone is working with this professional editing services for people who want to publish something. And that's perfectly normal. I mean, all journals are advising to do it, not only for non-

native speakers, but also for native speakers. So I think I feel a bit better [laughs] about that right now. And about my native language, Turkish, when I'm a bit more established in my field, I want to go over my research and take it from the whole other aspects and rewrite at least one small piece and publish it in Turkish journal where other people can read about it. Because I really think that this research can produce one book for American audience. And then whole other book for a Turkish audience. Yeah. So I definitely one day want to be able to publish in Turkish, too.

CYC (43:09):

Yeah. I think for me, most of my writing career, and especially academic scholarship, has all been done in English. And so it's actually been really hard for me to switch back to Chinese. And the prospects of writing an entire academic paper in Chinese is absolutely terrifying to me.

[Laughs]

And I know that I'm ill-equipped to do that. And so every time I've had to sort of present something in Hong Kong or to a Hong Kong audience, I always preface it with the giant apology at the beginning saying that, you know, I'm really sorry that I can't be presenting this entirely in Chinese. But then, actually the last presentation I did, I actually managed to do the Q and A, like, a lot of it in Chinese. And what it really opened my eyes to was that having access to different languages basically enlarges my conceptual toolbox. You know, there's so many things that are not translatable. And, and I know that it's a specific type of feminist intervention to not translate something. Like Gloria Anzaldúa just does it so beautifully in her work. And is somebody that I really admire and want to emulate. And there's so many ways in which she's so clever with language and forces you to trip over words. And I'm, I'm also thinking of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, who wrote *Dicteé*. And it's written with the intention of getting you to trip over language. To show you how, like, fractured experience of colonialism is, through a Korean lens. And so... those are things that I would love to sort of bring into my scholarship. And those are things that I really want to do. But at the same time, I don't know if I'm there yet in terms of my academic language and like thinking in different languages. So... it's like I have, like, a more well

exercised side of myself and then the less exercise one, but I definitely want to bring these different worlds together.

And then there are times where I'm like, "There's no adequate word for this in English." And I have to bring in a specific word. And then, through my writing process, try to unpack that word in specific ways and mobilize it. But in moments like that, I wonder if I'm performing a type of betrayal as well, where I'm trying to beckon to a Western audience too much. So yeah, those are thoughts that sort of ping-pong through my mind as I work through things, like, on a multi-lingual basis.

It was also really interesting because the last thing that I published was the first thing that I've worked directly with the translator to translate it into Chinese. And... there were certain passages that were so completely different in the Chinese. And I was like, "Oh no." And I felt also like really awkward trying to tell them that like, "Oh, this is not exactly, like, faithful to what I was trying to express in English." And then I started doubting myself questioning, "Oh, maybe I wasn't clear enough..." So, there are a lot of things in that process of working with a translator, who's not yourself, [chuckles] that just complicates matters so much more.

But I think those were really generative experiences. It's just more... new for me to traverse. Like, I just don't think of myself as a scholar that writes in Chinese. But in a sense, just based off of what I write about and how I present myself to the world, I am put in a position where I have to be. So, it's definitely time for me to really think more about what does it mean for me to be a Chinese language scholar?

AAP (46:42):

Hm.

AAP (46:42):

I actually have one comment about that: I pleasantly surprised when I came to Turkey for my field research in 2019. Because of the massive amount of refugees right now, like, going through Turkey or like staying here or whatever -- not just Syrians, but also Iraqis Afghans, and a lot of people from South Asia and Middle East -- the migration studies field developed so much. And that in the presentations in Turkish I attend from, like, local academicians who

are in Turkish universities, many terms that I haven't heard of Turkish before, were translated in very good way. Like, it really reflects on the idea behind the term and also something that you can really use in Turkish. And I thought, "Wow! So good. This is very good scholarship." Being able to translate these critical terms, such as "genealogy" or, like, "agency," which we use a lot in American academia, it wasn't really, I think, well translated before, but now scholars do that and I kind of realized the importance of doing that. Also, like, carrying, translating this knowledge in your narrative so that it could be discussable in, um [chuckles], semi-academic, semi-public public projects.

CYC (47:57):

Awesome. That's really great to hear.

[Brief musical interlude]

HS (48:03):

And there you have it. Thanks for listening to this episode of Write for You and a big thanks again to both of our guests. On behalf of the Odegaard Writing & Research Center, I hope this has been informative, affirming, and maybe even inspiring. If you want to learn more about the OWRC, its programs, or services available to University of Washington students, faculty and staff, you can find us online at depts.washington.edu/owrc.

[Brief musical interlude]

HS (48:35):

Looking for more Write for You? Check out the rest of season two, out now, or listen back to our fabulous guests from the first season for more conversations about writing experience, process and practice. In the meantime, for myself and all of us at the OWRC, happy writing.

[Brief musical interlude]

HS (49:02):

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[Outro music]