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Forgotten Voices: Japanese War Orphans In China

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ABSTRACT

Research on World War II (WWII) history has predominantly focused on the European theater, with limited attention given to the war's events in Asia. The scarcity of in-depth studies conducted by Asian historians necessitates an investigation into the complex events that unfolded in this region during this significant period in world history. This study aims to shed light on the often-neglected history of Japanese war orphans in China during WWII and their lives in the post-war era. To provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the war's impact on the lives of ordinary individuals, this study follows the historical timeline and delves into the specific living conditions experienced by war orphans during the war. The research incorporates perspectives from both Chinese and Japanese survivors, offering a broader historical context. It places particular emphasis on exploring the childhoods of war orphans and the hardships they faced in daily life. Furthermore, this study focuses on the practical challenges encountered by war orphans upon their return to Japan in middle age. By examining the firsthand narratives of war orphans, their struggles and hardships in the aftermath of the war are revealed. In addition, this study incorporates a visual thesis featuring conceptual-themed paintings that vividly depict the life story of Japanese war orphans. The intention is to evoke empathy among readers and foster a deeper comprehension of the subsequent challenges and resilience exhibited by these individuals.

FORGOTTEN VOICES: JAPANESE WAR ORPHANS IN CHINA

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“Imagine there’s no countries.

It isn’t hard to do.

Nothing to kill or die for.

And no religion too.

Imagine all the people living life in peace.

You may say that I’m a dreamer.

But I’m not the only one.

I hope someday you’ll join us.

And the world will be as one.”

— John Lennon, *Imagine*

INTRODUCTION

The war in Ukraine, characterized by its ongoing conflict and the failure to effectively contain its spread, has emerged as a significant threat to global security. This escalation has prompted the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists' Science and Security Board to advance the Doomsday Clock this year. Reflecting this heightened concern, the Clock currently indicates 90 seconds to midnight as shown in Figure 1, the closest it has ever been to symbolizing the impending catastrophe facing the world.

Figure 1. The Science and Security Board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock forward (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists 2023).

The world is currently grappling with numerous challenges, as the war between Ukraine and Russia intensifies, leading to increased instability. History has shown that war is often an extension of politics, as it employs violent means to coerce opponents or achieve certain objectives. Unfortunately, while politicians may etch their names in the history books, it is the ordinary people who bear the brunt of the consequences, often enduring immense suffering that goes unnoticed or unreported.

This thesis aims to delve into a specific aspect of history, focusing on the Japanese orphans in China—children who were left behind by their Japanese families following the repatriation from Huludao in the aftermath of World War II. By studying their unique experiences, this research sheds light on the untold stories of these orphans and the challenges they faced in the aftermath of the war.

In the autobiography "*What Life, a Japanese War Orphan's Memories*" by Yōhachi Nakajima (2015), the author recounts his childhood as a Japanese war orphan in China. After the war, approximately 4,000 Japanese children were left behind in China, with around 90% of them residing in Inner Mongolia and northeast China (then known as Manchukuo). These children were adopted by rural Chinese families. The author, a male war orphan, shares his experience of being accepted and cared for by both his Japanese and Chinese families. However, many war orphans remained unidentified, and their suffering was even more pronounced. It was only in 1980 that some orphans began to return to Japan. However, upon their return, they faced discrimination due to their limited proficiency in the Japanese language and encountered difficulties in securing steady employment.

According to Tanaka (2017), only about half of the war orphans were able to eventually locate their Japanese families. It is important to recognize that the consequences of war extended beyond the orphans themselves and affected future generations as well. These orphans faced social exclusion and discrimination, which contributed to social tensions and even the emergence of violent risks. One well-known example is the Japanese underworld organization called Doragon, which primarily consists of descendants of Japanese war orphans.

The ongoing bitter and bloody war in Ukraine has inflicted severe devastation upon the country,

deepened Russia's isolation from the West, and contributed to global economic insecurity. Amidst this conflict, there is an increased concern regarding the protection of war orphans and women. It is crucial to highlight the tragic story of Japanese war orphans who were affected during the Sino-Japanese War in WWII. Furthermore, drawing parallels from the Russia-Ukraine War, this thesis aims to serve as a warning message to the world. The primary focus of this research will be to investigate the history of Japanese war orphans, encompassing aspects such as their adoption history, the Japanese diaspora in China, Japanese family structure, and the Second Sino-Japanese War. By examining these facets, the thesis seeks to shed light on the experiences of Japanese war orphans and offer valuable insights into the broader context of war and its impact on vulnerable populations. In addition, the author incorporates a visual thesis featuring conceptual-themed paintings that vividly depict the life story of Japanese war orphans. Through this study, it is hoped that the tragic story of Japanese war orphans will receive the prominence it deserves, while also serving as a reminder and warning to the world regarding the consequences and human toll of conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine War.

PART ONE

Perspectives on War Orphans in China: A Chinese Narrative

The Japanese invasion of northeast China took place at the early stage of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1930s. Over 1 million Japanese households with approximated 5 million people emigrated to the northeast area of China to colonize the resource-rich region for over the following 20 years. Japan sent over 380,000 agrarian emigrants; most of them had been living a destitute and depressed life in rural Japan. They turned Chinese villages into Japanese communities, though many of them were deceived by the Japanese government at the time, who had promised them a better life and land possession. In northeastern China, the emigrants tilled the land that the Japanese army confiscated from Chinese peasants and hired Chinese as laborers. Since the day they stepped on Chinese ground, they developed sophisticated relationships with the locals, filled with a mixture of agony, hatred, and sympathy.

In the tumultuous aftermath of Japan's loss in the Asia-Pacific War, thousands of Japan's infants and children were stranded in Northeast China and remained there for decades as the foster children of Chinese families. Mostly, the Japanese orphans were taken good care of by their foster parents, and they received extra attention from their foster parents in many circumstances.

Fortunately, I had the opportunity to research primary sources on the history of Japanese war orphans. My great-grandmother's family was living in Manchukuo, a puppet state of the Empire of Japan founded as a republic in 1932 after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Although the last Chinese emperor, Aisin Gioro Puyi, acted as the head of state for Manchuria, my ancestral home had completely become a Japanese colony. During 1932 to 1945, most of the schools in Manchukuo were operated by the Japanese government, where the students were mainly

educated with the militarism of Japan. My great-grandmother's family escaped from Manchukuo for my grandmother's education and moved to Beiping, later named Beijing after the war.

I interviewed my grandmother on the subject of the Japanese war orphans. Many of the Japanese war orphans she knew who remained in China did not want to acknowledge their Japanese heritage because of bias and discrimination. In particular, the historical circumstance such as the Chinese Cultural Revolution makes it more difficult. One of my grandmother's neighbors, Grandma Li, born in 1937, was a Japanese war orphan who remained in Harbin because she was unable to locate any relatives in Japan. My grandmother's family and Grandma Li lived in the same town in Manchukuo. At the time Manchukuo was ruled by Japan, a series of colonial policies were issued which were known as the Kominka Movement. For example, lecturers in schools could only teach Japanese, and students had to salute in the direction of the Emperor of Japan during morning exercises. If a family used Japanese surnames, they could get economic preferential benefits (Peng and Chu 2017). The Kominka Movement was the process by which Japanese culture dominates, assimilates, or influences other cultures. Huan-Sheng Peng and Jo-Ying Chu (2017) described the Kominka Movement as follows:

> "Japan used education as a tool to expand its influence over members of society, and attempted the frequent use of Japanese and Kominka in daily life to penetrate the awareness of people in the colonies. Japan also started to enforce various assimilation policies. A comparison of the implementation of Kominka policies in Taiwan and Korea shows that, in terms of school admission rates and frequency of use of Japanese, the proportion of school admission rates for frequent speakers of Japanese to primary education in Taiwan are significantly higher than those in Korea. Moreover, in terms of primary education, national schools were implemented in both Taiwan and Korea according to the "National School Order" promulgated in 1941. Japan made use of the term "education equality" to win people over."

The concept of Kominka was aimed at forcing the locals to become loyal to the Emperor of Japan. However, such colonization of the culture paved the way for the following struggling situation of the Japanese war orphans left behind in China. The Komika Moment deeply damaged the civilian population in Northeast China and intensified the conflict between the Chinese in Manchuria and the Japanese emigrants. After the evacuation of Kwantung Army from Manchukuo, about one million Japanese people were repatriated to Japan from May 1946 to August 1948. However, many had died in Harbin, Changchun, and Shenyang during the winters of 1945 and 1946 before the repatriation began. Those who died or were sent back to Japan left a large number of orphans who stayed in northeastern China.

During that time, many war orphans were taken in and raised by local families in China. Remarkably, these foster families treated these Japanese orphans as if they were their own children. The early years of the newly formed China were characterized by impoverished economic conditions, further compounded by a tumultuous social and political climate. Life became incredibly challenging for numerous families as a result. However, despite these formidable obstacles, the Chinese foster families selflessly dedicated their limited resources to provide Japanese orphans with essential nourishment and valuable educational opportunities. For instance, the 1950s and 1960s were marked by famines that ravaged specific regions of China, including the northeastern area, exacerbating the already dire circumstances faced by countless Chinese families. Nevertheless, certain families exhibited extraordinary acts of sacrifice to ensure the survival and well-being of their adopted children. These acts of selflessness demonstrate the potential for humanity and compassion to transcend boundaries and historical conflicts.

A poignant story from the documentary "*The Times, Japanese Orphans Living in Northeast China*" (Arrow Factory 2017) vividly portrays the profound love exhibited by a Chinese foster family. The story revolves around an elderly woman who was a Japanese war orphan. As a young girl attending primary school in China, she endured the derogatory label of "little Japan" from a group of bullies in her class. Feeling wronged, she sought solace at home and shared her grievances with her mother, asking, "Am I Japanese?" Her mother wisely replied, "Don't pay attention to their nonsense; you simply resemble them, but you are not Japanese." Recollecting her childhood, the woman, now a gray-haired grandmother, fondly remembers how her Chinese mother always shielded her from bullies. Her present life in Harbin brims with happiness, akin to that of most ordinary Chinese elders. She and her husband live in peaceful harmony, blessed with a devoted daughter. However, she confesses that during arguments with her husband, she often feels aggrieved when he criticizes her Japanese ancestry. This lifelong burden continues to haunt her; she harbors a desire to return to Japan and reunite with her long-lost relatives. Placing this aspiration on her bucket list, she fervently hopes to meet her biological mother before her own passing.

However, the Japanese war orphans still suffered from discrimination and prejudice. During the Chinese Cultural Revolution, a turbulent period due to the political and social upheaval, some Japanese orphans were unfortunately subjected to mistreatment. They were often labeled as "enemy's children" or even accused of being Japanese spies, leading to their persecution and torture at the hands of extremist factions. It is important to note that not all Chinese individuals viewed Japanese orphans in this negative light. Despite the challenging circumstances, there were also instances of compassion and support extended to these children. While some extremists targeted them, there were others who recognized the innocence and vulnerability of these orphans and offered them assistance and protection.

The experiences of Japanese orphans during the Cultural Revolution varied, reflecting the complex dynamics and conflicting attitudes prevalent during that time. It is crucial to acknowledge both the acts of cruelty and the acts of kindness that occurred, highlighting the range of attitudes and responses within Chinese society towards these children. Many Japanese war orphans survived as Chinese citizens while simultaneously awakening their Japanese identity. They grappled with the complexities of their dual Chinese and Japanese identities, forever affected by the war throughout their lives.

The history of Japanese War Orphans is relatively unknown in China, primarily because their identities are not fully acknowledged or accepted in either China or Japan. These children, who were undoubtedly the most innocent victims, bore the brunt of the war's consequences, while those who instigated the war were often least affected by its impact. The former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's grandfather served as an official in Manchukuo during World War II. He was involved in the planning of Japan's aggressive war against Asia, while his grandson held the position of Prime Minister in Japan.

War Orphans in China: A Japanese Perspective on the War Era

On the other hand, the history of war orphans is also relatively unknown in Japan. The magnitude and severity of the loss of Japanese civilians in Manchukuo during World War II were unparalleled. The long-lasting impact of the war on these orphans extended beyond a single generation, leaving irreversible and deeply negative consequences.

According to a report by Mayumi Itoh (2010), it is an often-overlooked fact that the highest number of Japanese civilian casualties during World War II occurred in Manchuria. Out of the

total population of 1,550,000 Japanese civilians in Manchuria, a staggering 245,000 lost their lives. To put this in perspective, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki claimed the lives of 140,000 and 74,000 civilians respectively. Additionally, 84,000 people perished in the massive air strikes on Tokyo, and 94,000 lost their lives in the Battle of Okinawa.

The tragedy in Manchuria was exacerbated by the fact that the civilian victims were primarily concentrated among farmer-settlers. On August 9, 1945, the day the Soviet Army invaded Manchuria, the Kwantung Army hastily conscripted all able-bodied male settlers in what was known as the "uprooting conscription". This left women, children, and the elderly defenseless in the settlements. As a result, out of the 270,000 farmer-settlers in Manchuria, a devastating 78,500 lost their lives.

Due to historical context, the plight of Japanese war orphans has often been overlooked in the history textbooks. While the motives of the Japanese government remain unclear, their response to this issue indicates a lack of active involvement in assisting these war orphans in returning to Japan and reconnecting with their relatives. An advisor of my thesis committee believed that this reluctance stemmed from the Japanese government's unwillingness to accept responsibility for compensating the war orphans. The Japanese history scholar Mayumi Itoh regarded the Manchukuo war orphans as forgotten victims of WWII. She argued that the orphans problem was a product of the misguided Manchuria-Mongolia settlement policy, which unfortunately remains unresolved to this day (Itoh 2010).

During the 1930s, Japan initiated the annexation of Manchuria, perceiving it as a great opportunity for expansion and exploiting the abundant natural resources in Northeast China. Consequently, a great number of Japanese were recruited and settled in small villages in

Manchuria, following a similar colonization pattern to that of Hokkaido 80 years prior (Chan 2010).

A documentary produced by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, titled "*The Truth about the Japanese Immigration Policy in Manchuria for 71 Years*" (NHK 2016), sheds light on one possible conclusion: during that time, many Japanese villagers collectively chose to commit suicide. Influenced by militaristic teachings, Japanese civilians believed it was essential to demonstrate their integrity by refusing to surrender to the enemy. This act of mass suicide was also seen as a way to display loyalty to the emperor. Some mothers even resorted to strangling their own children before taking their own lives. Most of the war orphans lost their Japanese parents during the air raids conducted by the Soviet Red Army in Manchuria. Some Japanese parents, fearing for the safety and well-being of their young and frail children, made the difficult decision to give them up for adoption to local Chinese families, hoping it would increase their chances of survival during the tumultuous times.

The scenes depicted in the NHK documentary, "*The Truth about the Japanese Immigration Policy in Manchuria for 71 Years*," revealed a harrowing and hell-like reality on Earth. Interviews with surviving children showcased the enduring psychological trauma they still carry to this day. One elderly survivor hauntingly recounted, "I can still hear the screams of people at that time when I close my eyes."

During that era, the Japanese militaristic government implemented a national policy encouraging Japanese citizens to emigrate to Manchuria. The documentary highlighted that some Japanese citizens had reservations about this policy. However, the prevailing nationalism fueled by state propaganda made it difficult for dissenting voices to be heard. In his book, Mr.

Nakajima shared a poignant letter written by his father while migrating to Manchuria. The letter, sent to his uncle's residence in Japan, revealed a lack of awareness regarding the gravity of Japan's situation, despite signs of impending defeat.

In the letter, his father wrote, "As a male member of the pioneering regiment, we will participate in rear regiment training this year. The weather in Manchuria is very cold, but our family can survive so far. Except for the supplies of the pioneering group, everything here is very expensive. Presumably, you are currently suffering from air raids in Japan, and it is not easy for you. I wish you all well and fight to the death with Britain and the United States. We are also working hard for it and hope to wipe out these guys within the next year" (Nakajima 2015). Nakajima reflected that individual like his father, who were kind-hearted and innocent, were particularly susceptible to being brainwashed by militaristic ideologies.

PART TWO

War Orphans in Japan: The Plight in Modern Society

After China and Japan reestablished diplomatic relations, many war orphans who had remained in China were finally able to return to Japan. In August 1978, the Chinese and Japanese governments signed the “Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship”, which stipulated that the two governments’ relevant departments would facilitate the organized repatriation of Japanese war orphans in China to Japan, starting in 1981, in search of their relatives. However, upon their return to Japan, many war orphans encountered challenges in locating their relatives. One contributing factor was the stringent policy on blood identification and naturalization. Additionally, most individuals were elderly by the time they returned to their home country, making it difficult for them to reacquaint themselves with the Japanese language and overcome the obstacles arising from linguistic and cultural disparities. Despite the collaborative efforts between the Chinese and Japanese governments, war orphans continued to face numerous practical difficulties in integrating into Japanese society.

Barriers to Repatriation

At the beginning, the Japanese government permitted only Japanese orphans who had been properly identified to return and settle in Japan. However, Japan displayed a negative attitude towards those orphans who had not been properly identified, placing excessive emphasis on strict regulations such as “naturalization” and “guarantor”. These cumbersome and complicated government regulations caused significant hardships among the orphans. Despite many of them being of Japanese Yamato origin, they were treated as ordinary Chinese citizens due to their possession of Chinese passports, leading to their processing for legal alien residence status.

During the early postwar period, the Japanese governments showed indifference towards the

Japanese orphans left behind in China, considering them to have been naturalized as Chinese citizens. In 1959, the Kishi cabinet ultimately classified them as “wartime dead”, effectively burying their existence in the annals of history. Itoh (2010) mentioned that with the “Wartime Death Decree” of 1959, most of the orphans’ domiciles (e.g., equivalent to birth certificates) were eliminated from their parents’ household domiciles. The Ministry of Justice decided to treat the repatriates from China as legal aliens in 1975. Even if their domiciles had not been eliminated, the orphans had no way to find them unless they knew their Japanese names. Therefore, the orphans could not legally become Japanese again unless they reestablished their domiciles. In addition to the arduous task of finding their kin, the orphans had to go through a strenuous legal battle with the Japanese government to reestablish their domiciles for repatriation to their homeland.

The first unidentified orphan to regain her Japanese nationality was Akiko Imamura. Her Chinese name is Ming Xu. Ming Xu’s case marked the first instance where the “certificate of Japanese orphan” issued by the Chinese government served as the basis for approving the domicile of an unidentified orphan. In 1980, Ms. Ming Xu bid farewell to her adoptive parents in China and traveled to Japan in search of her relatives. Previously, she had encountered a Japanese delegation visiting China and took the opportunity to write a letter in Chinese, detailing her situation, which she handed to a Japanese reporter accompanying the delegation. Upon returning to Japan, the reporter published Xu’s story, capturing the attention of an elderly man who then reached out to her after reading the report.

Through a series of more than ten correspondences and confirming their blood types matched, the elderly man, residing in Hokkaido, believed Xu to be his estranged daughter. However, their hopes were dashed three months later when the results of a DNA test were revealed.

Consequently, he drove Xu away. At the time, Xu was still a Chinese citizen, and due to the failed blood test and her impending visa expiration, she had no choice but to return to China.

A lawyer from a law firm helped her. After finding multiple agencies to prove that she was Japanese, the court finally admitted that she was a residual orphan in Japan after five months of judgment, even though she had not found her relatives. In the end, Ming Xu officially obtained Japanese nationality on February 3, 1987, through her unwavering efforts in the endeavor to restore the nationality of the remaining orphans, she achieved a significant milestone by becoming the first orphan to obtain citizenship. She was also lucky to succeed in the blood test later and finally found her sister in Japan.

Ming Xu gave herself the Japanese name Akiko Imamura. “Imamura” was the surname of the Japanese lawyer who helped her, and “Aki” was the same Kanji character just as her Chinese name “Ming”. After the successful blood test, she eventually adopted her Japanese sister’s surname, changing her first Japanese name to her original Japanese name “Sumie Ikeda”.

Xu’s story represented an unidentified orphan case, highlighting the complexities involved. Even for the orphans who were identified and had some information about their Japanese families, the process of regaining their Japanese citizenship posed significant challenges and obstacles. In her book “*Japanese War Orphans in Manchuria: Forgotten Victims of World War II*” (Itoh 2010), Itoh recounts several stories of identified orphans who managed to return to Japan and reclaim their nationality as follows:

> “Even more strangely, the Ministry of Justice treated the orphans, who knew their identities and had their domiciles kept intact, as foreigners. For example, Beniya Torao wrote to his hometown in Nagano prefecture in 1973 after the

> normalization of Sino- Japanese relations. His domicile was intact at the local government. The local office contacted his elder sister who did not settle in Manchuria and had moved to Tokyo. She identified Beniya as her brother and became his guarantor. Beniya was repatriated permanently in April 1975. Nevertheless, the Immigration Control Bureau told him to register as an alien. Then they told him to file a procedure of naturalization in order to become legally Japanese. He was a legal alien until his naturalization application came through in December 1978."

Female War Orphans

The plight of female war orphans was particularly challenging compared to their male counterparts, primarily due to the paternal blood principle enshrined in the Japanese Nationality Law (Itoh 2010). Under this law, only children whose fathers were Japanese could automatically acquire Japanese citizenship, while those with mothers of Japanese descent did not have the same privilege. This distinction caused considerable hardship for female orphans.

Many female orphans expressed a desire to return to Japan with their children, but their husbands and children preferred to remain in China. According to Japanese law, their children could only hold Chinese nationality, creating complications for visa procedures if they wanted to bring their families to Japan to visit relatives or live together. This predicament left many female orphans torn between their Chinese family and their Japanese homeland, forced to make a heart-wrenching decision. The choice they faced was a painful and difficult one, as they had to give up either their Chinese family or their Japanese hometown. This internal struggle caused immense distress for these women, who found themselves caught between two worlds, each with its own deep emotional connections.

Special Identity Issues

Many war orphans spent their formative years in China and only returned to Japan in middle

age to search for their long-lost relatives. As a result, they encountered significant challenges when reintegrating into Japanese society. The situation faced by war orphans differed greatly from that of other new Japanese immigrants originating from China, Korea, Vietnam, and other countries.

Given Japan's aging population and labor force shortages, the government had opened its doors to accept new immigrants from various Asian countries. These immigrants, similar to Japanese Americans or Chinese Americans in the United States, experienced a process of integration into Japanese society.

However, war orphans were distinct from these immigrants as they were originally Japanese nationals who were separated from their families due to the war. Unfortunately, some of their Japanese parents had passed away during the conflict, while others had entrusted their children to local Chinese families out of fear for their survival during the evacuation from China. When these Japanese war orphans finally returned to their homeland, they discovered that mainstream Japanese society considered them as foreigners. This painful realization created a deep internal struggle with their own identity for many war orphans.

PART THREE

Conceptual-themed Illustrations: What Life, a War Orphan's Memory

For my visual thesis, I created a series of ten conceptual illustrations that were be showcased in my final thesis exhibition. These illustrations depict the life stories of war orphans, which serve as poignant examples of the pain inflicted by war. Through my artwork, I hope to prompt deep reflections on the cruelty of war and evoke an emotional resonance with the experiences of war orphans among my audience.

In conceptualizing my art project, I likened the process to that of nurturing and giving birth to a child. Just as a human body requires a structural skeleton, I utilized Erik Erikson's theory of the 8 Stages of Psychosocial Development to analyze the life stories of war orphans. This allowed me to portray their psychological transformations at different stages of their lives.

Building upon this metaphorical framework, I infused my artwork with "muscles" by creating a new character based on extensive research from historical materials and non-fiction books that I collected. While each war orphan had a unique story, I aimed to distill their collective experiences into the narratives of the characters depicted in my artwork. My intention is for these characters to represent the broader life experiences of war orphans, enabling viewers to develop a deeper emotional understanding of their struggles. Ultimately, my goal is to enlighten individuals who may be unfamiliar with this history and foster an empathetic connection to the plight of war orphans through my artwork.

In psychiatrist Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, there are eight stages that encompass a person's life from infancy to late adulthood. These stages represent different challenges that individuals encounter and overcome as they progress. While Mr. Erikson

acknowledged the significance of early childhood experiences, he also emphasized the role of the social environment in an individual's development. In my final ten illustrations, I attempted to apply Mr. Erikson's theory to analyze the social and psychological formation process of war orphans. A detailed description of this theory is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development (Saul Mcleod 2023).

Stage	Age (years)	Developmental Task	Description
1	0–1	Trust vs. mistrust	Trust (or mistrust) that basic needs, such as nourishment and affection, will be met
2	1–3	Autonomy vs. shame/doubt	Develop a sense of independence in many tasks
3	3–6	Initiative vs. guilt	Take initiative on some activities—may develop guilt when unsuccessful or boundaries overstepped
4	7–11	Industry vs. inferiority	Develop self-confidence in abilities when competent or sense of inferiority when not
5	12–18	Identity vs. confusion	Experiment with and develop identity and roles
6	19–29	Intimacy vs. isolation	Establish intimacy and relationships with others
7	30–64	Generativity vs. stagnation	Contribute to society and be part of a family
8	65–	Integrity vs. despair	Assess and make sense of life and meaning of contributions

My final visual thesis, titled *What Life, a War Orphan's Memory* drew inspiration from four main sources: *What Life, a Japanese Orphan's Memories* by Yōhachi Nakajima (2015), *The Son of Earth* by Toyoko Yamasaki (1991), and two interviews conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (Tanaka 2017, Aoki 2018). While Nakajima's book focuses on his childhood in China, *The Son of Earth* follows the story of Yixin Lu, who ultimately chose to remain with his Chinese adoptive parents, excluding his experiences as a war orphan upon returning to Japan. The two interviews shed light on the lives of individuals who spent their childhood in China and later returned to Japan in search of their relatives during middle age. By combining the experiences of these four characters, my aim was to present a comprehensive life journey of war orphans.

To depict this comprehensive narrative, I created ten illustrations corresponding to different stages of the war orphans' lives. Each illustration was accompanied by a text description to enhance the viewer's understanding. Through the combined use of visual illustration art and literature, I sought to immerse the audience in the vivid life stories of war orphans.

For the first and second illustrations of the thesis, I focused on portraying the initial stage of Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory: Trust vs. Mistrust, Infancy (0-2 years old). According to Erikson's theory, parents play a crucial role in establishing trust during this stage. However, most war orphans lacked the presence of their Japanese parents and were still adjusting to their Chinese adoptive parents. Trust can only develop in a secure environment. In my first illustration, I symbolized Japan and China with a chrysanthemum and a peony respectively, while depicting the significant bond between the infant and parents as a womb with an umbilical cord. In the second illustration, I utilized a Chinese woman's shoe and a peony to represent the Chinese family. I depicted a fetus lying in an oyster to symbolize rebirth and incorporated a pomegranate to convey the traditional Chinese cultural belief in many children and blessings, as war orphans were often adopted by families unable to have their own sons.

In the third illustration, which corresponds to Erikson's second stage of development (Childhood) for children aged 2-3 years, I focused on the theme of Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt. During this stage, children begin to assert their own will and often imitate their parents' behaviors through play. For war orphans, their childhood stage was marked by significant change, transitioning from their Japanese families to Chinese families, especially during the chaotic period at the end of World War II. Many war orphans have fragmented and

disordered childhood memories. In my third illustration, I depicted a combination of traditional Chinese and Japanese toys to symbolize the war orphans' jumbled childhood memories.

The fourth illustration introduces Erikson's third stage of development (Initiative versus Guilt) for the preschool age group (3-6 years old). During this stage, children's primary mission is to gain recognition. For most war orphans, it was during this time that they started interacting with other Chinese children, which brought about identity confusion as they realized their differences. Many war orphans felt a sense of loneliness, confusion, and fear. In my fourth illustration, I portrayed a war orphan imagining himself as an insect, seeking companionship with insect friends as a way to cope with the challenges of feeling different from other Chinese children.

In the fifth illustration, I depicted Erikson's fourth stage of development, Industry versus Inferiority, which applies to school-aged children (6-12 years old). During this stage, the significant relationship for children is their school. Many war orphans experienced discrimination from their Chinese peers, but they found support and protection from their Chinese parents and teachers. In my fifth illustration, I portrayed the war orphan embracing their Chinese parents to symbolize their mutual support and solidarity.

The sixth illustration represents Erikson's fifth stage of development, Identity versus Role Confusion, which pertains to adolescents (ages 13-19). During this stage, teenagers' significant relationships revolve around their peer groups. For war orphans, their adolescence coincided with the tumultuous 10 years of the Great Cultural Revolution in China. This period held immense significance in modern Chinese history and became a collective memory for all Chinese people. In my sixth illustration, I incorporated a peony to symbolize China, while using

a star and a red ribbon to represent socialism. I opted for an ink drawing style to emulate the woodcut style prevalent in Cultural Revolution-era posters.

The seventh and eighth illustrations depict Erikson's sixth stage of development, Intimacy versus Isolation, which characterizes early adulthood (ages 20-39). During this stage, individuals strive to form close relationships and navigate the joys and sorrows of life together. For many war orphans, early adulthood marked the transition from being a young Japanese child to becoming an ordinary Chinese adult. Additionally, with the resumption of normal diplomatic relations between China and Japan in 1952, war orphans had the opportunity to return to Japan in search of their lost relatives. However, due to their age, many war orphans had difficulty recollecting clear and useful information about their Japanese families, which posed challenges in their search. In my seventh illustration, I utilized an egg as a powerful symbol, representing the metamorphosis from a young Japanese boy to an ordinary Chinese adolescent. In the eighth illustration, I employed the Japanese traditional handicraft technique of Kintsugi to symbolize the process of piecing together fragmented memories.

In the ninth illustration, I presented Erikson's seventh stage of development, Generativity versus Stagnation, which pertains to middle adulthood (ages 40-64). During this stage, adults' significant relationships encompass their social community and family. In the middle adulthood of many war orphans, they made the decision to return to Japan in search of their relatives. However, they encountered difficulties reintegrating into Japanese society due to their age. Many war orphans faced identity issues upon their return, struggling with language barriers as they were too old to relearn Japanese. Additionally, cultural barriers emerged as they had spent the majority of their lives in China. Some war orphans found themselves with no alternative but to join organized criminal gangs, such as the second-generation Japanese war orphans'

organized criminal gang known as “Doragon”. In my ninth illustration, I utilized plants and insects as symbols of identity confusion. Masks, mouths, and eyeballs were incorporated to represent their fear of being subjected to gossip.

The tenth illustration depicts Erikson’s eighth and final stage of development, Ego Integrity versus Despair, which applies to old age (ages 65 years and beyond until death). During this stage, the primary task for older individuals is to reflect upon and accept their life’s journey. In my tenth illustration, the war orphan has become an elderly man, contemplating his life. I intentionally incorporated the same design elements of a chrysanthemum and a peony from my first illustration, creating a visual echo between the two. Furthermore, I deliberately chose a smaller size of 11"x15" for the tenth illustration compared to the other nine pieces. This was a deliberate decision to give this final artwork a distinct significance, serving as a punctuation mark to my project and symbolizing the conclusion of the war orphan’s life story.

To enhance the engagement of my audience, I wrote a story about war orphans that served as the foundation for my final ten illustrations. The story was a fusion of the real-life experiences of multiple war orphans, and I crafted it in the first person to immerse readers fully in the narrative.

Figure 3. First illustration: Infancy (0-2 years old).

I was an infant whose upbringing was shaped by both China and Japan, and my life story intertwines with the rich histories of these two countries. Today, I would like to share with you my extraordinary journey through life.

Figure 4. Second illustration: Infancy (0-2 years old).

After Japan's defeat in World War II, the Kwantung Army abandoned the Manchurian pioneer group, leaving my Japanese mother with no choice but to flee from China in a state of panic. Amidst the chaos, I was unintentionally separated from her and left behind in Northeast China. However, fortune smiled upon me when I was taken in by a kind-hearted Chinese farmer couple, who not only saved my life but also showered me with love and care.

Figure 5. Third illustration: Childhood (2-3 years old).

My memories of childhood were hazy and elusive. I remember engaging in playful activities with various toys but distinguishing between those given by my Japanese biological mother and those bestowed upon me by my Chinese adoptive mother proved challenging.

Figure 6. Fourth illustration: Preschool (3-6 years old).

During my preschool years, my days were filled with adventurous exploration of the vast farmland that surrounded our home. I was captivated by the unique plants and insects that thrived there, often daydreaming about joining them in their miniature world. While I enjoyed the company of children my age, I couldn't help but notice our differences, particularly in my Chinese language skills. This realization sometimes left me feeling scared and bewildered. However, I found solace in the unwavering support of my Chinese adoptive parents. They stood by my side, shielding me selflessly from any harm that may have crossed my path.

Figure 7. Fifth illustration: School age (6-12 years old).

Despite facing financial challenges, my adoptive parents devoted all their savings towards funding my education. I enrolled in an ordinary Chinese elementary school and began my studies like any other student. I considered myself lucky to have been enveloped by the selfless love and protection of my adoptive parents.

Figure 8. Sixth illustration: Adolescence (13-19 years old).

During my adolescence, a significant socialist transformation swept through the cultural landscape, impacting all Chinese individuals of my generation. It was a time when teenagers were brimming with enthusiasm, some might even say they were a bit “crazy”. We opposed all forms of privilege and traditional authority within society. In schools, students fearlessly questioned and challenged the views of professors, even if it meant the closure of schools and the suspension of classes. This collective memory of adolescence remains deeply ingrained in the hearts of all Chinese individuals of my generation.

Figure 9. Seventh illustration: Early adulthood (20-39 years old).

Being adopted by Chinese parents at a young age, I have lived a life akin to that of an ordinary Chinese person. While I faced various economic and daily life challenges, I was fortunate to have a loving family by my side. Regardless of the difficulties we encountered, our family always supported one another. Over time, I have undergone a gradual transformation from being a Japanese child who survived the war to becoming an ordinary young Chinese man today.

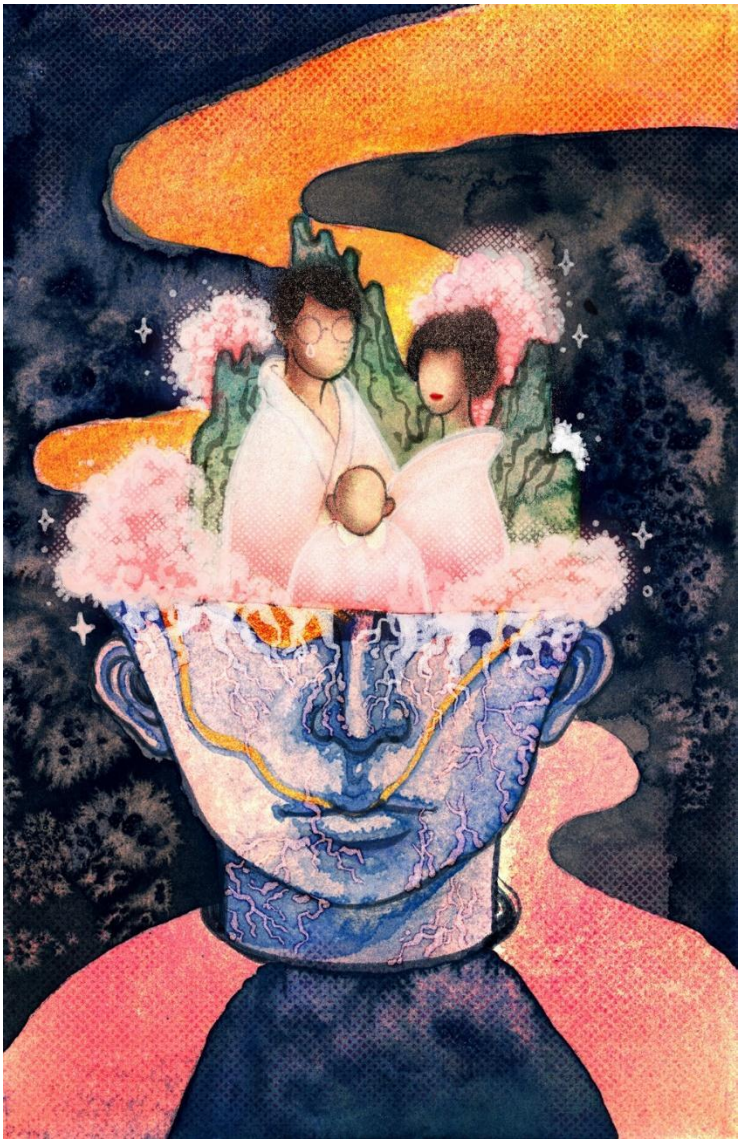

Figure 10. Eighth illustration: Early adulthood (20-39 years old).

In my early adulthood, China and Japan had restored normal diplomatic relations, leading the government to approach me about the possibility of returning to Japan to search for my biological relatives. Engaging with professional government personnel, I entertained the idea of embarking on a journey to Japan to reconnect with my birth parents for the first time. However, I faced the unfortunate challenge of having blurry memories of my hometown in Japan due to my young age at the time.

Figure 11. Ninth illustration: Middle adulthood (40-64 years old)

In my middle adulthood, I made the courageous decision to embark on a challenging journey to Japan in search of my long-lost biological relatives. However, the path I walked was filled with numerous obstacles and difficulties, and the reality of finding my family proved to be far from easy. Sadly, many war orphans like me encountered similar hardships along the way. Having spent the majority of my life in China, adapting to Japanese culture and society posed significant challenges, especially given my limited proficiency in the Japanese language. This made it difficult for me to secure employment beyond low-income manual labor. Despite my

Japanese heritage, I faced prejudice and a lack of acceptance from many individuals, leaving me caught between my Chinese and Japanese identities. The resulting confusion and inner turmoil weighed heavily on my heart, intensifying over time.

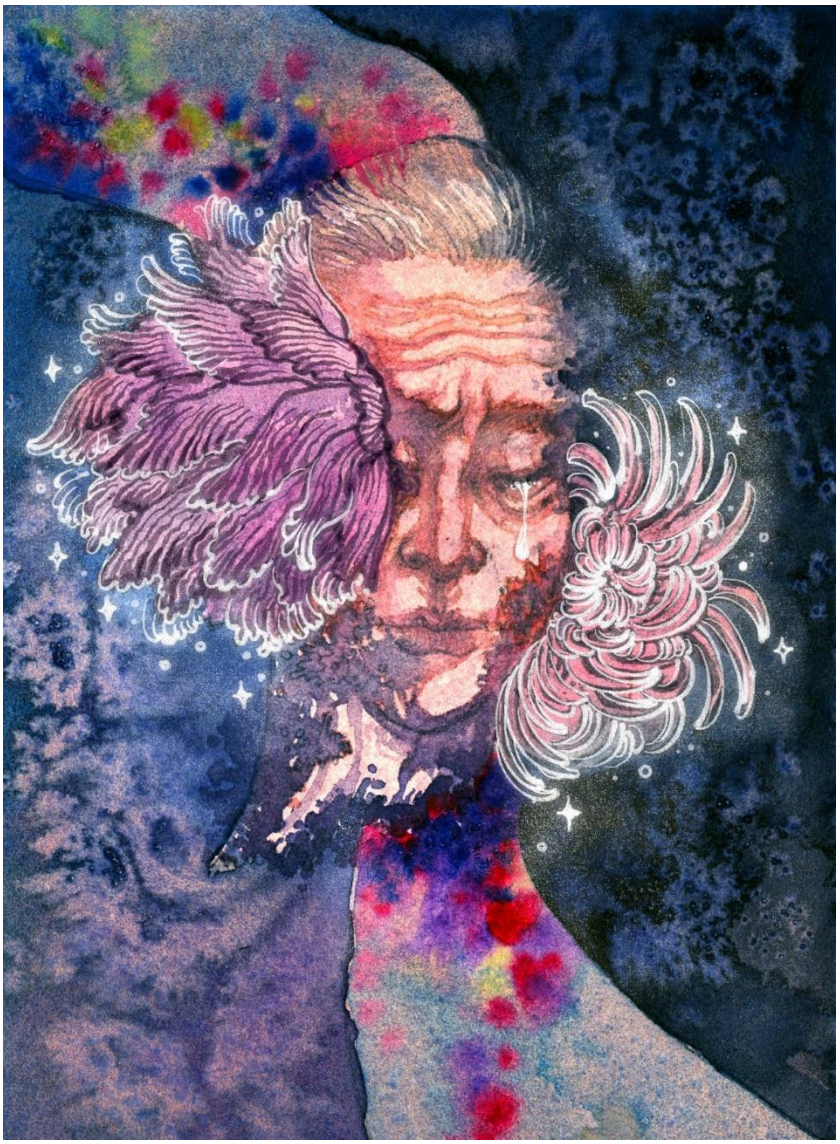

Figure 12. Tenth illustration: Old age (65 years - death).

As I reached old age and reflected on my life, I realized that I had always existed in the space between China and Japan. Recalling my extraordinary journey, I often wondered if I truly belonged to either country. Instead, I considered myself as a child of the Earth, transcending

borders and nationalities. What led me to endure such a unique path? It was the devastating impact of war. Without the horrors of war, perhaps I would have spent my entire life peacefully with my family in a rural village. If not for war, I would not have experienced the loss of my relatives, and my life story would have taken an entirely different course. Yet, these were mere musings and wishes. War has a cruel way of uprooting and reshaping the lives of ordinary civilians. By sharing my experiences, I aspire to foster greater understanding among people worldwide about the immense suffering caused by war. Above all, I yearn for a world of peace, where future generations will be spared from enduring the same pain and loss that I have witnessed and endured.

CONCLUSION

Echoes of the Common People: An Elegy

In exploring the significance and implications of research on war orphans, it becomes evident that the unique experiences of these elderly individuals offer profound insights. At times, I find myself succumbing to pessimism, realizing that many of us, like the war orphans, are ordinary people. It is disheartening to contemplate how small and powerless ordinary individuals can feel in the face of national policies. Most of us cannot escape the relentless tide of history, and it is this very fact that contributes to the tragic fate endured by war orphans. As a mere graduate student, I often pondered my own role in shaping the future. Engaging in conversations with older individuals, whether from China, Japan, or the United States, I frequently noticed the indelible imprints of history upon their perspectives. It became apparent that each person's outlook is inevitably shaped by the historical events they have witnessed. Perhaps, as I grow older and interact with younger generations, my own perspective will evolve accordingly.

Reflecting on the life stories of these aging individuals, I realized they had endured the cruelty of war, witnessed the complexity of human nature, experienced the warmth of love, and encountered numerous stumbling blocks throughout their lives. They were individuals whose lives were permanently influenced by the effects of war. It is crucial that we strive to prevent any future conflicts. Let us not allow the forthcoming generations to experience the horrors of war. This very reason compelled me to choose this topic as the focus of my thesis. Additionally, I aspire to share more authentic Asian narratives with English-speaking audiences. Finally, let us come together to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II and pray for eternal peace for all people around the world.

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