



# Daydreams as entry points to counter stories

by Hong-Ru Liang



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## Abstract

This paper explores using clients' self-reported reveries or daydreams as entry points to counter stories. Daydreams can represent moments of resistance to social expectations: small cracks in the walls of separation that oppressive discourses can build between people and their hopes and values. This paper shares conversations that emerged from attending to people's daydreams, using narrative enquiries to explore the ways in which daydreams might represent the 'yang' that counters the 'yin' of the problem story, and helping to balance oppressive discourses by raising the status of treasured values and meaningful people and relationships. Reveries can represent alternative sites from which to explore and practice our values and principles.

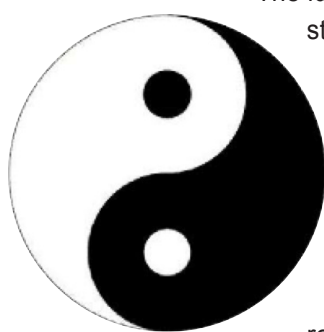
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Behind their presenting problems, people are often facing multiple oppressive discourses: gender inequality and discrimination, agism, racism, colonialism, the stigmatisation of physical illness and mental health issues, or political and organisational inequity. I work with people not only in relation to the problems they bring to counselling, but in relation to the often-hidden discourses that support and reinforce the problems.

Let us imagine that those oppressive discourses heap heavy, burdening stories on your left shoulder making you lose your balance as you try to move forward and bending your direction. There seem to be two methods to handle the situation: remove the burdening stories to maintain balance or add a counter-story on the other side to maintain balance.



The idea of balancing a problem story with counter stories resonates with the yin and yang concept in Chinese philosophy, which is well known and used by most Chinese people. In a very simple way, yin and yang can be represented by this figure:

Here, the white parts stand for yang, meaning positive, obvious, active, and expansive. The black stands for yin, meaning negative, hidden, passive and contracting. These forces transform into each other and coexist interdependently. According to Chinese philosophy, if you want to understand and deal with something well, you have to know both its yin and its yang and understand how these aspects interact.

I began to think that if a problem and its supporting discourses were understood as the *yin* of a person's life, what must be the *yang* of the persons' life? According to Chinese philosophy, there must be something maintaining the balance for the person's life to be continuing. I wondered, in David Epston's words, 'how do they go about the living of their life?' (Epston, as quoted in Denborough, 2001, p. 181). How do they spend their time? Beyond fulfilling basic physical needs, reverie (daydreaming) might be one of the most common mental activities people engage in. Might daydreaming be an entry point to representing the yang of a person's life? Could it be used as a starting point for the development of counter stories?

Soon after this reverie of my own, some of my clients shared their daydreams with me.

## A reverie about growing old together

I had just woken up from my midday nap. I was sitting on my bed and looked to the living room. I saw him. He was very old and had white hair, but I knew it was him. He was carefully and slowly making tea. Two cups were on the table, steam was rising from the tea, and I knew one cup was for me and the other was for him. He was waiting for me to wake up and for us to have tea together. I was old too. It seemed that he and I had lived a long life together and grown old together.

Hua related this daydream with tears in her eyes and I was deeply touched. I asked her: 'can you tell me why or how this reverie is meaningful for you?' She replied: 'I want to grow old together with him just like in the reverie, but I know it's not possible!' I had been working with Hua for some time, and connected this with other narratives she carried. Hua was highly ambitious in her professional career. In order to pursue a higher education and opportunities for career development, she had left her hometown at a very young age and had moved from city to city. She had done well in her career but experienced difficulties in relationships. As she approached 30 years of age, Hua was identified as an 'unsettled' woman – not the kind of woman men are seen as wanting to settle down with. Her parents had never recognised Hua's professional achievements, and saw her career as an increasing barrier to finding a good marriage. These discourses led Hua to lose her confidence in being a good partner. She had come to identify herself as 'worthless for being loved'. These ideas became an internal voice mumbling about her 'worthlessness' and saying that she would end up dying alone. When Hua met the 'him' in the reverie recounted above, she felt conflicted and came to consult with me.

The reverie gave Hua a safe piece of ground on which to stand (a riverbank position, see White & Morgan, 2006) while discussing the depressing discourses affecting her life, and connected Hua to treasured dreams about relationship. We began our conversation with this reverie, and I introduced a number of narrative enquiries, including re-authoring questions.

**Hong-Ru:** Hua, have you ever had a similar reverie about growing old together with someone?

**Hua:** No, I dare not! You know there is a voice inside that keeps telling me I am worthless and that no-one will really love me. I will die alone in my house and my corpse won't

be found for days and will be eaten by my cats. My death will only be noticed when my neighbour smells my dead body and decides to call the police and the TV news will come [fear on her face and on the verge of tears].

**Hong-Ru:** Okay, so this is the first time you've daydreamed about growing old together with someone?

**Hua:** Yes, it's the first time.

**Hong-Ru:** So can you tell me what's so special that this first ever reverie about growing old together happened? Maybe it's about your relationship with him or something about you, or maybe something else.

**Hua:** Oh, that's a good question. I think it's about the relationship between us.

**Hong-Ru:** Great. Can you tell me more specifically about what in the relationship between you speaks to a future of growing old together?

**Hua:** I think it's about standing up, protecting each other as a team. We have some business collaborations and he works for his father's company ... OMG, do I sound like an old lady who is sexually harassing handsome young men in a workplace?

**Hong-Ru:** What do you mean by 'standing up, protecting each other as a team'? How do you and he do this?

**Hua:** Oh, it's like this: almost every time his father talks about him, it's a criticism. It sounds like he does nothing well, but actually he is a really responsible partner and works hard. I would give him my approval as a senior colleague in the field even if I was not attracted to him personally. Even though I know it's not appropriate, I will reply to his father with my honest thoughts: 'your son is good, very good'. And he will do the same when he introduces me to other potential business partners or his friends. He has talked about my master's degree and other professional certifications. And it's not in a business way but in a very sincere way. I am touched by his honesty. It seems to me that he really appreciates me.

**Hong-Ru:** What do you treasure about in this 'standing up, protecting each other as a team' relationship?

**Hua:** Is it the 'unconditional love'?

**Hong-Ru:** What do you mean by 'unconditional love'?

**Hua:** You therapist guys always talk about this, don't you?

**Hong-Ru:** I might know what I mean by it, but I would like to know more about what it means in your life.

**Hua:** Sure. It's like someone standing beside you whatever happens. Having support through difficulties.

**Hong-Ru:** Can you tell me which of you two started this 'unconditional love'? You or him? Or at the same time?

**Hua:** It would have been me? I think it was me first and then he reciprocated.

**Hong-Ru:** So, it seems to me that you started a 'standing up, protecting each other as a team' relationship with 'unconditional love', and then a reverie about growing old together with him happened to you. Can I say that?

**Hua:** Well, you can say it.

**Hong-Ru:** What does this story say about you taking action to start a relationship that makes you dare to entertain a reverie about growing old together with someone for the first time?

**Hua:** Hmm, you mean I can give myself hope by my own actions?

**Hong-Ru:** Do you think so?

**Hua:** Wow, as a conclusion from a daydreaming, it's too big. But I like the logic and I will try to see things this way. I will see what I can do for my relationships.

Hua did start a relationship with the young man, and although there were difficulties, she could hold on to the knowledge that she could 'give myself hope by my own actions'. Hua used to ask fortune tellers or friends to predict the longevity of her romantic relationships, and what was said would seriously affect her emotions.

Now, although she would still sometimes seek predictions from friends or fortune tellers when feeling uncertain, she cared less about what the others said, and focused more on what she could do.

The 'worthless' and 'dying alone' discourses were still there, but Hua was able to access different stories through her reveries. She continued to share her reveries with me in our counselling conversations, and she developed some new knowledge through them. For example, Hua had a quarrel with her boyfriend, and it happened that the young man was busy working on a project, so he could make little time to see her. After a couple days, the voice began to tell Hua, 'you see – you've been abandoned! You should have known that he is not that into you! You are not worthy of his love!' She felt disappointed and almost made the decision to end this relationship. However, as she was walking home from her office, she passed a young couple walking slowly hand in hand and talking about how beautiful the day's sunset was. Hua stood still and daydreamed about doing the same thing with her boyfriend. She felt herself strongly missing him. Then she took out her cell phone and sent him a message asking if he had time to see how beautiful the sunset was. Then, even though he was still busy working, they had a wonderful exchange of messages and Hua felt proud that she had done something to protect her relationship from the voices. She had been able to hold herself back from giving up and regained her confidence despite the pressure from those discourses.

With the encouragement of her boyfriend, Hua also stood up to the continual sexual harassment in her office, and it stopped. Previously, her friends and family members had always suggested that she keep silent about what they described as a 'usual' thing in an office. Hua said: 'Once you are sure that you are worthy of someone's love and protection, you can't bear this kind of humiliation anymore'.

### ***Reflections and inspirations from Hua's story***

When oppressive discourses, such as sexism, ageism and individualism, co-operate together to form a wall isolating people from their hope, it's difficult to fight each of them separately and equally. The spontaneous reveries that Hua recounted broke open a small crack in this wall, an entry point to different stories. In Hua's case, the reverie of growing old together with the young man offered an opening to a story that differed from those about her 'worthlessness' as a woman and about dying single and alone. New claims about 'standing up, protecting each other as a team' and 'I can give myself

hope by my own action' were identified in the re-authoring conversation about the reverie, and these stories were translated into actions in Hua's daily life.

This experience inspired and encouraged me to further explore the use of reveries as entry points to counter stories.

### *Wei's reveries*

Wei had first sought my consultation four years before. She had been caught in an abusive relationship and was unhappy at work, where 'office politics' was making life hard for her. Pressure from her family added to Wei's difficulties. Wei and I had worked together for some time, and she had been diagnosed as bipolar by a psychiatrist I referred her to. Medical treatment and counselling helped Wei to make sense of the relationship between the bipolar and the effects of her situation. Wei ended the abusive relationship and moved back to her hometown to have a rest.

Wei had recently got back in touch to restart counselling to help her respond to new problems in her life. When we met online, Wei looked well. She said that her hometown in southern China was stable and familiar, but that she was struggling to manage the expectations and social norms she confronted there: that a woman of her age should be married with a child or two, and that a university graduate should be working in a secure civil service job or for a company in the national capital. People around her sought to 'help' her find an appropriate job and marriage partner, but these efforts made her feel even further away from meeting the norm. She sometimes felt angry about people wanting to make decisions for her without regard for her preferences – all in the name of 'love' and 'care' for her. At other times, she felt depressed about her failure to meet their expectations. She had concluded that this jumping between anger and depression was connected to her bipolar, which was being aggravated by these pressures.

Wei was working at a national capital bank at her hometown as a counter clerk when we relaunched counselling. She had been assigned to the elders' saving service because her boss thought that Wei could use her 'cute baby face' to persuade the elders to invest more money in the bank. Wei hated this assignment. She felt that it was 'like defrauding the

elders'. Wei did not reach her boss's targets and her family were disappointed about her 'failing to accomplish a job anyone could do'.

After work, Wei was required to join business dinners at which she would be forced to drink strong spirits (this is very common in the Chinese community – it's a hidden requirement that a good employee should be good at drinking). Wei couldn't turn down the alcohol, even though she knew it was bad for her bipolar. She didn't dare tell her boss and colleagues that she had mental health issues. Wei worried that she would lose the job, and that this would result in further criticism from her family. She felt that this dilemma had also aggravated her bipolar.

Inspired by Hua's story, I decided to try the idea of using reveries as points of entry to counter stories.

### ***'I'm like the office green plant'***

Wei had an extra job after hours polishing the leaves of the green plants in the hall of the bank to keep them shining. She shared a reverie she had while carrying out this task, and this provided openings for re-authoring, re-membling and externalising questions.

**Wei:** You know, Dr Liang, one day when I was polishing the leaves, I noticed that they were gradually becoming yellow and dying. Soon, replacements would be delivered and this process would be repeated. I was daydreaming about how I was a lot like these plants. I could see myself withering in this bank, and no matter how hard I polish myself, I won't shine again. I am dying.

**Hong-Ru:** This may sound like a strange question, and if it's too strange, you can tell me and I will ask another one: What do you think these plants would do if they had legs?

**Wei:** You are funny, but I like this question. Let me see, they would run?

**Hong-Ru:** Yeah. What do you think they would run to?

**Wei:** To the fresh open air, sunshine and fresh water – not the funny smelling tap water.

**Hong-Ru:** Why do you think they would run for the fresh air, sunshine and fresh water?

**Wei:** They want to survive. They would be happy there. Oh, do you think I should run?

**Hong-Ru:** If you ran, what would you run to?

**Wei:** A more suitable job? I don't know, but I really don't like working here [Wei listed a number of things that made her uncomfortable at the bank]. I don't like wearing a suit. It constrains me and I can't breathe here.

**Hong-Ru:** So can you tell me what you might run to? Fresh air?

**Wei:** Yeah, but if I ran from this job, my parents would kill me. They almost used up all their relationships to find me this job.

**Hong-Ru:** Do you think they know that you feel 'withered' and 'dying' here?

**Wei:** I haven't told them yet, but if they know it hurts me badly, they might agree, though they will have much to say.

**Hong-Ru:** Can you tell me what makes you believe that if they knew you feel 'withered' and 'dying', and that working at the bank hurts you badly, they would agree to you leaving? What does this say about your parents?

**Wei:** They love me? Oh, dear, I regretted saying so immediately.

**Hong-Ru:** Can you give me any other examples of their loving you? I mean, if you have an impression that they love you, there must be some examples making you believe this.

**Wei:** Sure. Actually, they are not bad parents. They are just too submissive – submissive to what people say – and they can't stand up for themselves and me. But I can still feel their love. [Wei gave several examples]

**Hong-Ru:** Do you know when this 'submissive' happened in their lives and deprived you of some of their love?

**Wei:** This is a strange question, but I have a stranger answer to it: society? I think, in their experience, they feared being punished if they stood out from the crowd for their opinions. Taking a political stand or choosing a different lifestyle would be judged and people are punished if they are different. So they learnt to love me in their controllable area. They want to hold me in

a limited area that they can control. They'll feed me if I am unemployed, but they will still present other people's judging opinions back to me.

Wei quit the bank counter clerk job later after another occasion of forced drinking. She explained the situation to her parents until they understood how difficult it was for her to work in such a setting and how it aggravated her bipolar and threatened her wellbeing.

Wei's parents agreed that Wei should find a job that was more suitable for her and said to her, 'your happiness and health is what's most important'.

Later, when Wei's parents couldn't help passing on judgements about Wei, Wei told them how this hurt her and they would stop. Further, her father rejected some inappropriate job leads from friends and relatives and tolerated their criticism without sharing it with Wei. Wei heard about this from her cousin and was touched. Wei's mother stopped pressing her to get married. She felt assured that her parents had tried their best to love her and protect her.

Through the re-authoring and re-membering enquiries sparked by the reverie of 'I'm like the office green plant', Wei externalised the oppressing 'judging and punishing' mechanism from her parents' identities. Now Wei and her parents could team up together to face the depressing discourses that were making Wei unwell.

### ***Queen of the open market***

After Wei left her job at the bank, she decided to re-organise her life. Even though she was temporarily unemployed, she was managing to take her medicine on time and do healthy things. One of the things she liked to do for herself was to buy fresh food from the local open market and cook healthy meals.

**Wei:** Dr Liang, I have an interesting thing to tell you today.

**Hong-Ru:** I'd like to hear about it.

**Wei:** I have been going to the open market every day to buy fresh produce to cook my lunch. I've been going to a particular lady's stall because she always sells the freshest vegetables, and she makes them very tidy in piles or bunches with price tags on them. It looks so beautiful and is very convenient. Can you picture it?

**Hong-Ru:** Yes, it must be beautiful with all the colourful vegetables.

**Wei:** Yes, it is! But that's not the most interesting part. Last week when I went to her stall again, an old lady was trying to pick things from different piles and bunches and was messing everything up. The stallholder gently asked her not to do that, but the woman continued picking up different things. She handed them up to the stallholder for pricing. The stallholder said, 'I have my rules here and I asked you not to do this. It isn't just for me, you are troubling other people. I won't sell you things if you keep doing that'. The old lady wanted to talk back to the stallholder, but she realised that other customers were not on her side, and she just dropped the vegetables and went off. The other customers all expressed their support to the stallholder. At that moment, she was standing higher up surrounded by piles of vegetables and she looked like a queen in her vegetable kingdom. I couldn't help thinking about being a queen in this open market – having the right to hold my ground, insist on my rules and do my best to serve people in some direct way like offering food or a hair cutting service. I immediately asked the lady if she needed a helping hand and she said no. I went to ask the tofu shop and they said that their work day started at 4am, so that wouldn't be so good for my bipolar – I can't get up that early.

**Hong-Ru:** And then?

**Wei:** And then, nothing. I still can't find a job suitable for me.

**Hong-Ru:** Can I ask something about your daydreaming about being a queen in this open market?

**Wei:** Sure.

**Hong-Ru:** What in that daydreaming attracted your attention and motivated you?

**Wei:** I think it's about being able to see a different story about work.

**Hong-Ru:** What is the different story about work?

**Wei:** Of course, you have to do your best in work for the customers, but I could have some say about what I want to do and what I don't want to do. Like the stallholder – she can have her own rules at her stall. And she can make rules that are fair for all her customers, not just for her own benefit. Unlike my boss in the bank who kept saying things were for the public's benefit but actually she only cared about her agenda and how she would benefit.

**Hong-Ru:** So what do you feel when you are daydreaming about being a queen of the open market and having your own rules?

**Wei:** If I could make my own rules, I could hold my ground and have the freedom to choose who and how I serve. I could hold on to my principles.

**Hong-Ru:** Can you tell me more about your rules, your ground and the principles that you would like to uphold?

**Wei:** Mmm, I've thought about this. You see, when I did well in taking exams and earning myself a university degree, everybody – including myself – thought that I should go on to sit in an office in a modern building wearing suits to some smart job. I tried this and it turned out to be terrible for me.

**Hong-Ru:** What specifically in that environment turned out to be terrible for you? Was there anything against your principles?

**Wei:** It may be because of the system? I had to obey some rules that were taken for granted. For example, in my previous job in the bank, I didn't like convincing the elders to save that much money in our bank. I didn't like being forced to drink and I didn't like the way my colleagues kept talking about my private life and arranging blind dates for me, treating me like I was something left over. I had to conform to all of this rather than my principles. I had to give up my ground, until I had no ground to give and my bipolar broke out and I could only run away.

**Hong-Ru:** Wow, very insightful! Do you think this daydreaming about being queen of the open market says something about what

you want from your next job and the related lifestyle?

**Wei:** Okay, maybe what I was dreaming about is holding some ground in which I can do my best to serve other people, to earn money with what I am willing to give out while still holding on to my principles? Yes, I need to hold my line, before something crushes me into pieces.

At this point, I remembered that Wei was in a bipolar self-help community and that she had once told me that others there were also experiencing difficulty in finding jobs. For some, this was because of unreasonable expectations in relation to fitting into the systems mentioned by Wei just now. For some, there was stigma towards mental health issues. Others mustered all their strength to pretend to be 'normal' in the office, but they soon tired and quit, which made them less confident about finding another job.

I got the idea that maybe Wei might share her insights about working like a queen and having fair rules and principles with others in the self-help group.

**Hong-Ru:** Wei, that's a really powerful conclusion. Do you think that you could share this story and understanding with others facing the dilemma of holding principles while needing to earn money? I am thinking about you writing something for the members of the bipolar self-help community, and I can think of several of my clients who might benefit from your insight.

**Wei:** Yes, I do think so. In the bipolar self-help community, many friends struggle with finding a job and keeping healthy. I think I would like to share my experience with them.

**Hong-Ru:** Great, and may I have the honour of reading your sharing too?

**Wei:** You will be the first one I send to when I finish writing it.

**Hong-Ru:** Thank you for your generosity – I'm looking forward to reading it!

Two weeks later, Wei found a job in an after-school education centre tutoring primary school students and helping with their homework. She created many effective methods in her work, and she enjoyed being

able to wear all the beautiful and colourful clothes in her closet to work, rather than having to wear black and white suits every day. She felt free and like she could breathe.

Wei's mother joined her in a self-loving activity: they put on their brightly coloured high-heel shoes and went shopping together. A neighbour said, 'You two look like sisters!' Wei was touched by this expression and felt close to her mother.

Later, Wei wrote an article sharing some of her experiences of coping with bipolar in the public online platform of the bipolar self-help community. Many people resonated with her ideas about 'holding ground'.

Wei quoted an adage at the end of her article:

活着就是胜利

赚钱只是游戏

健康才是目的

快乐更是真谛

This translates as

To live is to win

Making money is just a game

Health is the goal

Happiness is the true meaning

She wrote: 'I think having this illness means something. It might be telling you that something is wrong in your life or about what is really important. If you haven't learnt anything from your bipolar yet, please wait until it becomes apparent to you'.

At the time of writing, Wei had been working at the education centre for over two months. She had claimed more duties for herself, from teaching three students in one group to nine students in three groups of different ages. She was proud that she could handle these students and their parents well with 'clear and fair rules'. She said she felt free from others' orders and could innovate. She had also volunteered to take up some general office duties.

Wei had encountered some office politics among the teachers. One of the teachers had complained to their boss about Wei's lack of teamwork. According to Wei,

the complainer kept talking about her personal issues to colleagues and even to students' parents, so Wei kept a distance from her. When the boss blamed Wei for lacking in teamwork, Wei was able to hold her ground and related her understanding of the situation. She asked her boss, 'in your opinion, who is breaking the teamwork here?' The boss changed his mind and went back to talk to the teacher who had complained.

Wei continued to play a significant role in the bipolar self-help community. She communicated with members and their families in the WeChat group, sharing her experiences of medication, counselling and life decisions. When she felt it would be helpful, she would refer people to me. Everyone referred to me by Wei talked about how Wei had helped them.

Wei felt that she would be okay without counselling and we stopped meeting. She recently messaged me that she had fallen in love, and for the first time in her life she was entertaining reveries about getting married.

### **Reflections on Wei's story**

Wei's reveries were like openings to two new chapters of a greater story. When she told me about her reverie about marriage, it sounded like a third chapter was being written. I was surprised by the power of these reveries: they were rich experiences with sensory, emotional and intellectual elements. And because the person is fully aware of the reverie, they can reflect on it immediately, making it easy to introduce questions eliciting counter stories.

Wei's reveries afforded her opportunities to observe her experience as being like a 'dying green plant' in a place that doesn't fit for her. They also allowed her to witness the possibilities of being a 'queen of her own ground, holding fair principles'. These reveries and the conversations that followed made it possible for Wei to clarify what she valued in life and to develop counter stories that have already led to preferred developments.

### *Reflections from Hua and Wei*

When writing this paper, I contacted Hua and Wei separately and asked them about their experiences of using reveries in counselling.

I asked, 'in your experience, what are the differences between uncontrollable reveries and active imagining?'



Both Hua and Wei expressed that in reverie it's more free. Hua said, 'in active imagination, I am still constrained by some judgemental beliefs, but in reveries I can see the emerging of some aspects of my life which I don't know much about yet'. Wei described how vivid reveries can be, in contrast with active imagination:

For example, if somebody suggested that I should do this or that, I can imagine doing it, but I have no feeling for the imagination. Reveries are different. In reveries, I feel things. I felt tired when I saw the plant and I felt excited when I daydreamed about working in the open market. Even the weather in my reveries is sunny. When I am depressed, there is no sunshine in my imagination.

When I asked whether this vivid feeling made a difference, Wei replied, 'it makes you really want to make it come true, as you have "actually" felt how good it is in the reveries. It's quite different from just thinking it's right to do – it's you wanting to do it!'

I asked, 'Did our conversations about your reveries have any effect on your identities, relationships or expectations for the future?' Hua said that she planned to turn the reveries into short stories and write them down. At the time of this conversation, she was working on a story about a cold-blooded killer caring only about efficiency of completing her mission:

At the very beginning I felt like I was very petty, one of those people who would die with no-one to care, but later it turned out not like that. I want to make my character a negative and cynical person at first, and then turn her into someone different. I think she can be complex. Writing her makes me think that I have such parts too – but that I can change.

I was really curious about how the playful process of creating characters and stories had affected her, but this was not a counselling session so I left this topic for when we next met.

Wei concluded that she had become more assured about what she wanted, rather than being swayed by others' advice and suggestions.

My final question was, 'after our conversations about your reveries in the counselling sessions, did you have any different attitudes about reveries in other contexts? If so, what were the differences?' Hua said she found

it shameful to share her reveries in daily life. She was afraid of being judged by others who thought that reveries were nonsense. However, as she mentioned above, she would make her reveries into stories.

Wei had become very interested in communicating with her reveries, especially the 'impressive' ones, as they might be telling her what she really wants and what's really important to her in life. I asked how she identified the 'impressive' ones:

Impressive reveries will have pictures. For example, the reveries about the open market. Even the other day, I was still daydreaming about going to work at the open market in the morning and the sun shining. It will appear again and again, lasting for a while. If so, I will know that this must mean something to me. Reveries are more focused on the feeling, not what's rational. Rationally you may think it's suitable, but you might not like it. You won't be passionate about it.

## Conclusion

In Chinese folk culture, there is always an imaginary place far from the centres of power and secular life. We call it 'rivers-lakes' (江湖). People in rivers-lakes have extraordinary kung-fu (skills and knowledges) in keeping their promises and principles. They are loyal to friends, family and their own hearts. They put justice before their own life and look down on people who sell their souls and bend to those in power. We call these people '侠' (hero). Unlike American superheroes, 侠 do not have supernatural powers. Their kung-fu comes from hard study, extreme training and actual experience combating injustices. Folk stories about 侠 have sometimes represented opposition to colonisers and oppressive local regimes. Despite oppression, people keep resistance in their hearts and yearn for rivers-lakes where they can take a stand for their principles, hold their ground and bring about justice. Rivers-lakes is a place of Eastern adults' daydreams, much like wonderland is a place of daydreams for Western children. These alternative spaces of reverie are sites in which we can explore and practice our principles and virtues, and perhaps find some yang to balance the yin of the dominating spaces in our lives that leave little room for our own hopes and values. Surely these spaces should be honoured, explored and documented.

This paper has explored using clients' self-reported reveries or daydreams as entry points for eliciting counter stories to balance oppressive discourses by raising the status of treasured values and meaningful people and relationships in clients' self-narratives.

In both Hua's and Wei's cases, the client's sense of self-agency and self-value were raised and valued relationships were re-emphasised. Distance was gained from some of the oppressive discourses operating in their lives and their effects were weakened.

Hua's writing of stories based on her reveries and the subsequent interactions between her and her characters was a surprising outcome. These stories themselves created a space for Hua to interact with ideas, knowledges and discourses. She could play with them in the story space without worry about being judged by others.

Wei's contribution in the bipolar community touched me deeply and motivated me to think about practicing in a more collective way, honouring people's first-hand

experience and local knowledge on specific challenges. In the article she wrote and shared, Wei related detailed knowledges and skills in facing the challenges that come from bipolar. These were met with great expressions of resonance and helped others to identify and externalise problems.

Hua's practices of story writing and Wei's documentation of her skills and knowledges prompted me to reflect on the potential of creative forms of documentation, such as songs, drama, drawing, dance and letters. Such documentation might further establish selected reveries as indicators of potential and already existing counter stories. The forming of a personal or collective archive of counter stories related to reveries could thicken preferred stories and provide opportunities for the recognition of resonances among reveries.

I would like to express my gratitude to all the people who have listened to my ideas and discussed them with me. I am interested in further developing these ideas in co-operation with other narrative practitioners.

## References

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