

Voice, Function and Resistance across Bodies

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Introduction

Hello everyone, my name is Chan Yi Qian.
I am currently a Master's student at Waseda University, Japan.
I have been living in Tokyo since last year, and I returned to Singapore last week.
In this performance presentation, I will be performing live text-to-speech.
Basically, text-to-speech is what you are seeing and then hearing right now.
My performance presentation is on voice, function and resistance across bodies.
It all began when I started living in Japan last year.

March 2025, just landed in Japan

Immediately, my menstruation, also known as my period, became abnormal.
Without going into too much detail, my period lasted much longer than usual.
I got concerned, so in May last year, I saw a doctor who could speak English.
I took a blood test and an ultrasound scan of my womb.
My hormone levels came out fine, as was the ultrasound scan.
During the ultrasound scan, I had a live viewing of the eggs in my ovaries.
Observing my ovaries, I thought about my grandmother, fondly known as ahma.

Background

I vividly remember my mum telling me a story about ahma.
One day, Japanese soldiers came looking for ahma and other Chinese people.
She survived because she was hiding in a chest at her Malay neighbour's house.
I learnt that ahma carried a part of me in her womb.
A female is born with all the egg cells she will ever have.
A small part of me was inside my mother when she was still inside her mother.
A part of my womb resisted being in Japan.

The doctor told me she didn't know what was wrong with me.
Still, she prescribed me Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), saying it might help.
Immediately, and to my surprise, my body physically functioned properly again.
But also to my surprise, my emotional body was resisting function.
I would randomly find myself crying, or trying not to cry, all the time.
I cried while cutting a kiwi fruit. I cried while on a walk. I cried after a lovely day.
There was no reason for me to cry, so I was pretty confused.

25 June 2025

One month later in June, I visited the doctor's for a follow-up consultation. I told her about my period being "normal" again, and my abnormal crying sessions. The doctor suggested I continue with TCM, and to monitor my emotional state. Using a period tracking app, it felt weird to separate my emotions into categories. What is the difference between "sad", "sensitive", "irritable" and "not in control"? One emotion that was not available as a choice in the app is "confusion". Every inexplicable crying session left me in confusion.

Methodology

I mean, tears are supposed to mean something, right?
Each time I felt the immense urge to cry, I would conduct deep reflection sessions. Am I crying because of this one specific incident I suppressed in my memory that is now coming up because I am trying to find a valid reason as to why I am crying?
Maybe, I thought and cried simultaneously.
The next day, I cried again, so I would shuffle through different memories. I was hoping that if I found the "right" reason, maybe the crying would stop.

I was healing, still crying, and also running low on memories I wanted to revisit. Okay, if it is not an internal factor, it might be an external one, I thought. Hypothesising that it could be an external factor, I conducted my own experiments. I tried consumerism as a distraction. It didn't work, as you might have guessed. I tried only listening to happy songs. I cried to many happy songs. I experimented with my diet, my night routine, my morning routine... There were many variables I tested, and I was crying through all of them.

Background

During this time, I also experienced something very interesting in my body. Ever since landing in Japan, I have felt an inner resistance to learning Japanese. This was weird to me, because I love learning languages. And I wanted to learn Japanese, since it will definitely help me function in Japan. I would attempt to start learning, but I literally couldn't bring myself to continue. There was no reason for me to not learn Japanese, so I was pretty confused. There is an active voice in my body that resisted, and I, crying, had to listen.

Discussion

Interestingly, I felt that my crying did not stem from sadness. The tears just felt... neutral. And the crying somehow did not feel like it came from me, if that makes sense. These crying sessions just felt like it was a release of some kind.

Connecting my resistance to learning Japanese
with the resistance in my womb,
with the random crying sessions...

Maybe ahma is trying to speak through me.
Maybe ahma is actively resisting my body being in Japan.
Maybe ahma had some unresolved trauma during WWII.
Even without direct exposure to the original event,
trauma experienced by one generation can impact subsequent generations.
This is called "intergenerational trauma".
Maybe I am just trying to make sense of it all.

October 2025

I blinked my eyes and it was October, five months since starting TCM.
I called my friend and updated her about this entire situation.
She was unsure about my theory of intergenerational trauma with ahma.
But she reminded me that resistance is possible.
Immediately, I stopped taking the medication the doctor prescribed.
My random crying sessions slowly faded from my memory.
I was back to "normal"!

March 2026, just landed in Japan

I blinked my eyes and it was March, five months since stopping TCM.
In March this year, I started crying again for no reason.
Tears once again randomly flowed out of my body, over the next five months.
Also, my period started becoming irregularly irregular again.
I have been bleeding for two months straight, with a one-week break in-between.
One time, I cried in front of my friend, and she asked me what was wrong.
I said, I wish I knew too. And I laughed a little because it just felt so absurd.

Methodology

This year, I conducted another experiment.
I had plans to visit Taiwan and South Korea in June this year.
I monitored my emotional state to the best of my abilities, in all three countries.
The results: I did not cry in Taiwan and South Korea, and I cried in Japan.
Maybe I was just busier in Taiwan and South Korea, so I had no time to cry...
Maybe there are too many variables and it was just a random coincidence...
Maybe it is Japan...

7 April 2026

Over dinner,
mum said she didn't remember the story of ahma and WWII.
Dad said he did for his side.
His parents likely hid somewhere,
maybe in caves,
from the Japanese.
Hmm! I have a family lineage of hiding...

14 July 2026, 11PM ish

when i'm by myself, i feel like i am going to die
staring at nothing, in tears
ah! ah!!!
should i reach out to someone? i am grateful that my friends check in on me. but what are they
gonna do? also my tears, i think only comes out when i am alone
earlier today my friend said i looked very happy (i am!)
lol crying while listening to
The Notorious B.I.G. - Greatest Hits (Full Album) | Biggie Greatest Hits Playlist

15 July 2026, 12.20AM

just washed out the period stains on my panties and pants
maybe i am on my period
(actual??)
and not just spotting?
maybe earlier crash out was just pms??
was feeling kinda reckless earlier
(i.e wanting to ask my guy friend to keep me company over the next few days in case i crash out
more)

Discussion

I have been living in Tokyo since last year, and I returned to Singapore last week.
I told my mother that my period is still as weird as ever, maybe even weirder now.
She paused and said, actually my period was like that too when I was younger.
My period is irregular, sometimes nothing for months, and sometimes for months.
Hmm! Perhaps this is hereditary, and I have nothing to worry about?
Should I go and see the doctor again, or let my body do its thing?
Which of these voices should I listen to, and which should I resist?

28 July 2026

Real-Time Update:

Am I still bleeding now?

No.

I was bleeding for two months until the day I submitted these slides, which was last week.

Am I still randomly crying these days?

Yes.

The tears accompanied me from Japan to Singapore.

I wanted to cry on the MRT.

I wanted to cry while walking.

I want to cry now, but I have to voice the text.

How am I feeling now?

I am feeling like a grateful waterbody.

*I am grateful to have lovely friends and family,
but there is also so much to cry about in this world.*

*In my abstract, I wrote that I will tell ahma about what has happened in Japan,
but ahma tia buay tiok english eh... ahma does not understand english...
i wonder if there is a translator in the spirit realm*

Who am I to speak for you?



Limitations

Who am I to speak for you?

Before this work you are experiencing now, I made two related works.

In these earlier works, I referenced Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO).

OOO posits that reality does not only exist from a human perspective.

Objects have agency and possess their own unique relations with other objects.

Objects, such as paintings, have their own essence beyond human access.

I become your voice, functioning with resistance.

I can only speak a little bit of the languages my ahma spoke.

Ahma, wa si yi qian.

She mainly spoke Teochew, which is a Chinese dialect.

Wa diam diam 哭 eh...

She also spoke a little bit of Malay and Singlish.

一点点 tak boleh tahan leh.

I usually spoke to ahma in a little bit of Teochew and Chinese.

Wa eh 眼泪 si le eh 眼泪 ah?

最近、日本語が少し話せます。

Ahma, wa 最近 aye hiao 一点日语.

I wonder how ahma would feel if she knew I was talking about her.

Wa ai ga le gong wei.

I wonder how ahma would feel if she knew I spoke the language of her trauma.

Le si ai eng wa gong wei ah?

Actually, do I even have the authority to be speaking about you?

Dang si wa tia buay diok leh...

Discussion

How can I prove that you are real?

You are proof that I am real.

But there is no hard evidence.

Then it shall be soft.

Round, round and round.

Let it swirl,
unfurl,
Whirl.

Results

The most plausible reason for my random crying is that it is a side effect of TCM.
I still don't really know where the resistance to learn Japanese is coming from,
but I plan to sit, listen and share that there is no need to hide anymore.
In the end, maybe the tears I release have no underlying meaning.
Maybe the tears were an opportunity for me to just be present with myself.
I was trying so hard to make logical sense of my bodily changes.
But perhaps not everything needs to make sense.

Conclusion

Here, voice swirls,
function unfurls,
and resistance whirls.
This work has been activated with voice, function and resistance across bodies.
Here, I am grateful to be,
and I am grateful to your being.
Thank you for being here.

After Conclusion, in Japan

21 September 2026, 9.20AM

Woke up in tears
I feel fragments, with the wholeness of the experience
I attended a talk about a researcher who interviewed people who have experienced trauma
Babies also experience trauma
She found that when babies grow up, they find it a little harder to process their experiences
I wonder if a zygote can store trauma too
Should I be comforting my grandmother? Or what should I do...????
How do I process something I have not directly experienced?
History of hiding in my lineage. Hiding, waiting, forest, prayer chest.
I don't want to hide anymore.

29 September 2026

(On Shodoshima, Japan)

I feel the island spirits bubble and spiral in my body.
As and when it pleases, the sea spirits gift me the tides.
If the tide is high, I breathe salty water that flows through me with ease.
Even during low tide, my experience of the world sways and aches.

My heart aches and aches
with feelings I have yet to understand
The aching radiates and transforms my body
in ways I have yet to discover

On days with strong winds, I close my eyes and let the bubbling waves crash over me
On days with weak winds, I breathe in sharp smells that remind me of the tide's presence

Now, I live in fermented time
Time spirals in all directions
Let's float together, along the waves of fermented time