

Our Fuzzy Wisdom

Using myopia to explore a collective's evolving identity

By

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Abstract

This project expands the application of body symptom work from an individual's process to a group's collective process using Processwork methodology. The group of choice was ethnic Chinese in Singapore. The primary identity, cultural and social norms of Singaporean Chinese was explored through qualitative research with four participants, and heuristic inquiry carried out by the author. Myopia was the body symptom of choice due to its high prevalence in the Singaporean Chinese population, affecting the majority of the members. Myopia was unfolded using Processwork methods to elicit the secondary process for each individual. When these secondary processes are combined and reflected against the primary qualities of Singaporean Chinese, myopia appears to be indicative of the group's process of becoming more fun and relational with one another; becoming more spontaneous and creative, developing our relationship with our inner lives, and identifying more with our inner freedom and power and empowering others to do the same.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The idea for this research traces my evolving understanding of illnesses and body symptoms from the contemporary ‘Western’ medicine view, to the psychosomatic paradigm, and finally, to my current study in Processwork.

In my twenties, I did research on the prevalence of common childhood allergies (asthma, allergic rhinitis and eczema) and their associated risk factors. My world operated on quantitative experiments, numbers and statistics, trying to prove cause and effect. My peers and I would cross our fingers hoping that the number crunching through the computer would turn up something statistically meaningful to report. I also came to realize that the pharmaceutical companies are major players in the medical system, with their emphasis on the prescribing and use of medication. I felt dissatisfied and wondered if there is more to health and healing.

By chance, I sustained a dance injury and was in debilitating pain for 2 years. No one could identify a definite cause for the ongoing pain. I followed my long-time interest in alternative medicine, read up on various bodywork modalities, and received treatments when I could. The physical pain, impaired mobility, and not finding meaning in my professional work wore me down mentally, physically and emotionally. The silver lining in this low point was the impetus to start doing personal depth work to unfold more deeply what was going on. Stepping away from the rational and objective way of going about things that I was used to, I began to explore the realm of the subjective, subtle and numinous.

When I began my healing and self-awareness journey, I encountered the word “psychosomatic”. Made up of the root words “psyche” and “soma”, it refers to the

mind/emotion/soul (psyche) and body (soma) connection, and how psychic stressors stored in the body can result in illnesses and dysfunctions. I experienced what a deep catharsis of suppressed emotions hidden in my bodily aches and pains could do. It was an eye-opener to witness the recovery from a chronic physical problem by addressing the psychosomatic cause. I was surprised to find out that the practice of psychosomatics was once investigated by scientists and physicians as a valid paradigm for healing for a few decades in the mid-1900's but failed to make it to mainstream medicine (Lewis & Lewis, 1972).

In my 30's, I changed career and went into life coaching. When I was introduced to Processwork and its concept of the "dreambody", my understanding of the mind-body connection, diseases and physical problems took another huge turn. Arnold Mindell (1998), the founder of Processwork and former Jungian dream analyst, discovered that we do not dream only when we are asleep; our dreaming process is ever present and takes place even while we are awake. Like her Jungian roots, Processwork values dreams as part of our psyche's developmental process and meaning-making. Mindell (1998) also observed that our bodies participate intimately in this ever present dreaming process, conveying and mirroring the dream material as subtle bodily sensations which can be experienced through our senses as well as physical movements, hence the term "Dreambody". Similarly, all body symptoms, with or without medical diagnostic labels, are viewed as Dreambody phenomena.

Therefore, unlike the pathogenic view of mainstream medicine and psychosomatics, body symptoms and illnesses are not necessarily dysfunctions of the body and/or mind that need to be removed. Instead, body symptoms and illnesses are seen as meaningful occurrences that encode new aspects of our identity that are purposeful, useful and

empowering to us, which we need to bring awareness to. The range of body symptoms that Processwork can be applied to is potentially limitless and well documented, including allergies such as asthma (Menken, 2010; Mindell, 2000; Morin, 2014) and chronic atopic dermatitis (Camastral, 1995).

Reflecting on my earlier experience in disease prevalence research, I began to have a wild idea. Body symptoms are well explored at the individual level, what if this idea is extrapolated to body symptoms or diseases common in groups of people? Might a prevalent body symptom or disease reveal emerging aspects of a group?

Hence, I struck upon the idea to study myopia in Singapore, the country that I am from, in the sub-group of ethnic Chinese, to which I belong. Firstly, Singapore has one of the highest prevalence rates for myopia in the world (Seet, et al., 2001). Secondly, among the three major ethnic groups in Singapore, the Chinese have the highest rates of myopia (Saw, et al., 2006), it is an anomaly to be not myopic. Thirdly, myopia is a non-sensitive health condition, which simplifies the ethical considerations for the study.

As a Singaporean Chinese with myopia myself, this study takes on an intimate personal note as well. I have not contemplated much about my roots nor my identity as a Singaporean until recently. Studying Processwork and being a minority in a foreign country were definitely catalysts in making me contemplate more about my identity and what I took for granted. As I enter middle age, an appreciation of my Chinese roots grew as well. Hence, this research project provided an opportunity to take stock and explore the identity as Singaporean Chinese through the narratives of the four study participants and myself.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Mainstream ‘Western’ Medical View of Myopia

In normal vision, light entering the eye is focused to form an image on the retina, allowing a clear image to be perceived. Myopia is a form of “disorders of refraction” (World Health Organization, 2018) whereby refractive error causes the image to be focused in front of the retina (Fig. 1) instead of on it, resulting in good vision viewing close objects but blurry vision when viewing objects at a distance. Myopia is most commonly caused by an elongation of the eye ball (National Eye Institute, 2010).

Intervention consists of methods to restore proper focusing of image onto the retina. The simplest and most common treatment is to wear corrective eyewear such as spectacles or contact lenses; refractive surgical procedures that thin the cornea to achieve the same effect are also available (Seet, et al., 2001). The degree or severity of myopia is measured in dioptres, which corresponds to the power of the corrective lens required to restore normal vision. The dioptres run in the negative range for myopia (for example -1.00 D) as opposed to the positive range for hyperopia (far-sightedness) (Foster & Jiang, 2014).

Data suggest that genetics plays a role in predisposition to myopia, while environmental risk factors include prolonged time spent indoors (insufficient illumination) and extended near work activity such as reading; conversely, increased exposure to the outdoors is associated with lower risk of myopia although the exact interplay of these factors and the mechanism of myopia development are largely unknown (Pan, Ramamurthy, & Saw, 2012). Correspondingly, lifestyle and habits that lower exposure to the risk factors, and spending time outdoors, are promoted as preventive measures of myopia.

2.1.1 Myopia Prevalence Globally and in Singapore

Myopia is the most common cause of correctable visual impairment in the world, estimated to affect 22.9% of the global population or 1.4 billion people in 2000, and is predicted to rise to 49.8% in 2050 (Holden, et al., 2016). However, direct comparison of reported figures is challenging due to myopia's rising trend, and studies were carried out independently in different countries at different time points and in different age groups. Nevertheless, meta-analysis carried out by Rudnicka et al. (2016) showed a clear trend that myopia is rising most rapidly in East Asian countries (China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) and Singapore. The above countries have the highest rates of myopia in the world too; 86% of 15 year old Singaporean-Chinese were reported to be myopic.

The rate of early onset myopia in Singapore is also one of the highest in the world, 33% of 7 year olds entering primary school were already myopic (Leo, Ling, Wong, & Quah, 2007). As early onset myopia is associated with the development of high myopia (-6.00D) and serious ocular diseases such as retinal detachment, cataract and glaucoma and even blindness (Holden, et al., 2014), childhood myopia is of great public health concern in Singapore and is the subject of large scale research and public health programmes.

2.1.2 Why Myopia is High in Singapore

When myopia prevalence was compared between children in Malaysia and Singapore¹, two trends were observed. Firstly, children in Singapore were significantly at a

¹ Singapore and Malaysia are neighbouring countries separated by a narrow waterway. Both countries have Chinese, Indians, and Malays as their main ethnic groups. Each ethnic group in either country came from the same ancestry (see Appendix II) and hence, share the same gene pool. The Malays are the native people of what is now Singapore and Malaysia. The Chinese and Indians are descendants of immigrants from Southern China and Southern India respectively. The only difference between the countries being the Chinese form the majority in Singapore (75%) whereas the Malays are the majority in Malaysia (65%). Therefore, comparative studies between populations in Singapore and Malaysia are useful to study environmental factors in diseases (Saw, et al., 2006).

higher risk of having myopia for each ethnic group, and secondly and myopia is most common in the Chinese regardless of country. The high prevalence of myopia in Singapore is attributed to the combination of genetics (myopia in parents and siblings), higher education attainment, confined living and ‘visual’ spaces, and limited time spent outdoors (Seet, et al., 2001).

2.2 Myopia Through the Psychosomatic Lens

The psychosomatic view interprets vision problems, including myopia, as a form of psychological defence, protecting the person from what they did not want to see, or feel, or be present to (Weiss & English, 1943). Psychosomatic approaches to improve vision problems typically involve catharsis of the repressed psychic material, visualization exercises and affirmations (Goodrich, 1985; Kaplan, 2002; Lieberman, 1995). Kaplan (2002) proposed approaching our eyes and vision as metaphors of becoming more conscious and aware of our inner experiences, gaining our willingness to “see” and reflect on our forgotten memories, fantasies and imageries, so that we may gain insights about ourselves as the associated thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations surface.

2.3 Processwork

2.3.1 Processwork – an Introduction

Processwork, also known as Process-Oriented Psychology, is founded by Jungian analyst Arnold Mindell. Mindell (1998) made the discovery that the dreaming phenomena do not occur exclusively as psychic experiences during sleep. The dreaming process is ever present and ongoing even while we are awake. The dreaming process can also be experienced as somatic sensations. Hence, Mindell named his discovery the Dreambody.

The Dreambody is a carrier of meaningful unconscious material that is steering a person towards one's wholeness, just like night time dreams in Jungian dream analysis.

Diseases and body symptoms are also regarded as Dreambody phenomena. Just like dreams, they carry precious hidden information that contribute towards a person's individuation process. This is radically different from being seen as malfunctions that need to be gotten rid of as in Western medicine, or as psychological defences against trauma that need to be healed in psychosomatics.

As Mindell developed the methodologies for working with the Dreambody, he realized that a *process-oriented* approach, which he first encountered in quantum physics, was needed (Mindell & Mindell, 1992). *Process* in this context refers to seeing reality as a ceaseless flow of interactions and perpetual change. Taoist and Buddhist philosophies, process philosophy of Alfred N. Whitehead and systems thinking are some representatives of process-oriented paradigms (Capra, 2014; Seibt, 2012). The objective of a process-oriented approach is to facilitate what is happening in the moment (the process) instead of trying to find the root cause. The phenomenological nature of process also means that dreams, somatic experiences (the Dreambody), and all possible human experiences can be worked with to reveal their emergent qualities and information.

Mindell's (1997, 2001) process-oriented paradigm developed applications beyond individual therapy to include relationship work and group facilitation. It became known as Processwork. With Processwork, Mindell gave the world a theoretical model that finally bridged the mind-body divide in psychology and psychotherapy, and united physics with psychology. Processwork is now a trans-disciplinary approach. Her Jungian roots and process-oriented connections bring together dream work, mythology, Taoism, alchemy,

shamanism, quantum physics, somatic and movement work, art and music in the unfolding of the human experience. Quantum physics continues to play a major role in the development of Processwork theory (Mindell, 2000; Mindell, 2010).

2.3.2 Process Structure

Processwork reframes our perception, i.e. what we perceive and how we relate to what we perceive, into primary and secondary processes. Primary process refers to experiences and concepts that we identify with, and also actions, behaviors and communications that we carry out intentionally. Secondary process refers to experiences and actions that we do not identify with or are unconscious of. Delineating the primary and secondary processes is the ‘edge’. The edge is the boundary of our self-identity and worldview; it filters and interprets what we notice around us (Mindell, 2011). The purpose of the edge is to keep the person within what is known, familiar and unchanging (i.e. the identity or primary process); this inertia to change causes us to be static or state-like. We have varying degrees of awareness of our processes and edges.

A secondary process brings new information, and with it, impending change to the primary process. Due to the edge, our primary process often experience secondary process as disturbing or uncomfortable, or as something that happens to us outside of our agency, or as something foreign to us, or “not me”. Secondary process can take the form of body symptoms, dreams, i.e. the aforementioned Dreambody, synchronous events, relationship difficulties, disavowed experiences, and also unintended actions, behaviors and communications that we make. Secondary processes are often our disavowed powers and unconscious abilities attempting to connect with us. This tension and interplay between the

primary and secondary processes and the edge make up the bigger process of our psychological development towards wholeness.

2.3.3 Signals and Channels

In Processwork *channels* are understood as the carriers of the information of the process (Diamond & Jones, 2004). A channel that transmits information and experience of the primary process is described as occupied. An unoccupied channel transmits information and experience that the primary process is unaware of, and hence, is a carrier of the secondary process. We can map out the primary and secondary process by noticing which channels are occupied and unoccupied.

Processwork's objective is to bring awareness to the secondary process, making the information carried by it more known to the primary process and to support their eventual integration. The information carried by the channels is also known as signals. To unfold the information in the secondary process, we amplify and interact with the signals in the unoccupied channel, until it becomes a multi-channel experience. Amplification of the signals can occur through any creative means to deepen the awareness and experience of the signals. There are six main channels and a description of their signals are as follows:

Visual: visual signals occur as images, dreams, fantasies. Words that indicate visual experience include “looking”, “seeing”, “blurriness”, description of colors, brightness etc. Movements of the eyes, or looking in a certain direction, or looking at a distance also examples of visual signals.

Auditory: auditory signals can occur as music, sounds, spoken words, or words that indicate auditory experience like “loud”, “high pitch”, “I heard...”, “she

said...”, “a sound...”, “a voice” etc. Auditory information have details such as pitch, volume, timbre, intonation, rhythm, speed, action.

Proprioception: proprioception signals are experienced as physical sensations such as pressure, temperature, lightness, texture, touch, weight, rhythm, sharpness, dullness etc. Body posture, changes in breathing, closing of eyes are also indicators of proprioceptive experience.

Kinesthetic: signals that exist as physical movements such as hand gestures, turning of the head, swaying in the body. Words that indicate movement include “jump”, “roll”, “fly”. Movements can involve details such as speed, rhythm, intensity, resistance, direction.

Relationship: signals that are experienced through a person or with people. For example, an argument, feelings towards someone, making reference to a person. Dreams that are filled with people. Unintended events that bring people into present time, such as bumping into someone.

World: signals that come in the form of external or dreamlike social, cultural, political, institutional, environmental, ecological experience or references.

2.3.4 Levels of Experience

Processwork theory further distinguishes our experience of reality into three different realms. They are consensus reality, non-consensus reality (Dreamland) and sentient (essence) level:

Consensus reality (CR): This refers to the objective reality and experience that we share with one another and can factually agree with each other as “real”.

This reality occurs in a state-like manner, where things are concrete and separate, and operate according to the laws of Newtonian physics.

Non-consensus reality (NCR): NCR is where our individual subjective experience lies. Our secondary processes which we have little or no awareness of also belong here. NCR includes dreams that occur during sleep, figures in our dreams and fantasies, subtle bodily experiences and feelings (the Dreambody); unintentional body language or signals we give out (double signals); things, events or people we refer to but are not with us in the moment, or references to in the past or future. NCR corresponds to quantum realm, where phenomena like non-locality and synchronicities exist.

Sentient or essence level: This the subtlest and deepest level of experience, where one is in the experience of non-duality and pre-cognition. This is the driving force behind all levels of experience. This realm corresponds to the tendencies in quantum wave function or Bohm's concept of pilot wave. It can be felt as a subtle field of energy or atmosphere that we are moved by but is not easy to put into words, what Taoism refers to as "the Tao which cannot be said."

2.4 Processwork and Myopia

Camastral (1995) used myopia to illustrate the effects of long-term chronic body symptoms on primary identity and marginalization of secondary process:

Awareness of chronic symptoms often diminishes over time; they have become parts of our primary identity; one has learned to live with them and accepts their

existence as part of normal everyday life. [...] A person who wears prescription eyeglasses rarely thinks about their visual handicap anymore and doesn't have to wonder what might be behind the nearsightedness. The process connected to being nearsighted is still there and could be accessed, yet, since it is not a life-threatening situation, the person might let the opportunity slide and never know what personal power could be unveiled. (p. 37)

Camastral's account rings true of my own experience as a short-sighted person.

Myopia was my norm, my family's norm (every family member is myopic), my collective's norm. We attribute the pervasiveness of myopia to our strong societal emphasis on academic achievements and bad lifestyle habits (Seet, et al., 2001) and do not think much about it. With Processwork, we can unfold the secondary process that is happening through myopia not just for the individual but also potentially for the collective, which is what this study attempts to explore.

2.5 Research Questions

This research aims to explore the following

1. What is the primary identity of Singaporean Chinese?
2. What secondary processes can we discover from unfolding the experience of myopia using process-oriented methods at the individual level?
3. How might myopia represent a collective secondary process of the Singaporean Chinese?

Contributions to Processwork

1. This is the first time that the Singaporean Chinese population is studied as part of a Processwork research.
2. The body symptom investigated is unusual in that it affects the great majority of the population, it falls under the 'norm'.

3. A disease or body symptom is explored as a group's collective dreaming (versus an individual's process) for the first time.

Limits of Study

This study is exploratory and descriptive in nature, utilizing qualitative and heuristic methods to discover themes the subject explored, it is not designed to provide an objective proof to any hypothesis. At this exploratory stage, the participants were chosen by convenience sampling (Davies & Hughes, 2014), and they are expected to have a biased towards the social-economic and cultural leans that the author has, such as coming from middle class households and tertiary education.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

The methodology is a combination of qualitative case study and heuristic research. Moustakas (1990) wrote, “the heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social – and perhaps universal – significance” (p. 15). The heuristic approach is suited here because this study is inspired by my own experiences and curiosity. Furthermore, heuristic and qualitative research methods are also process-oriented in that we are “studying emerging and unfolding experiences in the research participant” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 104).

Data collection consists of two parts: an interview followed by the unfolding of the myopia experience using Processwork methods. From a process-structure point of view, the interview elicits i) information about the participants’ primary identity, ii) their collective consensus reality as Singaporean Chinese, and iii) inferences of edges and secondary processes.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Interview Process

Marshall (1999) quoted a 7-step interview process proposed by Kvale (1996):

1. Thematizing, which involves deciding the purpose of the study and the concept of the topic, before the interviews are conducted.
2. Designing, which involves planning the design of the study before interviews start, with the intention of obtaining certain knowledge and also addressing any ethical issues.

3. Interviewing, including a reflective approach to the information sought and paying attention to the interpersonal relationship of the interview.
4. Transcribing, which involves preparing the interview for analysis and transcribing from oral speech to written text.
5. Analyzing, deciding based on the purpose and topic, which methods are appropriate.
6. Verifying, which looks at the reliability, consistency and validity of the study.
7. Reporting, which means communicating the findings of the study resulting in a readable form.

The purpose of the interview is to elicit each participant's primary process and possible secondary process using three keywords – Chinese, Singaporean, short-sightedness. The interview was semi-structured and organized into three segments with the following prompts:

Experience of being Chinese in Singapore

1. What do you associate with being Chinese in Singapore?
2. How would you describe the typical Singaporean culture?
3. Supposed you grew up in a different country, which aspects of being Chinese (values, behavior etc.) would probably not change?

Experience of being a short-sighted person

4. Why do you think Singapore Chinese have one of the highest rates of short-sightedness in the world?
5. Any memories or anecdotes on being short-sighted or having to wear spectacles?

Participant's description of self

6. How would you describe yourself?
7. What are you up to in life right now? What are some of the challenges that you are working on?

3.2.2 Processwork Method of Unfolding Body Symptoms

Vassiliou (2005) observed Arnold Mindell working with panic attacks using Processwork, and outlined a 9-step approach that he took. This 9-step approach is universally applicable to all body symptoms and is used in this study:

1. Attending to the medical aspects of the condition.
2. Getting a picture of the life context within which the condition occur.
3. Eliciting the person's subjective experience of their condition.
4. Identifying entry points into the process underlying the condition.
5. Entering the process underlying the condition.
6. Unfolding the dreamlike aspects of the condition.
7. Understanding the significance of the unfolded experience of the condition for the person's life.
8. Sensing the essence of the unfolded experience of the condition.
9. Exploring the sensed essence and insights it generates about the person's life.

For the purpose of the study, the objective is to observe the process structure and elicit the secondary process and understand its message relative to the person's primary identity. The unfolding of the body symptom may or may not progress through Steps 5 to 9 as this depends on the success of navigating through the participant's edges within the session.

3.2.3 Selection of Participants

The participants were selected by convenience sampling (Davies & Hughes, 2014, p. 61). Singaporean Chinese is defined as an ethnic Chinese born and raised in Singapore, and holds a Singaporean citizenship. Severity of short-sightedness was not a criterion as long as the participant self-reported dependency on vision correction during waking hours. The influence of age and gender on identity and cultural experience are not the focus of the study and therefore not included as selection criteria. Three men and one woman participated in the study, they ranged from 27 to 33 years old at time of interview. I was in my early forties during the period of research. All participants received tertiary education and identified as coming from middle class background.

3.2.4 Human Subject Protection

All four participants were presented and briefed with the Informed Consent Form (refer to Appendix I) prior before obtaining their consent. As the participants are from my circles of friends, specific personal information (like profession, names of schools that they went to, etc.) are deliberately omitted or kept brief to prevent their identities from being identified through their associations with me. Pseudonyms are used and all participants are referred to by the male gender to protect their anonymity.

3.2.5 Heuristic Process

Before interviewing the participants, I reflected and gave my own responses to the interview questions, and unfolded my myopia body symptom by myself and with the help of a process worker. I also acknowledged the influence of my middle-class socioeconomic status, tertiary education and my family of origin on the biases present in my narrative.

In the course of interviewing the participants, I allowed their material to evoke more of my own. After the interviews were completed, I revisited the data collected during the transcription process, as well as re-reading the transcripts and continued to mull on them, noticing my thoughts, feelings and reactions. I also tracked my experience of conducting the research and writing the thesis from a meta-perspective in order to capture my primary and secondary processes at play.

3.3 Data Analysis and Reporting

Audio recordings were made for each interview and transcribed. The process of coding and analyzing the text was adapted from the “thematic network” method by Attride-Stirling (2001). Each transcript was dissected into segments of interest, analyzed and rearranged into possible clusters of themes using a mind-mapping software Simplemind Pro. Similarly, each Processwork session exploring the secondary process behind myopia was recorded by audio and video, and transcribed.

A composite portrait was created from all four interviews to answer the first research question of “what is the primary identity of the Singaporean Chinese?” A personal portrait was created for each individual from the interview material to study their primary process, edges and possible secondary process. Their Processwork session was analyzed for the edges and secondary process behind their myopia body symptom. Additionally, a brief introduction of Singapore’s history is included in my self-portrait. The portraits are presented in Chapter 4.

In the final step of the research, I entered the creative synthesis phase of the heuristic inquiry to answer the research question “how might myopia represent a collective secondary process of the Singaporean Chinese?” by further contemplation on the data

collected from the interviews and Processwork sessions. The outcome is presented in Chapter 5.

3.4 Choice of Language

As this project has an emphasis on exploring one's ethnic cultural roots and heritage, the term "Singaporean Chinese" was chosen instead of "Chinese Singaporean" because we are distinguishing the group of Chinese people studied in this research from groups of Chinese people from other regions and nationalities, for example, Malaysian Chinese. On the other hand, "Chinese Singaporean" will be more appropriate when inferring and making references to the different ethnic sub-groups in Singapore (for example, Malay Singaporean) when the context calls for it.

Chapter 4. Results

4.1 Author's Self-Portrait

Family of origins against the backdrop of Singapore

My paternal and maternal grandparents left China and immigrated to Singapore in the early 1930's. They came in search of better opportunities in Singapore, which had been developed into a thriving sea port under the British Colonial rule (Ee, 1961). Like most Chinese diaspora in Singapore, our ancestries trace back to geographical and linguistically distinct groups in Southern China (Ee, 1961), see Fig. 4 in Appendix II. My maternal side belongs to the Hokkien dialect group, while my paternal side belongs to the Teochew dialect group.

Both my parents were born in the 1940's soon after World War II ended. My paternal grandparents were farmers and my father grew up in the countryside. My mother grew up with her family in the city area. My maternal grandfather ran a bicycle repair kiosk while my maternal grandmother was a self-taught seamstress. Meanwhile, Singapore began to take steps towards self-governance, eventually declaring her independence as the Republic of Singapore on 9 August 1965 (National Archives of Singapore, 2018).

Both my parents received their education in Chinese-medium schools; people who did so are referred to as Chinese-educated in Singapore. They were the first in their respective families to obtain a university degree from Singapore's first and only Chinese-medium university, Nanyang University (Singapore Infopedia, 2014). Although university graduates enjoyed significant social standing and pride in their era, it was a different story for those who were Chinese-educated due to the political, social and economic climate. The biggest tension stemmed from the Singapore government viewing the Chinese-educated,

especially the intelligentsia, as a political threat, a hot bed for political leftists with links with communist China (Kwok, 2001). Socially, the British Colonial past had created a mindset that the English and Western cultures were superior; the Chinese-educated became second class. Economically, the pragmatism of a young nation striving to catch up with the rest of the world decided to enforce English as the first language in 1983 and phased-out all non-English medium schools by 1987 (Ho, 2016). This means that people from my generation, born in the late 1970's onwards, are all English-educated.

I grew up hearing my parents talk about their difficulties as Chinese-educated people, they had less opportunities than the English-educated, being seen as the lesser of the two. When I was much older and knew friends whose parents who were also Chinese-educated, the stories of our parents matched. Our parents started with nothing; they are diligent and hardworking, made a lot of personal sacrifices and had to be very astute with their finances in order to improve their financial situation. I was told stories of how my dad had to borrow a proper pair of shoes to head out to submit his university application, and how my mom's worn out shoes were thrown far away from the front door by her landlord because they were a disgrace. My mother would also speak of her regret for not pursuing graduate studies in Mathematics despite graduating in the top 7th place of her cohort, choosing to fulfil her obligation to marry and start a family and to work and earn money instead.

I have always felt an atmosphere of hurt pride from my parents. There is always an insecurity about their grasp of English. My mom is self-conscious even though she is very fluent having been a teacher most of her life and taught in English all the way. A fond

childhood memory of mine is waking up every morning to the voice of my father reading the newspaper out loud at 6am to practice his English before he went to work.

My narrative of being Singaporean Chinese and myopic

Descriptors that I associate with Singaporean Chinese are mainly derived from my interactions with my family of origin. We identify as hardworking, practical and pragmatic; we are responsible, dutiful and self-sacrificial; we are also very risk adverse, obedient and rigid in the sense that we adhere to rules, norms and propriety. Unlike my Chinese-educated parents, most 3rd generation Singaporean Chinese like myself have lost the direct links with our cultural roots. Growing up speaking Chinese at home with my parents kept the door to my roots open and I have grown to appreciate that connection. I enjoy going on holidays to China with my parents because they will always converse with the tour guide about China's history and culture when the rest of the tour bus is resting and I get to listen in and learn more.

My experience of growing up as a Chinese in Singapore can also be represented by the word "conservative". There is the conservative, obedient, demure, chaste maiden image that my mother hoped to raise her daughters into; she has said to me in exasperation, "Why are you not like a flower in a glasshouse?." My mother has a very controlling parenting style that is still a point of contention, it is an intrusive and oppressive way of loving that made me distance myself in order to have my private space where I can be alone, quiet and just be. Moreover, my parents are concerned about reputation and how others see them. Hence, there is an unsaid expectation to behave well and do well so that they do not look bad as parents.

I was expected to follow a conservative, safe career path, which I did not. Becoming a scientist was an unusual choice, it was approved by my parents because it appealed to their intellectual identity and yet they were apprehensive of its job insecurity. When I went into life coaching when it was unheard of in Singapore, it was met with great disapproval; my father felt ashamed to tell others about the profession that his daughter was in because it was not a proper job to him.

Passion, fun and self-expression are not in my family's culture either. Hence, I also feel that I have to "conserve" in the sense of restraining myself. While we do play, make jokes and do activities for enjoyment, there is a point where being practical takes over. For example, I was made to learn the piano². When I developed real interest in classical singing and wanted to take voice lessons, I was stopped from doing so because my parents were afraid that I would be distracted from my studies.

I associate my shortsightedness with the emphasis on scholastics in my family and in Singapore. My mom has an overt interest in hoping that her children are smart (like her). She started testing my IQ and told me that I have to go university even before I started preschool. The focus has always been on grades and being clever, which was what I felt I needed to be in order to be valued and seen. I also loved to read as a child which added to the eye strain.

On the other hand, my experience with myopia and spectacles has a dreamy quality about it. My eyesight problems also brought forth relationship aspects with people. When I

² Learning the piano was like another study subject that I was expected to put in effort and do well in. I stopped playing the piano the moment I finished my series of music examinations at 19 years old. While living in Portland, Oregon, for my Processwork studies, I caught the play, *The Pianist of Willesden Lane*. Through this play and with what I learned in Processwork, I finally knew how to *love and enjoy* the piano playing process and resumed playing the piano after stopping for 20 years. This is still a deeply moving experience to me.

was a very young child with perfect eyesight, I was surrounded by adults who all wore spectacles. I yearned to wear a pair myself, to be just like them and join the club. I would secretly try on the spectacles of a sleeping adult and play with the altered vision, becoming dizzy and disorientated, walking down the slopes of the huge indentions that magically appeared in the ground like sand dunes. When I became shortsighted at 9 years old, it coincided with me losing my friends when I changed classes and was miserable feeling of being an outsider with my new classmates. When myopia set in, words on the blackboard were no longer clear and I had to peer into my classmate's notebook to see what he had written down much to his annoyance. When I got older, I appreciate my short-sightedness for allowing me to see things very intimately in great detail close-up.

My potential secondary qualities

From the above paragraph, the experience of blurriness and being in altered states are very secondary to me. Moreover, I have a preference for seeing and being sharp and clear. For example, I prefer bright fluorescent lights over dimmer warm orange lights; I do not like the latter because I cannot see the actual colors. I also prefer to have my myopia corrected till I have very sharp vision, despite the optician's advice to under correct slightly. This preference also extends to my lack of interest in drinking alcohol because I dislike being drunk and having altered and reduced awareness. I do not really know how to party nor do I enjoy parties generally. Fun and creativity are also qualities that I do not identify with fully yet.

My visual experiences around myopia also indicate that relationship processes are more secondary to me. I have edges to bringing myself more whole and more powerfully in my interactions with others. I identify as a follower, I have an inner pressure maker that

tells me that I have to adhere to rules and do things the “right way”, nor do I consider myself a powerful go-getter, I have been described as *passive* by others. This brings to mind an incident when I was labeled by a teacher as “having no initiative” simply because I was lost in my own thoughts and inner world and was not present to the fly buzzing above the food we were about to purchase in the canteen, I did not respond to it by fanning it away, which was what she expected. Finding my power and authority is also an ongoing process of mine.

Unfolding my myopia experience

When I unfolded the blurriness of my myopic experience, the loss of visual acuity made objects around me, and myself, seemed impalpable and less solid. This was accompanied by the sensation of floating upwards on my back. I was edged out by the sensation of disappearing into nothingness many times. When I crossed the edge finally, the floating and feeling of disintegration were actually the start of the process of expansion. As I followed the sensations of becoming more fluid and immaterial, being lifted upwards and expanding, I eventually became this ginormous, transparent being who is rather cheerful and friendly, moving freely about Earth. He is like the “atmosphere of warmth”. In my dreaming, he picked me up and gave me a loving and reassuring presence that everything will be okay in my thesis writing process. His encouraging and positive nature is quite different from my atmosphere at home, where my parents tend to fret and worry if their children are doing well, there is always some concern and doubt; we also do not compliment or give acknowledgements to each other very much.

As I unfolded my process deeper into the essence level, the movements became very fluid, like piece of gauze or a trail of smoke floating in the air. I noticed the deepening

and intentionality of my breathing through the mouth as I moved my body, each in-breath and out-breath becoming more audible and regular, more Zen and meditative. I was present to the feelings of constriction and drawing things in towards my body when I breathed out, and the feeling of expansion in my being when I breathed in. I simply call this essence state, “The Breath”. The constriction portion reminds me of my primary process where I have to conserve, be sharp and focused, while the expansion portion reminds me of my dream figure, the “atmosphere of warmth”, that unfolded from my myopia experience.

Together, this cyclically dance of constricting in and expanding out seem to indicate my deeper qualities of sensing into and drawing in what is around me, integrating them and returning the material out in a new form. To follow the essence of “The Breath” is to free myself from my perceived constraints, going over my edges in relationship to interact and mingle, and create!

4.2 Composite Summary of Being a Singaporean Chinese

Before going into the individual portraits of each of the participants in Section 4.3, the common sentiments that they have about being Singaporean and Chinese are consolidated to create a composite portrait of the identity of a Singaporean Chinese.

4.2.1 Two Sources of Chinese Identity in Singapore

4.2.1.1 Institutional concept of race in Singapore. The participants consistently mentioned the influence of the government on their concept of race and nationality. The ideology that Singapore is a multi-racial and multi-religious country where racial and religious diversity are embraced and can co-exist harmoniously is strongly emphasized in the government’s efforts to build and maintain social cohesion. Three participants

expressed their sense of pride at Singapore's apparent success in managing her progress as a young country as well as her diversity.

Robin: "It's the pride of being a country that has tried so much that now it has absolute freedom to go anywhere in the world. Because we not only have the most liberal visas policies, in terms with exchange with other countries, we have enough money to go overseas and do anything that we want."

Kenneth: "In Singapore everyone really tries to live out what the government has what's the word, "propaganda-ed" I guess (laughs) or dictated about racial harmony and being understanding and accepting of each other. This is one instance where I personally feel that that level of dictation is actually good.... in whatever is being retained."

Chuan: "The positive aspects would be privileged, I think for me it falls under both positive and negative. As a Singaporean... Privilege because there's safety in Singapore, that I sometimes take for granted. There's harmony, racial, religious harmony... being a Singaporean... is a good feeling... whenever I travel overseas and I come home, I feel home, I feel the warmth, I feel safe, secure that this a place that I don't have to worry about my future, partly because government takes care of everything, everything has been planned out already, I just need to follow."

However, this is also accompanied by a sense of vagueness in their identity as Chinese other than what is impressed upon them by the system. This vagueness is very likely compounded by the fact that as the great majority of the country's population, the experience of being Chinese is the norm; we do not need to think much about our racial identity and its impact.

The awareness of one's racial-identity and the privileges of being the majority race often only came after the participants went overseas or had the experience of being in situations where they were the minority. Robin shared the following:

I have never been super conscious of my racial identity in Singapore. I actually feel more conscious of my racial identity when I'm overseas because... when I see the similarities between myself and the mainland Chinese people then I start to become very conscious of what's the different between us and people who are not Chinese. But in Singapore... my experience of being Chinese here is defined more by being conscious of how people around me who are Chinese make a distinction between themselves and other races.

Kenneth shared that he has the rare chance of being in a group where he is the minority race through his online gaming hobby:

I have a group of gaming friends... I would say about 60% of this group are actually Malay guys and I did not expect that from playing a game we would actually become pretty good friends in real life... over in this group of friends, I'm definitely the minority, and to be included it is a nice feeling. At the same time, I would still always feel a little bit left out because I don't speak the language, not well anyway, so sometimes they will go off in a long string of chatter in Malay and I wouldn't understand. So there is still that clear, I guess, erm... indicator that "yup, you are still different". Obviously I think this is common for all groups where you happen to be a minority... to feel that slight exclusion. These friends are always mindful and would either do a translation or they would switch back to English when they realize that I don't really understand what's going on.

Chuan on his experience of introducing himself and Singapore while attending the Winter Intensive at Process Work Institute:

I recently went to the States and not many people knew about Singapore. I started sharing about Singapore, about it being a racial, religious harmonious place. There is a lot of emphasis placed on that. Which, it took me by surprise when I went there, ...people I met from Europe, Africa that they were dealing with racial and religious issues back home and they felt very strongly for it whereas for me, it is "oh yes, it is very peaceful (in Singapore)", it never occurred to me that it (peace) would be an issue. So I was sharing that there are four main races in Singapore, Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others, formerly known as Eurasians but I think they changed it Others, I think. Don't know. They were asking me what's the percentage, as I'm sharing, it strike me that oh wow! I'm the majority in Singapore. And then I related it to White privilege in the States... I realized I have Chinese privilege in Singapore. Which I've never realized before.

It's not apparent, the racial divide. I do see people making fun of other races in their own private groups. So there's still that racism here in Singapore that I do see. As a Chinese person, I don't feel much, I'm the majority, I have the privilege, the term I learnt in Process Work is rank unawareness and I really relate to that. Because sometimes it really goes past me that I don't see certain things that are happening. The selfish part of me also, yea, do not want to be any other race (laughter) I'm the race with privilege.

4.2.1.2 Influence of Family. While the government is mentioned as the main influence of being Chinese as a racial identity, the more immediate and personal influence of one's cultural identity came from the participants' family of origin. Language, especially the ability to speak it, be it Mandarin or a Chinese dialect, gave the sense of being Chinese for all participants. Values and belief systems, behaviours, physical appearance, adherence to customs, celebration of festivals were also collectively mentioned by the participants as connections to one's Chinese identity.

Robin: "For me, I'm Chinese in that I can speak the language. Umm... I'm Chinese in that I share a certain common ancestry with people in China.... How else am I Chinese? ... I feel like the biggest part that has carried down for me is the clan values that my parents had brought."

Chuan: "Values of the Chinese culture, of filial piety, (to) respect my elders... obedience, manners, good manners, those are the things define me as a Chinese person. I relate easier to another Chinese person. My dialect. I'm proud of my dialect... and in the Chinese language there are many dialects... and there's Mandarin."

4.2.2 Participants' Perception of Singaporean Chinese

When the participants were asked for their associations with being Chinese and Singaporean, criticisms and negative attributes came more easily. Some participants also felt short-sightedness metaphorically represented the constrained worldview that Singaporeans tend to have. Chuan shared:

A lot of negative words come to mind. Pampered (laughter). Live in a bubble. Very disconnected from the world, complacent... Short-sighted comes to mind! ...study, work. If there's family then family, if not, then die... My friends, my peers, my clients, it's always, I find it very sad that every time they talk about, "yes the weekend is coming!", "yes, I'm going on a holiday 6 months down the road"... And that's all they think about and look forward to, I think that's quite sad. And the rest of the time they spend grumbling about work. Yea... very short-sighted. Only what's to come in the very near future... I feel the challenge with me, and a lot of Singaporeans, especially at job interviews, is "where do you see yourself in the next 5 to 10 years?" I can't answer that question (laughter)... That relates to me being very short-sighted... if I'm in a job then I'm just following the system... There's

nothing else for me to do. It's work. After I graduate, it's work and it's going to be work for the next 20-30 years of my life before I retire and I can do something then I enjoy and travel the world. So it's going to be work umm... I find it challenging to answer that question a lot of times. There's no need for me to see so far because for the past 25, 26 years of my life the government has everything in place, I just put through the education system.

Robin echoed similar sentiments in the following:

Not very bright... straight lace, compliant, inability to be flexible. Fearful of challenging authority... follow the norm. Don't have original thinking... I feel like it's a narrow focus in life that's why... When you are a kid, there are only a couple of focuses, you go to school, make sure you do well, prepare yourself to deal well for your survival needs that you will face when you grow older. The focus is very narrow... in Singapore you have to be really strict and narrow, do not be too out of line and the line is very narrow here.

Boon associated short-sightedness with the skepticism in Singaporeans:

Attachment to the material. What you are very attached to? You only believe in what can be seen. The scientific thing, only what you can see is real. With that attachment, then there is a fallibility of sight, what you see may not be what it is. Overly reliant on sight. The underlying practicality that is the main conversation... "Sight is the main sense that we base the whole society on. What you see is what you get, so many phrases, and is very aligned to what the Chinese people are. That's what I believe in... we are very sceptical. Chinese people are very sceptical... Scepticism when done adequately is great. When it comes to a point where however much proof or evidence is presented and yet there is scepticism then there is attachment behind certain ideas and that attachment is very strong in the community.

The above quotes also indicate a certain rigidity in Singapore and her people, in her hierarchical culture, where obedience and compliance to authority are expected. Closer to home, Robin, Chuan and Boon all described a one-way, oppressive communication style from their parents, Kenneth further observed "no emotional openness" and "honesty" in how people communicate. The following is Chuan's example:

I would describe my father as a very conservative man, very traditional, has certain values he thinks is right and he won't bend around them, like respect, obedience, manners, being organized. And he always, in my opinion, needs to be right, needs to have the final say. Even my grandmother has to listen to him.

His father died very young. He had to assume the head of the household at very young. That's the story my mom tells me that's his story... in my own experience

of him wanting things in his own ways, I've also learnt to just give whatever he wants sufficiently and I back off. If he wants me to apologize even though I feel that I'm not in the wrong, I'll just apologize for the sake of apologizing, but inside me I'm still very upset about the issue. But just to appease my mom and him, I'll just apologize and keep quiet. And whatever he says, I'll learnt to just let him talk even though I don't agree.

At the dinner table it is always quiet. And my mom would get frustrated because he feels it is too quiet. But when she starts talking (laughs) my dad would talk-over her then he gets frustrated also... yea, so nobody is heard at home. Everybody wants to be heard at home but nobody gets heard (laughter). That's the relationship I have with him.

The striving for survival seems to be the driving force behind most of the behaviour and traits. This need for survival has geared people to make practical and pragmatic choices, prioritizing financial and material stability. Chuan shared how his mom "still dreams of playing the piano in a lounge one day, cannot make money, so have to stay in a job to earn money for the family." Robin and Boon shared how their choice of leaving stable and good career as a civil servant and an auditor respectively created conflicts with their parents. It is common knowledge that parents in Singapore tend to avoid letting their children major in the arts or humanities in school because of the perceived worse job prospects.

This need for survival is also the source of *kiasi-sm* and *kiasu-ism*, two self-deprecating colloquial terms that Singaporeans use to describe ourselves. *Kiasi*, (literally fear of dying) meaning risk-adverse and *kiasu* (literally fear of losing), which means fear of missing out. As Robin and Kenneth pointed out, there is still a lot of underlying fear and anxiety behind this need for survival in Singapore.

Additionally, survival also extends to one's reputation and the psychological sense of belonging in a group. Robin and Kenneth noted that Singaporeans are concerned about how we are seen by others, in other words, fear of judgement. This fear also manifests as

“face” – the need to look good and fear of looking bad in front of others. Kenneth shared his anecdote:

Your upbringing is directly related to your parents’ reputation, if you behave poorly, it is a bad reflection on your parents, and I even heard this from my mom – she would say very clearly “Can you imagine if you behave like this what would people think about me? What would people think about your mother and how your mother brought you up? ”

Robin feels that this focus on survival and the practical side of things have resulted in the narrow worldview and lack of self-expression in Singaporeans; neither are we “taught to connect with our inner lives” according to Kenneth. Chuan further shared that he did not know what passion is for him until recently, after many years of working on himself.

4.2.3 Missing Sense of Roots

As much as the participants could easily mention the attributes they associate with being Singaporean Chinese, when asked about how much sense of roots they feel that they have, their responses reflected the tenuity of their connection, similar to the vagueness of the Chinese identity highlighted in Section 4.1.1.1.

Chuan was very proud of his dialect and yet he is embarrassed that he is unable to speak it and has secretly yearned to be able to do so. Kenneth, expressed passionately that Chinese people should be fluent in their mother tongue and takes pride in his fluency in Mandarin; yet, when asked how much roots he has with his Chinese heritage, he conceded the following:

In terms of my level of knowledge of like Chinese culture and history, (laughs) I notice I have very little cause I actually don’t know the culture and history, because for me, I guess the only thing I relate to the most is, for example, being able to at least speak the language, being able to communicate in the language.

Robin felt that it is difficult to distinguish whether his traits came from the Chinese culture or from the “pattern in the family’. This vagueness of being Chinese and having “no deep roots” is reflected by Chuan’s poignant and vivid imagery:

The Chinese in Singapore come from different places, different parts of China. I don’t have China Chinese culture but... “no deep roots”, I feel lost trying to explain Chinese Singaporean to my American friends. I don’t really know who I am and I’m not familiar or trained in Chinese history... If I put it in a metaphor, China Chinese is like this tree with deep roots going into the ground. Singaporean Chinese is... aquaponics...artificially made. There’s nothing below, or in a... very shallow, or in a glass, or in a test tube kind of thing, made in a lab with no roots... not the rich, dirty stuff. It’s just the clean and filtered stuff already.

Robin gave his perspective of what having roots is like:

When I was in England, there was this guy who actually wore a ring, which is a family ring. Umm... with the English families, what I gathered is that some of the families have very strong traditions... and it could be any kind of tradition, strong tradition of warrior-ship, of being huntsman, of service, of public service. There’s something that runs very strongly in the family and is some kind of quality that is expressed in the physical world in a very strong way. That to me is the ultimate rootedness. You know what your extended family stands for, you know what your culture stands for... you are aware of how it runs in you and you may choose to express it in the same way that they have been expressing it for the last hundreds of years or you may choose a different way. So let’s say if you are a warrior, these days you might not go to war but you might choose to be a warrior in something else, maybe you fight for a cause. Umm .. if you are hmm... if you are a public servant, or if you have a very long history of being rulers, these days you go into public administration. Something like that. There’s always some kind of thing that is taken down from the family, you are very conscious about it and you are expressing it. That to me is rootedness... there’s no connection to the experiences of the entire lineage that came before us. Zero connection there. Like who was the father of my grandfather? I don’t know. Where did they come from? I don’t know. Everything I don’t know. Where ... there’s no connection to China, and where the family came from. There’s no connection to anybody else upstairs (those who came before us).

He further elaborated the effect of un-rootedness on him:

No feeling of being home... I feel like with the rootedness it becomes a bit of an identity issue. So if there are strong roots, the identity is strong. The sense of knowing who you are is strong (exhales)... In every single cell of your body and life. I mean that quite literally. Without the rootedness... it becomes more a umm... for me, I feel... then I wonder where do I really belong? Who am I really? ... There’s no feeling of being home.”

4.3 Individual Portraits

4.3.1 Portrait 1 - Chuan

Chuan was the only interviewee who has direct experience with Processwork, he had attended the Winter Intensive at the Process Work Institute. His identity as an ethnic Chinese from Singapore was explored through his desire to connect with his Hainanese³ heritage and community, which he is unable to because of language barrier.

Chuan identifies as a perfectionist. He turned down the opportunity to visit his ancestral village even though he desired very much to connect with his roots because “there’s something about the rural village..., the perfectionist part of me that goes no, I want to stay in a hotel, I need it to be clean. I want to be in a hotel.”

He also portrays himself as intelligent, good and obedient so that he will be well-liked even since he was a young boy:

I used to be a teacher’s pet (laughs). Very obedient, very nerdy. I would intentionally pick glasses that would make me look nerdy. I feel it enhances my identity as an obedient boy. So I’ll pick up glasses like this... I’m very aware that I intentionally portray the good boy image but actually internally I know that I’m manipulative... (Good boy gets) approval from adults. Like “good boy, wow you are very well mannered”, umm... favors, preferred favors. What’s that word... people would remember me, my teachers would remember me, my co-workers would remember me for being this very obedient, very respectful boy.

The “image-consciousness” of the Chinese culture also compels him further to create the image of an obedient person because his actions are being judged by others:

The other thing is “face”, very image conscious... The things that I say, things that I do, I feel, I have to be very careful because I’m watched by people around me. I think it comes from the culture in school. Whatever I do, I say, I’m being graded (laughter) and then my teacher during meet-the-parents session will spill everything to my mom. So if I’m a good boy, then good! Nothing happens. But it’s unlike the cases for some of my friends who are more rebellious or more expressive, they more negative feedback (laughter)... I’m very mindful as I’m growing up of

³ Hainanese is one of the Chinese dialect groups. It originates from the southern-most island of Hainan, China.

behavior as well, in front of my relatives as well during Chinese New Year, certain behaviors are deemed good, and certain behaviors are deemed not good, and embarrassing and ashamed.

However, these primary traits also manifested as inner criticisms that made him feel guilt, shame and embarrassment, creating some of his edges. For example, his inner dialogue prevented him from “speaking up” for his request to reduce his workload with the authority of an organization he volunteered at - “you gave your word, how can you go back on your word?”; “you should... you could, you must... You should have known better... It has to be perfect.”

He also feels ashamed of his inability to speak his Hainanese dialect. He would deliberately hide this fact and “secretly” partake as a member of his dialect group:

A part of me feels guilty and like a pity that I can't speak Hainanese... I feel that if I can't speak it, then I rather not tell people. So I keep secret about it. And I compare because some of my peers, my age, they can speak.” Ashamed. I feel very small. Like... my grandma comes to mind... that I had an opportunity for so many years, for 25 years of my life, but I didn't... use that to connect with her. It's only when I hear her speak to my dad or my uncle and then I go eavesdropping.

For Chuan, speaking the dialect represents “connection” and “kinship” to him. When explored further, he mentioned feeling “whole”, “round” and “warm”, “like in a bubble”, accompanied by unconscious circular hand movement:

When I eavesdrop on 2 other people's conversation, it feels like home because I'm actually eavesdropping on the conversation between my family members, my grandma and other people... It's totally foreign (the language). The interesting thing is I don't understand all the words. I have to hear it in a sentence before I intuitively make an intelligent guess about what it is about. And most of the time I'm right. So something interesting when I eavesdrop on people having a conversation, I feel like I want to join in and say “hey! I'm Hainanese too! I feel really close to you” but I don't dare to, there's a barrier because I can't speak it... When I meet friends or people who speak Hainanese, I feel the immediate connection, hey I understand. I feel that kinship. But then ashamed because I can understand but I can't speak.... At the Western (food) stall at my coffee shop (giggles), my father said that if he orders speaking Hainanese, he gets the food faster or extra food. I've also seen it in my primary school where my friends can speak to the drinks stall aunty. She gets very

excited. Exploring the sense of “kinship”. “The word “wholesome” comes to mind. I feel whole. Like round (laughs). I see myself in a bubble filled with warmth and connection and joy and excitement.

These feelings of “warmth” “connection” and “joy” are in stark contrast to the typical “quiet” atmosphere in Chuan’s home – “at the dinner table it is always quiet. And my mom would get frustrated because she feels it is too quiet. But when she starts talking (laughs) my dad would talk-over her then she gets frustrated also.” He also spoke of how “passion is a very distant word for me.”

Processwork Session

We began unfolding Chuan’s body symptom by having him experiment with sharp and blurry vision, allowing the blurriness to alter him. His initial experience of “fogginess”, “not solid” and “malleable” was accompanied by his forearms making slow circular motion. Eventually, Chuan’s fingers began to move and his body began to sway. He began turning with his arms outstretched. He became giggly, and a light-hearted and joyful atmosphere became present. As we continued to bring attention to the movements in his fingers and unfold the experience, he morphed into a tree:

It’s the like leaves rustling... phwww... phwww... It’s very peaceful.. umm... umm... I’m a tree (laughs), I’m very grounded (lifts heels up and presses them into the ground). These leaves are rustling. It’s very peaceful. Umm... I am in nature. I’m the only tree around. There’s a river flowing. I’m on the river bank. I’m the only tree. It’s a very wide umm,.. space with grass. It’s cooling, there’s a gentle breeze. Umm... smells like lemongrass (laughs)...

The leaves, they are rustling, they are hearing a story (laughs). They are playing. They are little leaves, like little kids, they are playing with each other. Umm... Umm... they are having fun umm... umm... (laughs deliciously). They are very umm... um... umm... (giggles) they are very playful... They can only move at where they are. So, if they umm.. fall they will die. So they are very stuck at where they are but they are still playing (smiles). They are just moving, talking to each other. (laughs) they are laughing, yea, they are laughing. They can’t wait to grow up (smile) to become like the tree. It’s ticklish when the wind blows (arms makes a wiggle)... and they laugh more (laughs in an intoxicated manner).

A paper fan was made to fan wind towards Chuan to amplify the experience. His process revealed a new quality of being “just is” like the leaves:

They (the leaves) are very tickled when the wind blows and they are friends with the wind... There’s a lot of joy. When the wind stops, they just stop, and then they just wait, they just wait patiently for the wind to come again. It’s like a cycle and umm... it’s “just is” (laughs). They are not like me always wondering oh when will the wind come. They are oh the wind is gone and they will just wait. (laughter) And they just wait and (laugh) when the wind comes, they... they... (laughs) they just play and laugh, and then just wait again, and it just repeats itself (laughs).. it just repeats itself all year long. It’s very simple.

There is connection, there is friendship. The camaraderie. The feeling of I’ve got your back. We are in this together. We wait together, we laugh, we laugh together. So Umm... umm.. when all laugh, then there’s more joy (big smile), more laughter, if one is alone, then it’s boring, sad. Yea... so... (laughs).

Chuan’s followed his process into the essence level. His fingers eventually stopped moving and his body began to sway lightly. He connected with the experience of “peace, simple peace” and motioned the shape of a circle with his arms in front of his torso to represent it. He further felt “very grounded... (hands gesturing a circle) this sphere is very, very full. Full of peace, very gentle energy”, which he drew out (Fig. 1).

The big tree that emerged from the unfolding of Chuan’s short-sightedness brings forth a big, warm, playful and spontaneous spirit that is grounded deeply, peaceful and whole, and has the ability to relate and create community. Chuan applied this essence energy to process his difficulty in approaching the authority figure at the organization he volunteered at to talk about his plan of reducing his level of involvement. With his essence level, he connected with the “compassion” of not “needing to be so perfect” that allowed him to speak for his needs.

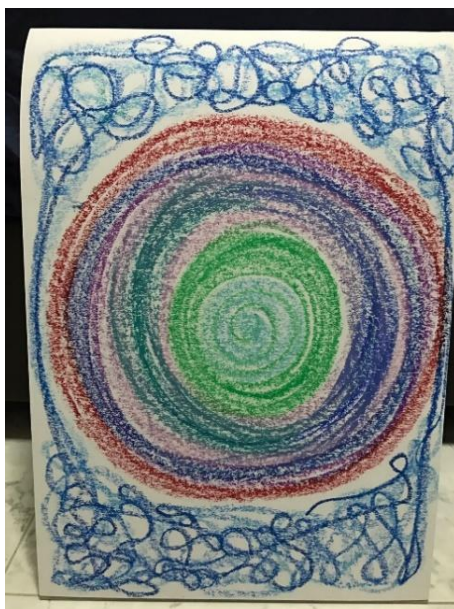


Figure 1. Chuan's sketch of his essence level energies.

4.2.2 Portrait 2 - Kenneth

Kenneth's account of his Singaporean Chinese experience is brought to life through his experiences with his immediate and extended family and his observations of how his upbringing differed from his peers.

Kenneth became myopic at 7 years old and has severe myopia. Wearing spectacles has become a part of his self-image; even if he surgically corrects his vision, he would "still get a pair of frames to wear, just to look more intellectual." He thinks a lot, "talking things out" is his primary mode of expression", making him "long-winded." His severe myopia also gives him significant fear and helplessness. He recounted having "anxiety... (that) tethers on the fringe of full blown fear" while moving "from pool to pool without my glasses... I cannot see" when learning swimming as a child.

He described himself as unambitious - "a terrible initiator... a bit of a wait-er... always in the middle... pretty happy being comfortable", he does not "stress himself out."

He had a “slightly outlier” and “very relaxed” upbringing compared to his peers as he was given a lot of freedom and autonomy by his parents:

Even though you sort of sense concern about school, my future, (and) my work from my immediate family, somehow my mom never talked about it. It’s almost felt like as if she’s trying to control herself to not control my life... My mom is pretty hands off about such things... she made it an effort to always tell me that you do what you want and you go do your best at that. Which I think it’s pretty rare for an Asian parent.... She left me to my own devices when it comes to school work. My dad was pretty absent after I passed age 5 according to my mother. I personally do not remember. But it was true that he was pretty absent during my growing up years. I didn’t need to refer to him or seek any kind of permission from him.

When asked about his Chinese roots, he spoke of the “face-saving” culture, meaning one should not “infringe or attempt to spoil that properness or image this Chinese person is trying to present to the public world”, otherwise “you are a bad person.” He is mindful about “doing things correctly, and getting it right”, and feels responsible for upholding good reputation for himself and others, as illustrated by this anecdote about his mother:

As much as my mom seems cool and very open, there are elements that are so rooted, that are very deep seated... Your upbringing is directly related to your parents’ reputation, if you behave poorly, it is a bad reflection on your parents, and this I even heard from my mom – she would say very clearly “can you imagine if you behave like this, how would people think about me? What would people think about your mother and how your mother brought you up? ”

This cultural pressure of propriety and “making best first impression” makes him “anxious” and “cautious”, forgetting a person’s name can make him “feel like I’m a bad person” and carries the consequence of embarrassment for him:

My mom was very big on me learning the correct term of address for different elders, I have to get the names right. If this was the Sixth Uncle, you better say Sixth Uncle and not Seventh Uncle... And because my dad side has such a huge family, I remember one of the pains, one of the anxieties that I always have during Chinese New Year was not remembering who was called what. Because that was so emphasized and if I got it wrong, I would be very embarrassed.

He further described how as a culture, we have a “strong association or adherence to the need for hierarchy or authority” because we need a “context to function in”. The hierarchy organizes our behaviours around one another, and also indicates the “official or higher authority” who will tell us what to do. Without the hierarchy, we are in effect “the same, if we are the same, then I wouldn’t give a shit about you.”

According to Kenneth, a person’s selfhood, subjective experience and individuality are also more secondary because the Chinese culture values the “preservation of the family unit, the cohesion, there is less emphasis on independence, there is more emphasis on group living, on community”. Kenneth also feels that the knowhow and encouragement to “have an inner life” are missing because of the culture’s preoccupation “with how we are seen by other people and to behave accordingly”. This has caused him to be “stuck” with the fear and anxiety instead of processing them.

The following secondary processes can be implied for Kenneth from his interview:

- i) Safety, potentially relaxation (versus fear of survival, physically and socially)
- ii) Silence and emptiness, potentially detachment (versus preoccupied with behaving right)
- iii) Taking charge, ambitious, directive (versus being a wait-er, always in the middle)
- iv) Self-authority (versus external authority from hierarchy; missing authority figures in parents)
- v) Genuine care, freedom and spontaneity in relating (versus coming from hierarchy, propriety)

Processwork Session

Conflicting edge experiences appeared soon after Kenneth took off his spectacles. He could not see beyond four inches in front of him making him instinctively freeze on the spot to avoid detection, yet another part of him wanted to turn around to check for danger and run away but was afraid of knocking or banging into something. After exploring these edges, he became aware that his body was swaying slightly and began sharing his long time fantasy of being “okay to walk in the world, and not have glasses, and have everything in a blur.”

He was encouraged to enter this fantasy. He walked about the room as he continued to process his thoughts and experiences out loud, and interacted with the objects and the space:

It’s a yearning, I wish I could do all these and be ok with the blurriness... Like I don’t have to deal with this, recognizing people... It’s like a mixture exhilarating and relaxing, there’s no worry, I don’t have to consider so many things, I just know what I want to do, and I go do it. And don’t have to answer to anyone... but there’s something holding me back, can I do this forever?

Catching his own edge, he remarked “I think a lot” and closed his eyes and exhaled.

He sat down in silence, dropping his head forward and slumped into the stool:

It’s like a sinking sound, duummm... (raises his hands and drops them, makes a high pitch to low pitch hum)... There’s a drop and a flattening (drops his arms and spreads them apart)...and peace, and then there’s stillness. It’s a just peace (arms gesture flatness), flat. This would be the desired state, no worries, no fears. (makes the high pitch to low pitch humming).

His next edge showed up, he began second guessing what letting go fully will be like. As he refocused on his process, he allowed his body to drop and tip over into a pillow, before flattening out on the ground. He experienced the following:

When I’m lying down, I’m flat, at peace. The realization is I’m excessive, there’s no difference before the point and after the point (relaxes and sinks into the floor,

stays quiet)... it's like you are at peace (exhales), very relaxed, no judgment, safety, no need to care about expectations... (talking less and taking longer quiet pauses).

Exploring his essence level, Kenneth was asked to find an earth spot with the above qualities. He found himself laying on grass under a canopy of trees, being embraced by them:

It's still a safety thing... a resting spot... plain nothingness, it's like free movement through water when you swim (waves arms around), it's not sinking, it's just suspended. There's nothing to hit into, no concept of depth, it's just being in everything

His essence advised him to "just relax". He had the epiphany that "when you sink and see nothing... nothing... is absolute creative space". From this nothingness, he saw the freedom of having "the choice of to stay, or look for what's next". Kenneth acknowledged that he had been "feeling trapped" by "putting all these efforts into maintaining all these rules and concepts and beliefs" and had become "frozen". Hence, only by "letting go", can he then create and build.

When prompted to feel into the essence of nothingness and express the creativity, Kenneth started to swing his arms about him. The more he amplified the movement, the more he exhaled. His began to step about, turning his body at the same time. He remarked that it felt "like infinity", "having all the space around him". He continued to move about the room, moving across a wider area, and making bigger and bigger movements with his body, raising his arms and bending his body. A sketch of the energies was drawn (Fig. 2).

With the session ending at this point, he was present to having more ease and confidence moving about the space without his spectacles instead of the fearsome feeling at the beginning of the process. He also connected with an inner voice that said to him:

There is no right or wrong, it's not my job to dictate, it's my job to let you know that if you make a decision, you have to bear the effects of it. I'm not here to judge

your actions. I'm just here to make you aware and remind you that whatever you choose, there are effects.

In summary, several secondary processes were unfolded, that of safety, being held, inner peace and detachment. In nothingness, Kenneth found non-duality, the freedom from right or wrong, the freedom of choice and also creativity, which essentially are about following his own authority and impulses. These qualities can potentially help develop his directive-ness and sense of ambition.

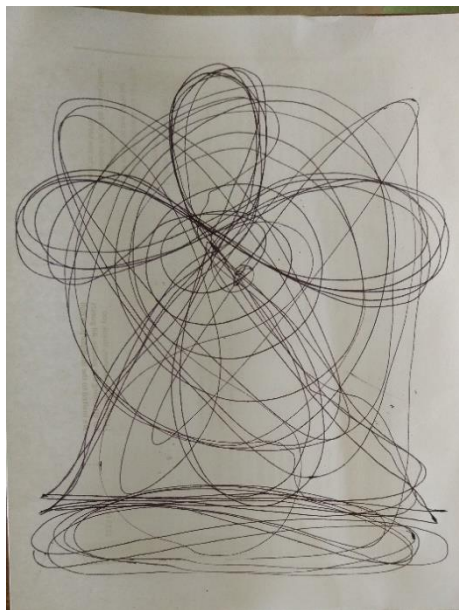


Figure 2. Kenneth's sketch of his essence level energies.

4.2.3 Portrait 3 - Boon

Boon's identity as an ethnic Chinese from Singapore was conveyed through his oppressive experience at home and when he was in high school. Boon has severe myopia at -700 dioptries and is seldom without his spectacles; he even wears it to sleep often out of convenience. When asked about his thoughts on the high rates of myopia in Singapore, Boon felt that it had to do with the very skeptical nature of Singaporean Chinese and our "attachment to the material" world; we "only believe in what can be seen, the scientific

thing; only what you can see is real”, making us “overly reliant on sight.” In other words, the Singaporean Chinese’s worldview is entrenched in consensus reality and what is evidence-able.

Boon’s parents dictated his life strongly. He referred to his mother as the quintessential Asian “Tiger Mom” depicted in Western media and his father as the “typical Chinese patriarch”. On being the “perfect picture” son for his mother, he said:

My mom always has this ideal image of who her son is... She would bring me out to all the art competitions... She’ll bring me everywhere to compete... So the competitiveness is always there. She has the perfect son doing well in school, getting a good job, that kind of thing... When I broke the thing (this image of the perfect son), she didn’t speak to me for 6 months plus before she reconciled her broken image and what reality is.

Boon’s father, on the other hand, has impressed upon Boon to shoulder the family’s “burden” since he was a child. Subsequently, Boon acquiesced to his father’s wish of choosing a stable, “money-making” vocation as an auditor and gave up his pursuit of the arts despite being talented:

He (Boon’s father) had his first heart attack (when I was nine years old). That was when he told me “oh, I’m going to die and you are going to be the person who is supporting the family”. That kind of situation happened 3 or 4 times, from having cancer, to diabetes, to heart attack... You feel that he is throwing you the burden all the time you are visiting in the hospital... it reinforces the working hard... my motivation and aspiration has been built around the survival conversation.

On the school front, Boon did well academically and attended an elite school founded by the Chinese community in the early 1900’s. During his time there, he felt that the school has “this consistent need to... fight to reinforce the “Chinese-ness... it must be protected”, which felt “stifling, unnecessarily structured and rigid”.

Coming from a modest background, he also experienced systemic oppression as an “outlier” at school because most of his peers were from affluent families. He had to work

harder than them. With the “odds stacked against” him, he had to develop “mental fortitude” to endure the physical, mental and emotional stress to “push yourself to the top of the situation”. It was especially incongruent to him when Chinese values such as “everybody is equal, the Chinese people must strive for the common good” were promoted by his school but his disadvantage and extra effort as a minority went unseen:

Everybody is coming to school in Merz (Mercedes cars) and whatever, and I take 1.5 hours by the stupid bus to get there and that sucks (laughs). And everybody goes on whichever school trip there is, and I have to think about it and chose one... I still could go but of course, there is this disparity. Of course, there will be a few rich kids group kind of thing. It is hard to break into some of these social groups there. When they say everybody can mingle in school that is not necessarily true. These are the subtleties that although very minute are very jarring at times.

Boon admitted that he has a lot of pent up anger and resentment and is prone to angry outbursts, including smashing a sibling’s laptop recently. He also described himself as a procrastinator, which stemmed from the fear of not meeting expectations, “If you don’t do it, you don’t have to face the reality that it didn’t turn out as expected.”

Boon’s primary narrative focused on the pressure, stress and unhappiness that he had gone through. Several of his edges were in the form of a pressure maker, which came from parental and cultural expectations. Possible secondary processes that can be inferred from Boon’s narrative are:

1. Personal power and inner authority. His anger and the authority figures in his life could represent his secondary power. Boon has shared that after ongoing personal depth work, he was able to come clean with his mother about not being the perfect son whom she thought his is, and he also left his job as an auditor despite his father’s strong disapproval.

2. Selfhood and individualism; freedom and choice. The Chinese culture emphasizes collectivism, sacrificing self for the benefit of the family unit, or the common good.
3. Vulnerability and being feeling. These are in contrast with Boon's fortitude and endurance that he has in order to survive through high stress environments.
4. Going into the unknown, non-consensus, subjective experience, this is in contrast to the skeptical and practical culture, and the need for scientific proof.

Processwork Session

As Boon unfolded his experience of blurriness, several signals showed up at the edge straight away - yawning and tearing up; lethargy, not wanting to move, yet fidgety; and the feeling of sadness. The fidgeting unfolded into in an edge figure that went "what's the profit? What's the point? What's the value? What would I get out of it?" Another part of Boon resisted back with repeated "don't force me."

As the yawning amplified, Boon's body slumped deeper and deeper into the sofa; he also detached from the above dialogue and became silent. His body appeared to be loosening up, each of his limbs stretched out one by one; he was lying almost flat across the sofa at this point, his jaws loosened next. He eventually dropped both arms and made himself comfortable. In this quiet and still state, Boon was prompted to go to an earth spot that captured the energy of his current state. He became the "sea of relaxation", which he remarked "it doesn't care". The session ran out of time at this point.

Hence, relaxation and detachment were unfolded from Boon's body symptom. These emergent qualities enabled Boon to ignore the pressure maker at his edge and gain the agency to follow his own inner experiences and his need to relax during the unfolding

of the process. Dreaming further into Boon's process, the essence of detachment could contribute further to his development of personal power and authority.

Perhaps Boon's short-sightedness also represented the essence of flow that is missing in the Singaporean Chinese culture. Earlier in the interview, he shared that our culture's ability to "flow" is constrained because behind the skepticism is a "strong attachment" to the material world and cultural ideologies. He gave the example of the Confucian teaching of 知足常乐 (joy of being content), while it represented going with the flow, being satisfied with what you have, and being in the present, we do not follow these values in achievement-oriented Singapore.

4.2.4 Portrait 4 - Robin

Robin's exploration of being "Singaporean" and "Chinese" was narrated through his relationships with his parents and his critique of the quirks he observed in his parents, and Singaporeans in general.

Robin was a former civil servant who attended Ivy League and Oxbridge institutions on prestigious government scholarships. This meant that he was from the upper echelons of Singapore's education system, earmarked for leadership roles in the government had he stayed in civil service. He enjoys "learning, enquiry and exploration, venturing into the unknown". He has a "bull-headed devotion to the truth" and being of "service to the highest good." He considers himself as not "having a fixed identity"; neither is he "conscious of my racial identity in Singapore... I don't feel like I'm particularly Chinese." If someone singles out his ethnicity, "it feels like you slapped a bunch of labels and expectations on to me."

He values personal freedom and freedom of expression the most because he “was so deprived of that” by his parents when he was younger, which made him feel “angry, overlooked and ignored”:

My father is the type who would tell us that whatever he gives to us we should just take it and not complain and be grateful... So there’s no choice, (laughs) there’s no space to express preferences and have the preferences honoured... with my mom I’m never free to express my own views without some possibility of a very strong reprisal.

He had analysed his parents’ mentality and imagined that it came from ancestors who were farmers back in China, “You have to go the field to work. If you don’t work... if you don’t follow the rules then you’ll have no rice to eat (laughs).” He further critiqued his parents for “constructing a box around themselves and everything must fit in that box”, causing a communication breakdown between them:

My dad has very fixed ideas... my mom has her rigid box that she’s controlling very rigidly... Anything that doesn’t fit in that box is condemned... they will ignore everything that’s outside of the box. When I happen to not really be in the box, the agrarian box (chuckles), it’s like talking to farmers sometimes.

His pursuit of freedom spurred him to work hard to receive his tertiary education overseas in order to escape a similar fate under Singapore’s education system:

When, I was in Secondary 3 (15 years old), I woke up in the middle of the night and started to do an analysis, a projection of the future... To be competitive in Singapore... I came to the conclusion that I needed to study overseas and study at a top university... After Junior College (18 years old)... (I saw that) I will be screwed not because of the competitiveness... I will have no freedom of expression of thought whatsoever. So it’s very important that I go get a good education somewhere else.

Robin also identifies as someone who is powerful, who “won’t take things lying down.” He was working on using power well towards others, desiring to have relationships that are uplifting and powerful for both parties. He added, “I have been working (on power issues) for a long time. Power is very neutral but can subvert one easily. To be effective in the

world I feel I need a certain degree of power but how to not misuse it and disempower people that is tough.” He was also learning how to build intimacy with people at the same time.

Robin’s experience of power through his father is a negative one. Nevertheless, it motivated Robin to “rise above to a position where he (the father) can no longer call me that (stupid)”:

Earlier in life, I get more pressure from my dad... He uses the word stupid very often. Every small little thing you get called stupid, after a while, the vengeance comes out. It had a very important impact on me... Over time, there was a desire to prove that he’s stupid (laughs)...Every time my father will say something slighting to me, he will say this is “激将法 (provocation method)⁴. It’s not because I really think that you are stupid, it’s because I want to motivate you.

However, when Robin did succeed in rising above his father academically, obtaining First Class Honours in Oxbridge, his father continued to “slight” him by deliberately asking for the number of people who obtained First Class and remarking “哦! 这么多人啊! (Wow, that’s a lot of people!)”, in an attempt to play down Robin’s achievement. When asked about his thoughts on his father’s slighting behaviour, Robin attributed it to the “false humility” in the Chinese culture, which he linked back to survival and power because “by playing meek... you won’t stand out and get killed.”

Robin has to be smart and pro-active in pursuing his freedom because self-hood is marginalized not just in Robin’s home environment but also in Singapore’s culture. He critiqued the Singaporean culture for being “boxed in”, that we have to keep within a

⁴ In response to the provocation method and the dismissive behaviour, the author would also like to share a Chinese superstition practice common in the older generations. A child would be called by a debasing nickname, for example, “Dog” or “Drain”, in the belief that it will make them hardier and survive. This nickname sometimes becomes the legal name.

“narrow line” (Section 4.1.2) or be judged; adding “if I turn up in the US in a witch’s hat no one will give a damn. If I turn up in a witch’s hat here, everyone might stare.” He also critiqued Singaporeans for lacking in “independent thinking... there’s always this dependence on something external... the government, parents, the norm... to serve as a guide, as a reference, as an authority figure to tell people what to do.”

In his critique of Singaporeans being afraid of being judged, Robin was being a judge-like figure himself, including calling his parents agrarian. As much as he identifies with not “having a fixed identity”, there are attributes that he values highly and exhibits consistently. Also, although he self-deprecatingly referred to himself as a “smarter farmer” compared to his parents, this is consistent with his display of high social and psychological rank, bringing to mind “false humility.” Possible secondary processes for Robin are

1. Qualities represented by the “farmer” or “agrarian” dream figure. Perhaps being simple-minded, using his intellect less.
2. Surrender, being in the moment, not going anywhere; versus active pursuit of freedom, needing to escape.
3. Deeper dreaming qualities behind “humility” and perhaps insignificance, this is versus the “false humility” in the culture.
4. Fully owning his rank and power.

Potentially, these secondary processes can support Robin’s interest in developing intimacy and better use of power and rank in his relationships.

Processwork Session

When Robin explored his experience of clear versus blurry vision, the former evoked the feelings of “need to”, “must”, always come, “get it done”, remarking that “it’s a

head thing”. Blurry vision made him lean into the sofa instinctively, feeling a “lull”, and “going beyond into another plane”, spreading his arms out at the same time. He was just beginning to feel altered and ungrounded from “falling asleep” and floating when he hit an edge. He reported that he stopped being altered just “before it becomes deep.” When Robin reconnected with his process at the point that he stopped, he described the feelings of “deeper” and “falling back”:

It’s more of a brrroooooohhhhhh all the way down (pushes cushion into the floor, eyes looking around)... there’s no floating, it’s just brrroooooosshhh.... (drops finger from above the head to the floor), all the way... there are a lot of energetic patterns... It’s rich and sparkling (shakes hands quickly and waves arms around).

Eventually, his arm movements felt like they were “reaching into somewhere that’s not in this world”, “it’s a totally new world... some interesting properties”, his became a ball “turned inside out” that “shoots out into the “unknown”, “transiting into new world after another.

Robin was edged out when he experienced “falling asleep” and floating and could not totally let go. When he resumed his process, his signals had switched to “falling back”, downwards and into the visual channel which was more known. Also, when he transited into a new world, one after another, this bears a pattern similar to his primary process of pursuing freedom and not wanting to be confined to a box.

Dreaming into his “falling asleep and float”, his secondary process could be along the lines of switching off his thinking mind, surrendering and losing control, allowing oneself to be altered and going into the unknown, and perhaps being in stasis.

Chapter 5. Discussion

In Chapter 4, we explored the known and unknown aspects of the primary identity of the Singaporean Chinese culture as well as myopia as a meaningful dreambody phenomenon at the individual level. Resuming the heuristic process, I allowed myself to sit with the material collected and mull, and notice the responses that the material evoked in me. In this chapter, I shall attempt to answer the final research question “how might myopia represent a collective dreaming in Singaporean Chinese.”

Myopia is a symbolic representation of the Chinese culture’s drive for survival. The culture, or primary process, is hardworking and pragmatic, as expressed in the common phrase “eat bitterness⁵, endure labour” (吃苦耐劳), having the fortitude to survive through “teeth-gritting” (咬紧牙根) hardship. Intelligence and scholastic achievements are valued highly because they pave the way for good careers and the financial means for a better life. Spectacles are associated with being studious and well-educated. Survival also takes the form of belonging to a group, hence, maintaining a good reputation in the eyes of others is important. The culture also values the survival of the collective over the individual. An individual has the duty to care about the betterment and survival of the collective, sometimes prioritizing it over the Self. Adherence to hierarchy and obedience to authority create order in the collective. These qualities followed our Chinese forefathers as they immigrated to Singapore, helping her through her turbulent beginnings and succeed as a young nation.

At the same time, Singapore sits in the confluence of Western and Eastern influences. The participants and I were born in an era where the Western culture has taken

⁵ The word for bitterness means hardship in Chinese as well.

precedence and any direct ties with our Chinese heritage was long gone. Borrowing Chuan's imagery of a big tree that appeared in his process, I felt like a branch that has been broken off from the tree and transplanted into an entirely different locale. I am not able to draw directly from the terrain and climes that the original big tree grew in. Yet strangely, I am a hologram copy of the original tree. I am the sum of all my Chinese predecessors who had come before me, I am part of the continuation of this lineage. There is something that runs deep and long that I cannot put a finger to that remains ineffable.

When I was younger, I felt a missing context and relevance in following the customs and culture, this made the enforcement and promotion of traditional practices and values on me feel contrived and oppressive for a large part. Even as an adult, I am expected to be obedient. As much as I can refuse to give in and oppose, I feel a lot of inner guilt, an inner critic that says "this is the wrong thing to do" and "I am being disrespectful". Like Kenneth, my paternal extended family is particular about proper address and respectful behaviour. I hated the formalities even as a young child, I felt that it was done for show; looking nice on the outside while family politics were ongoing, it was very incongruent. At school, the Chinese language teachers during my time perpetuated the traditional harsh, disciplinary style, making the learning process unenjoyable.

Moreover, there is the inevitable tension that forever exists between a person's individuality versus fitting into the majority cultural and social norms. Through this project, I wish to relate more with my heritage that I have marginalized and rejected, using Processwork to find the process of the collective that I am part of, to allow me to access the ineffable and to alchemically transmute the irrelevance I felt about my culture into my

sense of roots. Myopia with its stunningly-in-your-face presence in the population is chosen as the counterpoint for this exploration.

As I feel more deeply into why I chose myopia and why the expression “stunningly-in-your-face” above felt right, I am present to an irreverent sense of humour within, which is surreptitiously captured in this photograph (Fig. 3) of me taking my spectacles off and winking into the camera to activate its timer function. In the literal blur of the moment, irreverence here felt free and powerful, spontaneous and funny. It has the quality of detachment and disregard for authority, propriety and looking good. It brings people together. This brings to mind the big tree that appeared in Chuan’s process again and the qualities of camaraderie, joyfulness, intimacy, fun and just flowing with the seasons that came with it.



Figure 3. Photo of author.

From the unfolding of the process of the four participants and myself, the dreaming behind myopia appears to be bringing the following gifts to our heritage - the ability to detach and let go of control, surrendering into the unknown, tuning inwards and follow one’s inner subjective and numinous experiences; entering a state of non-duality and

stillness where free choice, creativity and flow exist, where we connect with our inner knowing and inner authority.

I have been edged out countless times in my writing process. As someone used to the “hard facts” and structure that qualitative science is based on, the freedom to explore and create in this qualitative study became ironically paralyzing. How am I qualified to make commentary about other people’s lives? How am I qualified to make social and cultural commentaries? A research idea that started off as fun, interesting and exciting became daunting. My primary persona trapped myself in a very rigid thinking of there must be a proper way of how things should be done but I do not know how.

Completing this thesis required me to cross my edges in many ways, to be not critical of my not knowing, connecting to my inner authority that says I have something valuable to contribute, and putting my thoughts out in a public and formal way (a dissertation). I also noticed that I had to switch from a thinking mode (factual, hard and rigid) to feeling my emotions (sensorial, feeling and fuzzy) more for my words and thoughts to flow.

How might myopia represent a collective dreaming for me and my Singaporean Chinese counterparts? As a heritage that already has the attributes to survive and be successful, we can be less serious and more fun and be relational with each other too. We are learning to flow between our inner worlds and consensus reality, be spontaneous and pick up more of our creative energies. We are identifying more with our inner freedom and power and empowering others to do the same. Thus in the blurriness that afflicts the majority of my folks, I found secondary energies that contain a vision into a more balanced creative future.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

Through the course of the thesis development, the element of relationship in this piece of research became more and more apparent. I was first struck by Chuan's imagery of his tree in his process and the stark contrast it made with the clinical aquaponics system that he used to describe Singapore's primary style of existence. I next noticed a very warm feeling of relationship whenever I go through my participant's transcripts. Lastly, as I answered my research question of "how might myopia represent a collective dreaming for Singaporean Chinese" I was very moved by the final vision that I saw - people relating with more warmth, closeness, empowerment acceptance. This gave me an epiphany for possible future community work in Singapore.

As a very young nation, nation building and sustainable harmony are still priorities for Singapore and her people, we are still learning how to navigate through our diversity and our concept of race. Myopia is a growing problem in Singapore regardless of race, it is a national phenomenon. The activities in this study can be adapted into community programs to explore the Singaporean identity, our diversity and foster relationship building among the people.

It has been an interesting and meaningful experience to use a chosen body symptom to explore cultural identity and a group's change process. What can be viewed as a physical disability has shown a way forward to a better future. What started as a personal curiosity about my heritage has evolved into a possible community vision.

Appendix I

INFORMED CONSENT

Research Title: Body Symptom as Collective Dreaming: first explorations with myopia

Researcher: Teng Nging TAN

Supervisor: Kas Robinson

Institution: Process Work Institute. 2049 NW Hoyt Street, Portland, Oregon 97209, USA

Invitation to Study

I am inviting you to participate in a research study that I am conducting as part of my Masters in Process Work program with the Process Work Institute. Thank you for taking time to look through this Informed Consent Form. This document will inform you about the nature of the research project, the data collection process, well as how we ensure confidentiality for the participant. Feel free to clarify any queries with me before giving your consent. Your interest is very much appreciated.

About this Research Project

Ethnic Chinese in Singapore have one of the highest rates of short-sightedness (a.k.a myopia or near-sightedness) in the world. I am interested to find out if the subjective experience of short-sightedness, as explored using Process Work methodology, can be meaningful and bring new insights for the short-sighted person. I am also interested to find out if there are any common themes in the insights that might be relevant to the collective experience of being Chinese in Singapore.

What to Expect

If you agree to take part in this research, I will first interview you to collect your demographic data; your experience and associations with short-sightedness; and your experience and association with being Chinese in Singapore. This can be done over telecommunication or in person. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed into text for contextual analysis. This is followed by the experiential exploration of your short-

sightedness facilitated by me. In brief, I will be facilitating you to get in touch with, and follow less known aspects of your short-sighted experience that you might not pay attention to in your day to day life. For this experiential segment of the work, it will be video-recorded and audio-recorded for transcription and analysis. Both parts can be completed in one session or in two separate sessions; I estimate it will take between 1.5hr – 2hr of your time in total.

It may be necessary for me to contact you after the sessions to clarify some of the information from the interview. You may request an electronic copy of the submitted thesis upon the study's completion.

Possible Benefit

The exploration of your eye-sight experience might uncover something meaningful or lead to new insights for you, or add to your personal discovery journey.

Confidentiality and Use of Collected Data

To ensure confidentiality, your name or identity or contact information or any identifying information will not be included in the thesis, transcripts, presentation or publications resulting from the study. A pseudonym will be assigned to you instead. All interview documents, video and audio media will be destroyed once the study is complete.

The actual video and audio material recorded will not be made available or accessible to the public they will be accessible to only to me and to my supervisor for analysis. For thesis, presentation and publication purposes, the video and audio material will be converted to transcripts with your anonymity protected as described in the preceding paragraph.

Participation in the Study and Withdrawal

The decision to participate in this study is totally voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you do, this will not affect how you are treated in anyway. In any event, your interest and involvement is respected and very much appreciated.

Questions/Concerns:

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact me⁶ by telephone or email.

CONSENT

Subject: The research project and the procedures have been explained to me by the researcher. I agree to participate in this study. My participation is voluntary and I do not have to sign this form if I do not want to be part of this research project.

Signature of Subject: _____

Signature of Researcher:

Date: _____

Date: _____

⁶ Details of the phone number and email are omitted in the Appendix for the author's privacy.

Appendix II

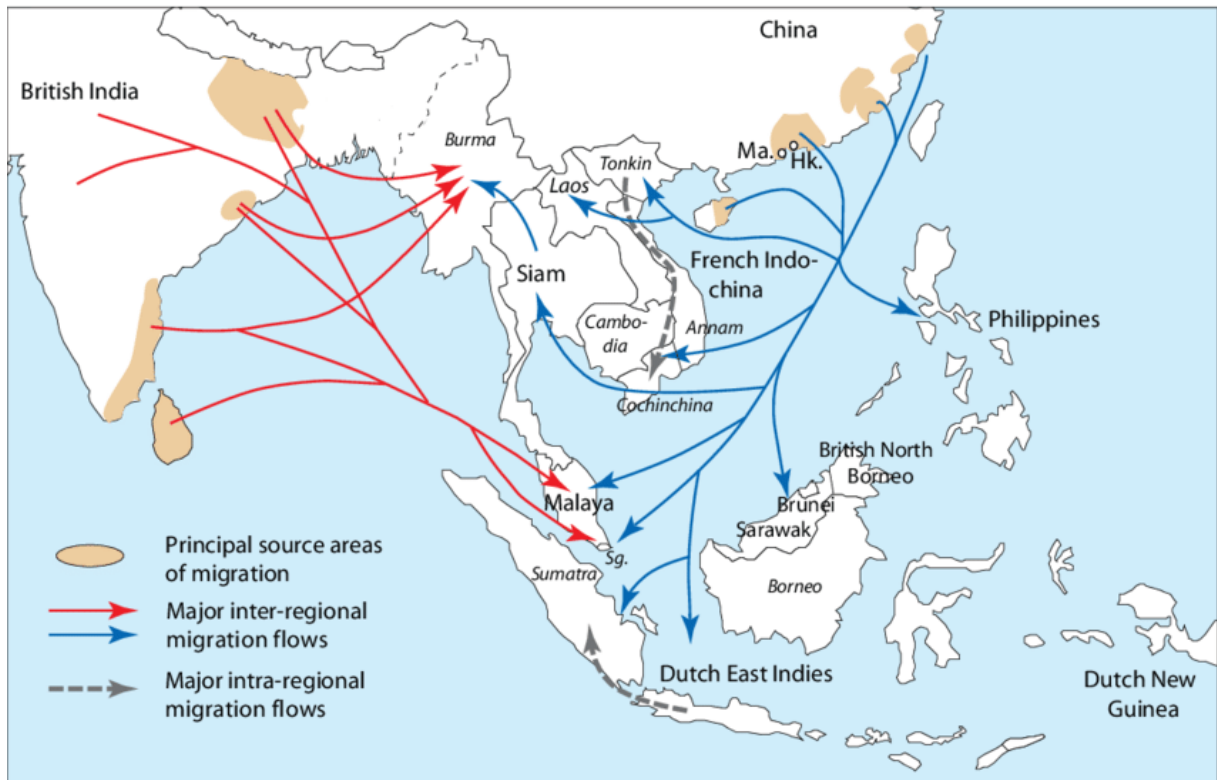


Figure 4. Origins of Chinese and Indian migrants in Singapore during colonial era.

Reproduced from Husa & Wohlschlägl (2014).

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