



**Indonesian migrant workers take part in a creative dance and movement workshop in Hong Kong.**  
© Asian Migrants' Theatre Company, 2000

Asian People's Theatre Festival Society  
c/o 15A Block 2, Parkview Garden  
8 Pik Tin Street, Taiwai, Hong Kong  
Telephone: (852) 9800-7169  
Fax: (852) 2601-4897  
E-mail: hkaptfs@netvigator.com

**Mok Chiu Yu** is Executive Secretary of the Arts with the Disabled Association Hong Kong and a veteran popular theater activist with the Asian People's Theatre Festival Society. His personal story is one of activism leading to theater, as he related to fellow participants in the online dialogue preceding this publication:

*I was born and bred up in Hong Kong and attended university in Australia. I was a student radical in the '60s ... at the University of Adelaide. I got involved in the peace movement of the '60s in Australia and the aboriginal land rights movement, etc. On my return to Hong Kong I became involved with the youth movement here in the '70s, and I was involved in publishing an alternative youth paper called '70s Biweekly, which had a readership of more than 10,000. Hong Kong was then a British colony — we, the youth movement, were critical of British colonial rule and the capitalist system, which we saw as exploitative, alienating, turning people one-dimensional, etc.,*

*etc. That made us attracted to socialist ideas. We were to split, not unlike the radical youth movement everywhere else in the world, with some believing in the Beijing Maoist propaganda hook, line and sinker, some turning to Marxism–Leninism, libertarian socialism, liberal democrats, etc. I was more a libertarian socialist, being influenced by ex–Red Guards (the whole nation of Chinese youths were Red Guards) who fled to Hong Kong. They believed that China was ruled by authoritarian bureaucrats and Mao was the biggest bureaucrat of them all. My political stance has since been anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-bureaucrats, identifying myself with movements fighting against imperialist control and domination in the underdeveloped countries.*

In this essay, he describes both transnational collaborations of Asian popular theater workers and a series of projects aimed at creating theater with a group that is a particular target—and some would say, casualty—of globalization: migrant workers in Hong Kong. His encompassing vision suggests a different type of globalization, the expansion of community cultural development projects beyond national boundaries, creating common cause where social trends have sown fragmentation.

The author would like to acknowledge the substantial and valuable assistance of Charito de la Cruz in preparing this article.

# Theater, Migrant Workers and Globalization

THE HONG KONG EXPERIENCE

by Mok Chiu Yu

**B**orn and schooled in Hong Kong, I always felt the oppressiveness of the British colonial education system: studying all subjects in English (with the exception of Chinese language in high school) and having to sing “God Save the Queen” at school assemblies. But I was radicalized at university. My parents, being part of the lower middle class, slaved to send me to Adelaide, Australia, to further my education. There I began my activist involvement in various causes: demonstrating in the streets in opposition to the Vietnam War, to the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, support for the Aboriginal land rights movement.

When I left Australia in the late '60s to return home with an economics degree, I joked to my Australian friends that I was going home to fight against British colonialism and all the evils of Hong Kong society. Sure enough, soon after I returned to Hong Kong, I became part of a youth movement that tried to articulate an alternative to the colonial, undemocratic and exploitative system; we also saw ourselves as internationalists and our fight as linked to the radical youth movements of the rest of the world. We published alternative papers and held political rallies and demonstrations. While some of us experimented with filmmaking, theater and other artistic media, I was more a “politico.” The movement in Hong Kong really lacked a cultural or artistic dimension.

I did not get involved in theater and music until the late '70s, after an encounter with Julian Beck and Judith Malina of the Living Theatre, in Milan to perform "Seven Meditations on Political Sado-Masochism." I was on a European speaking tour in support of the Chinese Democracy Wall movement. I was inspired by the Living Theatre; so when I returned home, with like-minded comrades, I created the Hong Kong People's Theatre group. We began doing street theater and theater in the communities. Our models were Western theater groups including the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Bread and Puppet Theater.

While we called ourselves a people's theater, we did not grasp that a real people's theater entails people doing their own theater to articulate their own voices. It was when we came to know groups like the Black Tent Theater of Tokyo and the Philippine Education Theater Association (PETA) that we discovered the methodologies that offered systematic participatory training to unleash tremendous creative power to make theater, to "voice out." These encounters led us to a network of people's theater groups in Asia (and subsequently in the Pacific region and beyond). We believed we could learn from one another and share our common concerns politically, socially and aesthetically. Cross-cultural collaborations would be our search for artistic excellence, for a theater which is Asian, and a way to manifest our commitment to common goals for a better Asia, a better world.

As the pace of globalization gallops, countervailing international exchange activities have become even more meaningful, although local community cultural development continues to be a prime task for any concerned artist. But alas, in the present global system, the local and the global are so tightly linked, as is easily understood by examining the case of migrant workers, as I do in the latter part of this essay.

Over the last two decades, I have come to understand the power of culture to effect social and individual transformation. One of the clearest impacts of globalization has been the perpetual migration of workers from impoverished countries to rich ones, a never-ending search for livelihood under conditions that barely acknowledge migrants' humanity—let alone their rich cultural heritages and the contributions they might make to people's empowerment and cross-cultural understanding. In this essay, I describe several projects of the Hong Kong-based Asian People's Theatre Festival Society (APTFS) that show how cross-cultural and local/migrant cultural collaborations might help build the basis for a strong and deep anti-globalization movement.

## GLOBALIZATION: STAGE 1

[In 1405 A.D.] Cheng Ho led his great fleet and sailed across the seas. In 27 years, they visited South and Southeast Asia, the Arab lands and East Africa. Cheng Ho simply represented the Chinese Emperor to go and declare nominal sovereignty of these places. No economic interests. And when Cheng Ho's fleet no longer roamed the seven seas, four little ships led by Vasco Da Gama began the great exploration and exploitation which was to follow. Looking for spices and riches, the Western nations fought to be the master of the oceans.

—FROM “MACAU 123,” A PLAY ON THE STORIES OF THE  
CHINESE, PORTUGUESE AND MACANESE IN MACAU

### **Asian People's Theater Workers Unite Against Globalization**

The plays quoted above and between major sections of this essay were produced in 1999, 1997 and 1994–95 by the Asian People's Theatre Festival Society, founded in the early '90s and based in Hong Kong. The APTFS is a group of Chinese people's theater activists whose concern with global exploitation and inequalities has propelled them into cross-cultural collaborations with people's theater workers in other parts of Asia. These collaborative theater productions have invariably toured a number of Asian cities: “Big Wind,” for example, was rehearsed in Patan, Nepal, premiered in Bhubaneswar, India, and then moved on to Calcutta, Dhaka in Bangladesh, Kathmandu in Nepal, Bangkok in Thailand, Hong Kong and Taipei and Xingang in Taiwan. Casts are always multinational, and the plays take as their themes issues of common concern to the participants.

Many of these productions have touched on issues of migration, migrant workers and other topics related to globalization. “Big Wind” is about the plight of workers who migrate from South and Southeast Asia to Hong Kong and the international movement of capital. “Yours Most Obediently” deals with Indian migration to Hong Kong; “I Came From the Himalayas” is the story of the Nepali Gurkhas; “Hairy Monkeys at Chung King Mansion” reveals the lives of the Pakistani migrants in Hong Kong; “Black Sky” tells the stories of South Asian migrants in Hong Kong, Taipei and Tokyo; and “Macau 123” is about Portuguese migrants to the Orient. (Only one collaboration—“A Tale of Two Cities: Beijing 1989/Dhaka 1990”—was an exception, focusing on the democracy movements in China and Bangladesh.)

Other groups have staged international and cross-cultural exchanges during the past decade, such as the series “Cry of Asia 1, 2, 3, 4” staged by the Philippines-based Asian Council for People's Culture; and many binational and multinational theater projects by Taiwan's Assignment Theatre, collaborating with groups like Kaliwat from Mindanao, PETA from Manila and Japanese artists including Nakayama and Sakura Daizo. Taken together, I see them as a collaborative effort by people's theater workers to raise a collective voice against the onslaught of globalization, asserting the commonly held

principle “people before profits.” In carrying out these projects, the participating groups have also sought to establish links, to network, to support one another, to learn from one another and to explore the aesthetics of an Asian people’s theater.

To what extent are these multinational theater projects effective in combating globalization? Obviously, we cannot depend on one piece of theater to change the world. But as part of a wider movement, we see such international theater activities as meaningful responses to the globalization process. Through our practice over the past decade, it is evident that such multinational collaborations are fruitful and should be continued.

The cross-cultural product arising from the interaction of artists well-versed in traditional and contemporary performing arts skills has been an antidote to the Western popular culture which has otherwise begun to dominate the leisure and recreational life of Asian urbanites. The fusion of traditional and folk gestural vocabularies from different parts of Asia has generated visually and aesthetically exciting forms and movements. Each multicultural encounter creates a theater product that is uniquely Asian. The themes of our performances are critiques of what is and portrayals of what ought to be, asserting our opposition to something that we clearly cannot want. Such theater pieces can also be regarded as rehearsals for change and for life. Through them, people—including the participants—are informed, educated and empowered. They may spark action beyond the theater.

There is value in both the actual performance and the process of creation, which can be a confrontation of conscience, fraternal dialogue, exchange of skills, mutual learning opportunity and a means to collective strength and creativity. To realize this full potential requires sufficient resources; good translation and interpretation as well as effective communication; democratic decision-making processes; and participants who are mature, selfless, tolerant, excellent artists and highly politically aware. Some projects have failed or functioned merely as artistic experiments because some of these conditions were not met.

With respect to audiences, different people respond and participate differently. When we play to those who are already aware of what the movement against globalization is all about, we generate solidarity. To others, we represent a challenge, an alternative view, an alternative source of information, even an inspiration or enlightenment. Ideally, we should be able to engage our audiences emotionally, aesthetically and intellectually: this is what makes a good performance. We cannot necessarily change the way people think or behave by a single act of performance, but a performance can be so bad that the audience disengages. In the end, to judge success we must ask each audience if our performances are empowering.

## GLOBALIZATION: STAGE 2

*Chorus:* Who are they?  
People, Indian people.  
People who have come over as soldiers.  
People who have come over as policemen.  
People who have come over as businessmen.

*Chorus:* And the deprived wretches who have come over as domestic helpers.  
The famous divide-and-rule policy for governing Hong Kong.  
An Indian army and an Indian police force.  
You don't have to fear.  
An Indian army and an Indian police force.  
They were the ones entrusted with guns. The right to kill people.  
Some Chinese were also recruited as cops. They got swords.  
The very sight of the strong bearded young men from Punjab drives people  
inside in terror.  
The terror exists till today. Bearded Indians are terrible men.  
Stay away from them. Stay away!

I hate Indians.  
Why?

1899, just a year after the lease treaty for the New Territories had been signed.  
The British mobilized Indian soldiers to suppress the resistance in the  
New Territories.  
But it wasn't that easy. The fire of resistance was burning. Tai Po, Yuen Long,  
Kam Tin. The people were transformed in the corpses.  
Hey Indian, kill him.  
But why? Why do I have to kill him for no reason?  
Because your job is to obey me. That's why you're paid.  
But he also has a family. Dependent parents. And familial responsibilities.

—FROM “YOURS MOST OBEDIENTLY,” A PLAY ON THE STORIES  
OF INDIAN MIGRATION TO HONG KONG, 1841–1997

### **Migrant Workers and People's Theater**

While many of the collaborations discussed above dealt with globalization and migrant issues, the direct participants were people's theater artists. Migrant workers (for example, those in Hong Kong or Taipei) were involved only as sources of information and stories and as audience members. At most, they were invited to participate in workshops facilitated by visiting artists.

In the year 2000, APTFS members realized they had long overlooked the potential of migrant workers in Hong Kong to be collaborators, both as artists and partners in the fight against globalization. So when the APTFS prepared

its next project—a major new outdoor production with giant puppetry, “The Bursting of the Asian Economic Bubbles”—the participation of migrant groups was invited. The production was about globalization, the World Trade Organization, cultural imperialism, the information-technology revolution, poverty and migration. The migrant groups responded positively, in part because some of them had prior experience initiating cultural projects, including the organization of the First Migrant Cultural Festival in December 1999. The result was a first-ever cross-cultural collaboration where migrant workers and local artists performed together, expressing their common concerns. The play toured in Macao and Hong Kong to enthusiastic applause. After each performance, there was interaction with the mixed audience of migrants and locals, who were highly appreciative of the migrants’ performances and receptive to the migrants who spoke, understanding their accounts of exploitation and discrimination.

Migration has always been a global phenomenon. But it has accelerated rapidly as a result of the globalization process, spurred by improvements in transport and information technology and increasing disparities between rich and poor on the national and international levels. Globalization of the international economy has limited the ability of the poor to earn decent livelihoods. As a result, the movement of people from the Third World to rich regions has grown continuously, as migrants move to find jobs as domestic helpers, construction workers, factory workers or in the entertainment industry—generally those that have been called “3-D jobs”: dangerous, dirty and demeaning.

The number of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong has increased exponentially, from just a few hundred in the 1970s to well over 100,000 in the early 1990s. Filipinas have been joined by Thais, Indonesians, Sri Lankans, Indians and Nepalis. By December 1995, the total of 150,000 included 130,000 workers from the Philippines. As of 1999, Asian migrant workers in Hong Kong totaled 218,100, mostly women: Filipinas numbered 147,400, followed by Indonesians at 46,000, Nepalese at 18,700 and Thais at 6,000. The rest—such as Sri Lankans, Indians, Pakistanis and the Bangladeshis—are estimated at not less than a thousand each.<sup>1</sup>

These thousands of migrant workers find themselves in harsh conditions, performing 3-D jobs and subject to many forms of exploitation. Indeed, they set off from their places of origin owing large sums to employment agencies in addition to other fees levied by their own government bureaucracies. While they are sometimes seen as taking jobs away from local workers, migrants and local workers have common interests in the universalization of workers’ rights, one of the goals of the anti-globalization movement. Indeed, it is impossible to conceive of an effective anti-globalization movement that does not include migrant workers.

The collaboration between the APTFS and migrant workers in “The Bursting

<sup>1</sup>Statistics from Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong* (Cornell University Press, 1997), xiii; and *Annual Report for Year 1999*, Asian Migrant Centre and Migrant Forum in Asia (Hong Kong); see [www.migrantnet.pair.com/publications.html](http://www.migrantnet.pair.com/publications.html).





The author (left) and a Bangladeshi people's theater worker provide sound and musical accompaniment to the performance of "The Bursting of the Asian Economic Bubbles."  
© Asian People's Theatre Festival Society, 2000.

of the Asian Economic Bubbles" led to a yearlong Theatre with Migrants Project that took us far beyond this first play. Working with local migrant organizations such as the Asian Migrant Centre, the Coalition of Migrants' Rights and other migrant workers' organizations involved in cultural activities, the APTFS offered workshops that led to staging a series of open-air performance activities. In fact, the migrant workers' cultural movement had already begun on its own, so the collaboration with the APTFS and local supporters gave impetus to its further development.

The outdoor performances drew large audiences, ranging from several hundred to thousands. Performances usually lasted from midday to 6 or 7 p.m., featuring nonstop songs, music, theater, poetry and dances, ranging from the traditional to the modern and popular, and from individual ethnic groups (including the local Chinese) to cross-cultural efforts. They included the Workers' Bazaar on November 5, 2000; the campaign to Say No to Violence Against Women on November 26, 2000; the second Migrants Cultural Festival on December 17, 2000; an International Women's Day event on March 11, 2001; an International Labor Day performance on May 1, 2001; and Kartini Day on May 27, 2001. The grand finale for the 2000-01 program took place on July 29: the Filipino Migrants' Colors event was preceded by a cultural parade with slogans such as "Globalization Condemns Workers to Poverty."

In retrospect, this one-year collaboration with migrant workers achieved a great deal:

- An Asian Migrants' Theatre Company comprising domestic helpers from

different countries has been formed and can be relied upon to devise showcases and performances for migrants' gatherings and campaigns.

- The migrant workers' movement in Hong Kong has become stronger and has significant cultural content. It is recognized that the empowerment of migrant workers is not just labor organizing, but also a cultural project with theater, songs, dances, poetry and so on. Groups are now eager to participate in cultural activities, with many specifically interested in theater. Given time and resources, other theater groups may be formed within different ethnic groups or organizations. In fact, the Asian Migrants' Theatre Company has since assisted the Mindanao Federation to form a theater group called Sining Mindanao Ensemble.
- Artistically, various ethnic groups have been contemporizing their traditional and folk performances to make them relevant to the issues of the day. For example, Indonesian migrants skillfully adapted a piece of traditional Indonesian monkey dance to tell their stories. In this allegorical play, the White Monkey was the oppressor and the brown monkeys stood for the people. The simple story of the brown monkeys organizing to end the White Monkey's years of exploitation was done with great artistry, with dance and movement extremely well executed and meticulous care given to costumes, makeup and props.
- With cultural diversity and cooperation being continuously promoted and affirmed, the project has helped strengthen migrant workers' cultural identity and pride without giving rise to narrow-minded nationalism. In fact, the partnership between migrant workers and local performers encouraged everyone to come up with their best in a spirit of solidarity. The project helped to strengthen the various ethnic workers' organizations: for example, the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union was able to stage a daylong event attracting 6,000 migrant workers, leading the Indonesian Consulate in Hong Kong to decide it is a force to be reckoned with. These experiences contributed greatly to growing solidarity among different ethnic migrant groups, and eventually to the creation of the Coalition of Migrant Rights.
- The project created such effective showcases for the rich cultural contributions of the migrant workers' movement in Hong Kong that it set a good example for Hong Kong's own workers' movement, which has never been very strong in the cultural dimension. It appears the project also paved way for the coming closer of the two movements.
- Similarly, in showcasing the diversity and excellence of migrant cultures in Hong Kong, the project enriched the local arts scene. The innovations of encouraging migrants' arts work and the full participation of the

Asian migrants' community in the development of Hong Kong's theater arts has been a breakthrough for both the locals and the migrants.

We hope that both the Asian Migrants' Theatre Company and the larger collaborative project with migrant workers can serve as models for other migrant communities around the world, helping to empower both migrants and local workers through the arts.

### GLOBALIZATION: STAGE 3

*Menan:* Stop—it hurts!

*Babul:* We better get him to the hospital!

*Ashesh:* No—he's overstayed! If we go to the hospital, they'll catch him and deport him. Take him back to Chungking Mansions, ninth floor.

*Migrant exits with Menan. Babul and Ashesh start back to work.*

*Two Hong Kong workers enter with signs: "Against wage cuts."*

*H. K. Worker 1:* Get out, Ah-cha! You're cutting wages! You put us out of our jobs!

*Babul:* Look, brothers—we're just trying to get two good meals! You ever hear the saying, "Hand stops, mouth stops"?

*Dance:* They fight.

*Factory Owner enters:* Stop interfering with my workers! You don't work here anymore—get out or I'll call the police.

*H. K. Worker 2:* My whole family's waiting for their meals! You ever hear the saying, "Hand stops, mouth stops"?

*Shouts of "Go home!" They shove them.*

*Factory Owner, going:* OK, hurry up, get back to work. Oh, I almost forgot—from now on, 4 dollars an hour instead of 5.

*He exits.*

*Babul & Ashesh (singing):*

They love us here in Hong Kong.

They give us the easy jobs.

They house us like pashas,

And they welcome us like kings.

They wish we were invisible.

They call us "hairy monkeys."

They wish we'd go away, but

Their city would fall down.

*Workers groan, follow him off.*



Some of the 40 migrant workers performing in a production of “The Bursting of the Asian Economic Bubbles” in Macau. © Asian People’s Theatre Festival Society, 2000.

—FROM SCENE 4 OF “BIG WIND,” A PLAY ABOUT MIGRANT WORKERS AND THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT OF CAPITAL

*Father:* Friends, now my eldest son, Ah Keung, has two garment factories in California, America! And my second son has a handbag factory in Holland. And my daughter, the youngest, has just gone to New Zealand! Or wait . . . I think somebody’s in Sri Lanka . . . is that Ah Wah? . . . Then Elizabeth must be in Australia . . . oh, no, where is Elizabeth?

*Freeze.*

*Music.* All sway as if in the wind.

*Dance again, they are all blown offstage.*

—FROM THE EPILOGUE OF “BIG WIND”

### **Workshops as Means of Empowerment**

It should be stressed that the Theatre with Migrants Project included not only performances but also workshops that took place before most of the performances. While performances have positive and empowering effects, workshops are more effective means of bringing about empowerment, an educational process aimed at enhancing the individual’s power, both in interpersonal relationships and politically. Empowerment enables the individual, family or social group to take action to change their own situation, building self-esteem through realization of one’s abilities, learning and improvement of various skills such as communication, expanding political consciousness and social and political participation, imparting knowledge about rights and social responsibilities and so on.

Asian people’s theater workers believe in theater by the people—that the

people should be vested with the means to produce theater, speaking out for themselves. Through workshops, participants are helped to unleash their creative potential, mobilizing their artistic skills, sharing ideas, information and analysis of the conditions in which they find themselves, experiencing a process of artistic creation and becoming confident in using cultural means to articulate their demands and aspirations in a spirit of unity and solidarity. Our Migrants Project experience and its predecessors have demonstrated that workshops, properly facilitated, are very effective means of empowerment.

One of the chief organizer–coordinators of the Theatre with Migrants Project, Charito de la Cruz, herself a Filipina, described the workshops offered as part of the project:

The workshops were carried out successfully as the training season ended in December 2000. In all the workshops (with different focus for each one), Nepalese, Indonesians, Filipinos, Thais and Indians and the locals shared their stories and explored artistic forms already known to them or learned new skills. The result was different highly impressive showcases. The pieces took the form of poems, short skits, allegorical plays, creative dance and creative movements. The performers had reviewed their own lives, and their performances gave an insider's view to the nonmigrants about migration. The showcases were performed during various migrants' campaign activities for the year and were also included in its performance season.

The workshops organized have established a special kind of relationship between the migrants and the local workers. The migrants were led to appreciate their own individuality and their group capability, and they were encouraged to be creative and to become aware of the opportunity to be part of a cultural movement no matter how far they are from their homeland. As for the local Chinese people—artists and workers—the workshops allowed them to understand more deeply the situations of the migrants and the diversity of culture, and they were happily involved in the highly creative and artistic theater processes jointly with the migrants.

The Thai Women's Association chose creative dance and movement to focus its showcase, centering on the following story, which served as a guiding script:

Thailand is one of only two Asian countries never colonized. The peace-loving Thai people worked in vast agricultural lands. Ironically, the process of modernization and industrialization which promised to provide employment and abundance left many in dire poverty, prompting them to leave their homes in search of greener pastures abroad.

Migration became a lucrative business not only for the government but also for the scheming migrant employment and transport agencies. Migrants and their families faced all forms of exploitation, abuse, discrimination, including sexual trafficking in innocent young women. But this does not stop them from rising above the situation. Thai migrants organize themselves, providing

education on migrants rights, human rights and the struggle against oppression faced by many migrants. They work in solidarity with other Asian migrants and local workers in Hong Kong.

The Indonesian Migrant Women Workers' Union based its showcase on a semi-allegorical/realistic drama treating the following story in a fashion inspired by the common folkloric tale mentioned above, in which brown monkeys struggle against a powerful White Monkey oppressor:

Indonesians back home faced various crises, from economic to political to social. The play presents the many difficult situations faced by Indonesian migrant workers the world over: highly repressive conditions in Saudi Arabia; undocumented workers in Singapore and Malaysia who are sent back in boats; and abuses in Hong Kong where many Indonesian domestic workers run away from the cruelties of their employers.

The Filipina group centered its showcase on poetry in motion, using this text:

Migrant, woman sand worker,  
Are you really as lucky?  
You are intelligent and open-minded,  
But you toiled all day and night  
While you face a lot of difficulties  
And uncertainties in life.  
Migrant, wife, mother,  
You are a source of life  
To that fetus in your womb.  
You are the light at every home,  
Yet you need to leave your beloved family behind.  
To keep them together sand gives them a better future.  
Migrant, woman, heroine,  
Are you worth billions of dollars?  
Slapped with a thousand deaths,  
Chained for decades to poverty and exploitation?  
Because the rotten system of  
your society will forever chain you!  
Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!  
Migrant, woman, dignified,  
Stand up and unite.  
Fight for your rights,  
For justice and equality.  
Migrant, woman, onwards!  
To international freedom and democracy!  
Long live the migrants!  
Long live the workers!  
Long live women!

These workshops were facilitated by Filipino and local artists who used the Basic Integrated Theatre Arts Workshop (BITAW) methodology developed by PETA, incorporating creative dance and movement, creative sound and music, visual art and creative writing. It is widely used by Filipino cultural workers and has been adopted by many people's theater workers throughout Asia. The BITAW process stresses orientation, artistry and organization through systematic use of various art forms and group dynamics so as to promote collective creative expression and group solidarity. Modules vary depending on the art form used, the type of participants and the focal issues. Integrated into the BITAW methodology are elements from the theory and practice of Viola Spolin, Augusto Boal, Rudolf Laban and others.

We have found BITAW a very effective methodology, but many others are useful in promoting empowerment, for example, Theater of the Oppressed as developed by Augusto Boal, playback theater as developed by Jonathan Fox, giant puppetry developed by Bread & Puppet Theater, playbuilding, process drama and other methods and techniques derived from drama-in-education, psychodrama and other therapies. We've found that the best approach is eclectic, depending on the circumstances, objectives, characteristics and needs of the participants. We ought constantly to update and improve our skills in facilitating workshops, clinging to one basic principle: if our workshops and activities are to empower and not to disempower, to educate and not to miseducate, they ought to provide a participatory and democratic mode of learning, neither authoritarian, one-way or top-down.

The aim of this type of training is to help participants develop, not do the work for them. The facilitator is to encourage a learning process neither rote nor spoon-fed but evocative. The process should be flexible. In participatory modes of learning, participants develop self-confidence, improve self-esteem and deepen their self-understanding. In this paradigm, everyone possesses knowledge, and the development of new knowledge is based on sharing existing knowledge and mutual learning. Inherent in this approach is a sense of shared responsibility to search together for new knowledge. The participatory mode of learning emphasizes collective creativity and sharing, acknowledging the value and contribution of each participant.

One essential way to wage continuous struggle against the negative effects of globalization is to work tirelessly to promote the empowerment of both migrant and local workers. This can be achieved through workshops conducted by effective facilitators, socially aware and responsive, comprehending how the world functions and in possession of a working knowledge of creating and staging theater. With these skills, they will be able to evolve a harmonious process of creation and implement participatory learning. But such skills

require training. The need is urgent to train more effective artists–facilitators, calling for more systematic and frequent trainers’ training, facilitated by international networking that can enable effective exchange of skills and ideas.

### **GLOBALIZING CULTURAL ACTIVISM**

People’s theater has been found effective in empowering migrant workers in Hong Kong. It provides powerful tools to expose and oppose the worldwide synchronization of human oppression and exploitation under the present process of globalization. Through participation in theater and other arts, migrant workers become aware of how they have internalized their oppressors. They begin to command the means of speaking out. By participating in arts among themselves and with the local people, migrant workers are no longer isolated, instead becoming active participants in the community life of their host countries. Through producing their own theater, they become part of the global movement to create a world that is truly ours.

Concerned theater workers in Hong Kong and elsewhere should be able to see that collaborating with migrant workers is as important and socially valuable as work with other sectors of the oppressed in society, whether persons with disabilities (who number half a million in Hong Kong) or marginal workers (who number more than half a million here). The commitment to theater and other arts as tools for societal transformation connects all artists, activists and the oppressed.

Our experience has shown that migrants, given the opportunity, can produce powerful art works that at the same time make strongly positive social statements. The continued blossoming of migrant theater and other art forms manifests a diversity that can be the antidote to the uniformity imposed by the present globalization process. This is diversity within the context of a cultural commonwealth in which real differences in culture are to be respected and appreciated. If migrant cultural projects are merely monocultural, they will only lead to narrow-minded nationalism. If cross-cultural exploration and inter-culturalism are enshrined and the process is carried out in the most participatory and democratic manner, I am confident it will produce exciting aesthetic outcomes.

I believe it is time to set up an international network of like-minded cultural activists to support and promote theater with migrant workers wherever they are found, and I hope readers will be inspired by these examples to join me in making this a reality.