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蒙上眼睛，就以爲看不見 Repress your eyes, so you thought you couldn't see it My Aunties and Uncles Taught Me to Feel The World

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Editor's note: This piece was written and produced before the current uprisings and outcry against the state-sanctioned murder of George Floyd (and the deaths of too many others, including Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery), anti-Black racism, and police brutality in the U.S. Thus, while not directly addressing the current protests, this reflection on the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and wisdom from womanist healers offers insight to a lineage of activism and how Asian Americans can channel the deep and overwhelming emotions of this time, as the people cry out: Black lives matter.

My parents tell me that in the weeks following the crackdown on the protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, I stomped around our living room singing 歷史的傷口 The Wound of History. “蒙上眼睛，就以爲看不見 Repress your eyes, so you thought you couldn't see it.” At this point, just like when the church aunties taught us hand motions as we sang the children's chorus, “Oh, be careful, little eyes what you see,” I'd cover my eyes.

“捂上耳朵，就以爲聽不到 Cover your ears, then you thought you couldn't hear it.” “Oh, be careful, little ears what you hear.” I'd cover my ears.

I'd sing the rest with much conviction: “而真理在心中 But the truth within our hearts, 創痛在胸口 the pain in our chests 還要忍多久 How much longer to endure, 還要沉默多久 How long must we be silenced?”

I was 3 years old. I don't know if I knew what I was singing about when I sang of the wound of history. I saw my parents and my church aunties and uncles gathered around television screens watching what appeared to be a very large gathering of people holding signs and wearing headbands with Chinese writing on them, and then suddenly the scenes were of fire, sounds of gunshots, and one lone man standing in the way of a row of tanks. I watched as the adults in my life cried. I thought that was what kids did. I didn't know that grown-ups could cry too.

“The Wound of History” was the song that I picked up from watching television in the living room with my aunties and uncles. I remember it all quite vividly, though few believe me. The ones who do recall my antics like to pat my head some 30 years later and say that I was a very special child, with all of what that statement implies. But I have evidence that my singing of this song really happened. An uncle at church, moved by my 3-year-old singing, recorded “The Wound of History” on a cassette tape in a loop so that I could play it over and over again. People these days joke that when you go to a Tiananmen redress demonstration, that is the only song that plays, as if on loop.

I tell this story because I understand that one of the big questions that my sisters and brothers in the Chinese church in America are still asking — and have been asking since my childhood, and before — is what to do about the second generation. This question is particularly relevant when it comes to the role of the church in a secular society. In my experience, many people in the church, whether they

voice it this way or not (and especially if they deny it), aspire to have some impact on the world. Young people, I hear, are key to this mission.

In this time of the novel coronavirus when history itself is being wounded again, this line of inquiry seems especially pressing. As some journalists and scholars have already been noting, Chinese churches are at the forefront of getting transnational news about COVID-19 while also bearing the brunt of anti-Asian racism for it. A statement has already been put out by a coalition of Asian American evangelicals about this pandemic dynamic, and I don't have much to add. But I confess I wonder if my insights from childhood could add to reflections about these times, though I'd say it's too early to say yet.

It would be easy for me to complain about my experience in the Chinese church — it's not in vogue for folks like me to have anything positive to say about it — but the aunties and uncles at my Chinese church showed me as a child how such real-world engagement is done. This formative experience when I was 3 counts, I feel, whether or not the adults in my life actually intended to teach me anything through their own deeply felt emotions. In fact, I think I probably learned more from how they allowed themselves to feel things about the world than from their formal Sunday school curricula and children's programs. As Anna Freud once pointed out to kindergarten teachers, what may look like behavioral problems in a classroom of 5-year-olds is the activity of kids who have already had five years of life experience, but who do not yet have language to express that experience in words, so they act it out in their bodies. I don't know if it's strange that I can remember what happened when I was 3, but I do know that most people retain their memories in the way they act in everyday life.

In the months after Tiananmen, our church discovered Vineyard songs. Here was another strange sight. Aunties and uncles huddled around a projector screen, raising their hands singing "More Love, More Power" and "Draw Me Closer" with their hands raised to God. My mother was pregnant with my little sister, and I remember going home and putting my head on her tummy, feeling my sister move inside my mom. I associated those songs and bodily experiences with all of what I felt that night, and I added them to my living room repertoire, with the same feeling as "The Wound of History". I am sure that another cassette tape was produced for me. I remember asking my mom why everyone was crying. She said it was because they were 好感動 well emotionally moved and by that, you know that we were Cantonese (the Mandarin speakers said they were 很感動 very emotionally moved).

At an early age, the wisdom I learned from my church family was not in words. Sure, there was language — Mandarin, Cantonese, and English all at the same time — but what I was getting from my mom and dad, aunties and uncles, was a sense of how feelings can move your body and transform into song. It is a little bit like that Mandarin chorus that many Cantonese churches like to sing nowadays, that when our hearts are melted by the love of our Heavenly Father, then our prayer rises like incense, "讓我們獻出每個音符 把它化為讚美之泉 that every musical note we emit may transfigure into a stream of praise."

I have been re-reading the Book of Proverbs because I learned in Sunday school that is the book of wisdom, and as an adult now, especially with all that is going on in the world, I feel that I need it. I am starting to see this same dynamic in the Bible. Lady Wisdom, the Mentor, and the mothers of kings address simpleminded children like me and — like the womanist healers of our time, from Alice Walker to adrienne maree brown, who conceive of social justice as work that happens at the kitchen table — they invite us to come into their house built with seven pillars and feast. The insight of Proverbs is that even before we have words to articulate it, our bodies are being trained to feel that which constitutes the foundations of the earth, detecting its perversions and groaning with it to be put right. This is why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. When your body encounters the presence of the supernatural, such an experience is not only moving, but also, as Zora Neale Hurston

of blessed memory showed us, mysterious and terrifying. Christian faith, I learned from an early age, is not really about ideas. It's about a relationship that begins at the kitchen table that invites participation in the work of justice, of reverting the perverse and recapitulating the cosmos. Doing that, Lady Wisdom reminds us, begins with the deep feeling that we share together, perhaps beyond words.

What was happening when I was 3 was that, through feeling the way the adults around me were experiencing the world, I was learning how to feel and express those feelings too. This means that my church family was not separate from the world. This is why tears fell for Tiananmen, as we felt as a community this wound of history in our bodies. I feel often what we young people take away from the church is the message, "Oh, be careful, little eyes, what you see" and "oh, be careful, little ears, what you hear," that we are supposed to repress our eyes and cover our ears to what is going around us. We therefore complain that the church is becoming irrelevant to our lives, much less the world that is undergoing so much suffering and injustice; this is, in fact, a typical second-generation gripe about the churches of our childhood, and I too have often joined this chorus, usually with good reason.

Yet if I make an honest reflection, what my aunts and uncles showed me — regardless of how their sheltering and protecting could be described at some points as smothering my peers and me — was that I too could engage in full force with the world by seeing and hearing it. I don't know if any auntie or uncle would be comfortable hearing that this full-bodied affective posture to the world was what I took from them; they probably wish they had been more stoic. But I am thankful to them for their humanity, for in giving in to their own emotions, they inadvertently taught me to listen for God's heartbeat in the same way I put my head to my mother's belly to feel my baby sister kicking. What my church modeled for me, more in practice than in words, was to not repress my feelings. It was to allow them to be transfigured into a stream of praise to the One up above who is looking down in love.

The channeling of the deep emotion that we experience about what is happening in the world into its theological transfiguration, is probably the greatest lesson my 3-year-old self learned about the relationship between church and society. It might even suggest ways forward for what we Chinese Christians might discern theologically through this current pandemic. The point of a public health crisis is that, like the wound of history, we are forced to pay attention to our bodies and what they feel. Doing so may save our lives as well as those around us, while overriding our feelings with ideas about abstract notions of freedom that are not tied to how our bodies and planet actually work may well be the kiss of death. But I'm saying too much again, because figuring out how my body feels about this very raw and developing situation is a day-to-day process for me right now. Maybe that's why I'm thinking about my early childhood at this moment. I can't make heads or tails of what's going on, let alone say anything wise about it. But if I learn to feel again the way my aunts and uncles taught me, then perhaps at least this moment might be transfigured into music, and in such transfiguration, some theological discernment about the state of the world might eventually be possible.