1. Borders

Border has many definitions depending on our perspective. From my point of view, it has two significant meanings: an invisible yet mentally-constructed barrier, or a physical separation in geographic terms.

Invisible border may sound weird or unusual, but my life is impacted by its existence. This border although transparent, it can be felt. To begin with, my life started in a multiracial country, Malaysia; yet, I am proud of being a Malaysian. Nonetheless, my ancestors are Chinese. Since I was young, my parents have provided me a vernacular Chinese education, because they refuse to send me to a public school, in which majorities of students are Malays and Indians. Thus, I have grown from a callow child to a mature young man in a Chinese community, “protected” from other races. I, therefore, have hardly talked to or interacted with them. It is like an invisible border isolating me from other races. Such an environment has shaped our generation into a racist community. Soon, I realize that this has become a trend in my country where my generation cannot embrace another's race.

Today, Malaysia is rated as one of the most racist countries in the world, and I am not only deeply disappointed, but I also feel embarrassed as a citizen. The three main races (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) are now fighting against each other. Malaysia's government officials are not in agreement because they lack trust and faith in each other. Politicians find faults to criticize other races. Malays, who strongly dislike others, go on strike in the streets, while Chinese protest for equality in rights and benefits. Is there a way which we can regain the long lost peace? For the next generation to be united, and stand together as one nation to help the poor and other critical problems, we must first destroy the root cause, also known as the invisible border.

On the other hand, borders by definition are just lines that divide; yet, in all civilizations, these lines have played a large role whether beneficial or detrimental since the beginning of human societies. Since time immemorial, people have claimed their territories by drawing borders. As civilizations grow and well-populated cities emerge, leaders among societies transform into kingdoms that are represented by borders. History has, in addition proved that borders have changed drastically depending on the power of a country.

In the old days, borders have shown how powerful a kingdom can be. When a kingdom conquered an area, its borders expanded. Leaders conquered places for the territory and resources to fulfill the kingdom's needs. For instance, the Roman Empire is known for its huge land that was conquered all around the Mediterranean sea. People acknowledged that Rome was a great and successful empire by looking at its borders.

In the modern days, countries become independent so that they have protections and rights within their borders. In these days, people cannot simply fight an independent country with an army under constitutional laws; therefore, borders cannot be changed easily compared. A country may be successful in spite of its size. For example, Singapore, which has such a small area, is a well-developed nation, and is much more civilized as compared to other places like Ethiopia. However, do borders bring only benefits? The truth is that borders also create disorders in the world these days.

First, knowing that borders divide countries, they labels humans with designations and create different images. This creates pride and ego among people. In the modern world, all countries have its own names, and the citizens of the nation are labeled according to their birth place. That is why we say we are “Americans” or “Chinese”, and we often feel superior to others. Even though we are all Homo sapiens, we often create our identities according to our designated countries. Therefore, as a species, we have a hard time working together because of borders. It may not seem important, but many problems arise from this cause.

One of the biggest issues is war, which is indirectly the result of division among people. War has led to many downfalls in human history and has caused suffering for many generations. This is due to two or more parties disagreements or disputes that have not been resolved, but have sparked war. There is a saying, “Grass is always greener on the other side.” Nations, who are dissatisfied with their territory and resources because of greed and jealousy, fight others to obtain more of them. Greedily, they seek to
expand and are willing to kill one another to achieve their goal. For instance, the Persian Gulf war between Iraq and Kuwait was caused by the strategic location that Kuwait has but Iraq lacks.

Let us use an analogy. There is a household, which consists of a five members. At first, they live together as they share the house equally. Nobody is arguing about the house because they accept each other as a family. One day, they decide to split the house for everybody to have private space. The next day, they paint their walls with their favorite color. Everyone, then, has different colored walls in their own room. One of them, John dislikes the pink wall painted by Maria, so he criticize her, and they start to quarrel. Marvin argues with everybody because he realizes that his portion is smallest. Everyone in the house is not at peace but instead is fighting. This is a simple analogy to explain what is going on in our world right now.

We, as human beings, must stop right at this moment to think once again, and ask ourselves, “Why are we so ignorant to the fact that we are so selfish?” Let us open our hearts, and break from our borders to embrace every human on earth disregarding race, nationality, religion, culture, color of skin, fame, wealth, power, gender, and health. Then, we can say aloud that we are united species, and pacification of peace will prevail.

2. Honoring Elders Day

Honoring Elders Day 2015

On November 14, 2015, Honoring Elders Day was celebrated in the City Of Ten Thousand Buddhas. This major event was organized and hosted by Developing Virtue Boys School. Many people especially the elders were invited to the city. Some special guests such as the CEO of Mendocino County, accepted the invitation to attend this event. Both Boy's and Girl's School Divisions' students were, however, ready to perform for them.

The organizers, also known as the student council of the boys' school, had set up a very special theme for Honoring Elders Day 2015. The theme was “It's a small world”. I was fascinated by this idea as I would never think of how small the world truly is. For three months, I have been living in the dormitory, together with so many people of different nationalities. Besides that, the advancement of transportation and communication technology has connected people from all around the world. Airplanes can fly us thousands of miles to the other side of the world within a day. A phone call allows two people to communicate from far away. These are indeed impressive and prove how easily we can reach out to each other. Furthermore, the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua founded this school and gave me this rare opportunity to be here and live with people from all around the world harmoniously. After reflecting, I realize that it is truly a small world

The event started at 9:30 a.m. . The tables and stages were set up before the day, and soon they were filled with visitors. The boys were busy rehearsing and warming up for the last time, while the girls were in charge to taking care of visitors. Suddenly, a teenage girl laid her fingers on the organ and played some wonderful melodies. The crowds gave her a round of applause. Next, Alejandro, from our school, approached the audience with his violin. Everyone enjoyed the pure melody, and some of them recorded the music with their phones. These were definitely a great beginning for Honoring Elders Day.

Two speakers from the boys' school, Aaron and Alejandro gave an opening speech to the audience and introduced the theme. Immediately after the opening ceremony, a few girls sang “It's a small world after all.”. Following next was girls dance performances, and the audiences cheered as several kindergarten girls danced. As they walked out in a straight line, their silk robes floating freely, they waved to the crowds. I turned my sight to the boys, and as the girls and boys never interact in the separate school. saw them gazing at the girls with all their might to get a good look at them because they knew how precious these moments together were.

Soon, it was lunch time and so everyone maintained silence to wait for the monks for the meal-offering ceremony. The monks came in the dining hall and proceeded the ceremony. After the ceremony, the guests received their food on their plates, and everybody had 30 minutes to have their lunch.
The dragon dancers rehearsed a few times in the Confucius Hall during lunch time, so that we could warm up before our performances. Everybody finished their food and the MC cued for the next performance which was Lion Dance. We held our breaths and crossed our fingers until the end, hoping they would be able to do the dance perfectly. The performances was almost flawless, and the crowds cheered and gave a long round of applause. Fortunately, they did not make any mistakes and received many big thumbs up from the audience.

The drumming performance was next. Their synchronized beats impressed the audiences, and the formation was unexpectedly good. Last but not least, the Dragon Dance was next, and I am one of the dancers. We had rehearsed perfectly, and we were confident but I tripped in the performance. Although I fell, it was at a transition when all of us lie down, so it didn't seem so obvious to the audiences. Perhaps it was my first time performing and I was too excited. Despite this, I was still satisfied with my performance.

Later, the celebration came to an end and everyone returned. We stayed back to clean up the dining hall and put everything back in place. I had a wonderful experience in this celebration, and I look forward to Cherishing Youth Day.

3. Was I Normal In My Community”?

Just like other normal children, I lead an ordinary school life. I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth, nor in a poverty-stricken family. My parents brought me up well but with discipline, and sometimes with harsh affection. I will always be grateful for them, putting aside their careers to spend time and effort for me. They are still a strong influence in shaping my identity today; however, the community outside my home, also affected me in certain ways.

The community consisted of many middle-class families; yet, I realized a norm in my community. My friends are spoiled by their parents, and so they became vulnerable to placing obstacles in their futures. They are showered with love and protected, so that they do not have to face any problems. Their parents would give them the best of everything they wanted. In spite of these peer influences, I feel different and do not want to be treated the same way.

My perspective regarding this matter grows firmly as I gradually develop into a mature individual. In this period of time, I learned to steer away from the direction of the norm and gained experience by facing my challenges by myself. Despite my views, I do not show my friends dissatisfaction, nor am I disrespectful to them; I have treated them like good buddies. Like a lotus flower in a pool of mud, this norm helped me and transformed me into an unique personality in my community.

At one time, when I was in eighth grade, most of my classmates disliked Mr. Prakash, our new English teacher. My friends found him unacceptable because his class was strict and boring. As a result, they complained to their parents. The parents formed a petition to fire Mr. Prakash. The petition was circulated among the parents, and it was successfully executed by school authorities. This behavior conflicted with my opinion, and I truly disdained it. My reason was that a teacher should transfer knowledge to students and not act like a clown, just to entertain the students; furthermore, it is the students’ responsibility to adapt to the teacher's style, so that the students can absorb the contents of the class.

I, therefore, grew up in my community while being influenced by it. Incident like this changed me in many ways, so that I am different from the people in my community. At last, I recognize and acknowledge this force that has shaped my identity today.