

Japanese War Orphans and the Challenges of Repatriation in Post-Colonial East Asia

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In 1965, Japanese journalist Magoroku Ide accepted an invitation from the government of the People's Republic of China to visit the country. Still seven years before the resumption of diplomatic relations between Japan and China, travel to China was restricted to those officially invited and even they were subject to state surveillance. Among the places he and his fellow Japanese journalists visited was the city of Anshan in northeast China. Having boarded the train to return to Beijing at the conclusion of their visit, they heard the clear voice of a woman saying, "Please take care of yourselves, good bye," in Japanese. Not visible from their train window in the crowd of Chinese who came to bid farewell, Ide and his colleagues were stunned to hear the voice of a Japanese woman. Although they wondered whether it was possible that Japanese were living in Anshan in 1965, they could not make the connection between her and the approximately 10,000 Japanese who were then living in northeast China, much less to the Japanese imperial past (Ide 1993).

Ide's confession of his ignorance of "overseas Japanese" in northeast China suggests that in the mid-1960s such a category of people was an anomaly. We must remember, however, that in the early 1940s, more than 1.5 million Japanese lived in Manchuria (Kôsei-shô 1997: 32). On August 9, 1945, these overseas Japanese encountered Soviet troops as Japan capitulated (finally surrendering six days later). With Japan's surrender, these overseas

Japanese—who were citizens of the Japanese Empire—lost the protection of the Japanese state. The Japanese government vacillated about their fate, first wanting to leave them in Manchuria, at other times requiring them to return home "even though [according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs] the welfare of the Japanese in Japan proper would be sacrificed [by the repatriation of these overseas Japanese]." They were finally ordered to return (Wakatsuki 1995:48-50).

Thus, for the overseas Japanese in Manchuria, the meaning of home changed drastically in 1945. Before, they had tried to make their home in Manchuria. After Japan's capitulation, they sought to return to Japan to seek the protection of the Japanese state once more, becoming once again *naichi*, or Japanese of the heartland (rather than *gaichi*, Japanese in the peripheries). By the 1960s, the distinctions between *gaichi* and *naichi* had faded, as the Japanese nation came to see themselves as a single ethnicity or race (Yoneyama 1999: 4; see also Oguma 1995, 2002).

The Japanese woman who bade farewell to Ide in Anshan, then, had been "homeless" since the time of Japan's capitulation. She should have returned home after Japan's surrender, following the Japanese government's instructions. Since she did not, she lives in China, a country to which she does not really belong. The Japanese public in the mid-1960s did not remember people such as her, who were mostly children at the time of Japan's surrender. Many were orphans while others had been separated from their relatives. They were raised by Chinese adoptive parents, grew

up speaking Chinese, later married Chinese citizens, and made their own families in China; they made homes in China. Consequently, when belated repatriation finally began in the early 1980s, they were seen as “overseas Chinese” by much of the Japanese public. In Japan, it was possible that they might merge with the increasing number of Chinese immigrants, both legal and illegal, that were coming to Japan to work as semi-skilled laborers.

I will discuss these “overseas Japanese” in northeast China, and describe how they can potentially challenge conventional ideas about Japanese and Chinese identities. This chapter consists of three sections. The first is a brief overview of Japanese colonialism in northeast China and of the conditions leading to the orphans’ abandonment. The second is an overview of their repatriation to Japan. The third considers relationships among returnees, Japanese society, and the Japanese government today. In conclusion, I critically examine the notions of ethnicity, race, nationality, and citizenship, which has been challenged by the presence of these overseas Japanese.

This chapter draws on ethnographic research in Japan between 1984 and 2001. From 1984 to 1996, I conducted research in rural Nagano in central Japan, which sent more than 37,000 farmers to Manchuria in the 1930s (Young 1998: 329). In Nagano, my informants were those who managed to return to Japan between 1946 and 1949. In 1998 and 2001, I shifted my fieldwork to Tokyo, where large numbers of those who had been left in China have settled since the early 1980s. In addition, I have also examined the history of Japanese imperialism in northeast China, and been informed by the autobiographies written by Japanese repatriates from Manchuria.

OVERSEAS JAPANESE IN MANCHURIA IN THE AGE OF EMPIRES

Japanese migration to Manchuria began a few

decades before the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), and by the early 1930s about 240,000 Japanese had moved there (see Gulcher, chapter 4). In 1932, Japan officially established the territorial colony of Manchuko, “a separate state under Chinese leaders who took their orders from Japanese officers and civilian officials” (Duus 1989: xxiix). About 1.5 million Japanese were stranded there on the eve of Japan’s surrender. Among these were a large number of agrarian settlers. Most came after the First World War, or were encouraged to resettle during Manchuko colonization. To give some idea of their hardships during repatriation, consider the oral narrative of Harue, a survivor I met in Nagano in 1988. She lost not only her “paradise” in Manchuria, where her husband aspired to become a large-scale landowner; she also lost her two children to epidemics.

In the middle of January [of 1945], several months before Japan’s capitulation, my husband was drafted by the [Japanese] military. Well, he was eventually taken as a POW to Siberia. Soon after Japan was defeated, Manchurian [local] bandits attacked our settlement. We were robbed of cows, horses, and clothes. We sought refuge at a nearby building . . . and lived there collectively for a while. When the bandits returned a second time, I saw them killing many of my fellow settlers. I really feel sorry for those who were murdered then. Not knowing when the bandits would return, we decided to go our separate ways. At that time, we received a notice that we would be able to return to Japan in September [of 1946]. But, at the shelter [for Japanese] in Harbin, epidemics erupted and spread like wildfire.... To escape the epidemics, my children and I left the shelter, but two of my kids died only two days apart from each other. Having lost them, I did not know whether I was sad or not. In retrospect, I guess I was in a state of total confusion, of total shock.

Why, in the wake of Japan’s surrender, did

Harue and other agrarian colonists in Manchuria encounter such a terrible fate? Why were some of them left in China for so long? And why are several hundred of them still believed to be in China today?

The simple answer to these questions is that they were destined to suffer once the Japanese Empire collapsed. In sending agrarian colonists to Manchuria, the Japanese military placed them near the Soviet border for strategic reasons. These settlers would help create a Japanese Empire. By the end of the 1930s, the Japanese state began targeting village youths, men whose ages ranged from 14 to 21, as agrarian colonists. They would be incorporated into the Patriotic Youth Brigade, a paramilitary group inaugurated nationwide in 1938. While this process was underway, the Japanese army began systematic draft of able-bodied men—husbands and fathers of the families of agrarian settlers. Following Pearl Harbor, they were mobilized to protect East and Southeast Asia against the United States. This mobilization eventually became “bottom-scraping” (*nekosogi*), and radically altered the human geography of each colony. Those who were left behind were largely the young Brigade members, women, children, and the elderly. Instead of protecting civilians, my informants now believe the Japanese army utilized them to create a buffer zone in northern Manchuria against an imminent Soviet attack.

As the army correctly predicted, the Soviet Union did invade Manchuria in 1945. The young Brigade members became “the first line of defense . . . and many died in Manchuria” (Young 1998: 406). The women, children, and elderly were thus left without protection. Their husbands, fathers, and sons, if not yet drafted by the Japanese military, were taken by the Soviets to Siberia. The local peasants, who were once themselves displaced by Japanese settlers, turned their rage against the colonists. The civil war between communist and

nationalist forces in China, who both tried to utilize Japanese civilians for their own benefit, created more confusion among the Japanese stranded in Manchuria. The severe winters and poor hygienic conditions caused malnutrition, epidemics, and other diseases. In order to save the lives of their children, as well as themselves, some agrarian colonists were forced to, in their own words, “leave,” “give up,” “abandon,” “sell,” or “entrust” their loved ones to Chinese families.

In postwar Japan, these children are called *zanryû koji* (the orphans who have remained behind).

Since they were raised by Chinese adoptive parents and they were no longer thought to be culturally-Japanese children, the term “orphan” attracts special attention. In 1998, I interviewed Mr. Yamamoto, the chief of the *Chûgoku Zanryû Koji Taisaku-shitsu*, an “office to deal with the orphans who have remained behind in China” within the Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare. He pointed out several characteristics of *zanryû koji*. First, they were born of Japanese parents. Second, they were orphaned or separated from their families in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Manchuria and Japan’s capitulation. Third, they are defined as those who were younger than 13 at the time. Fourth, they have remained in China since then. Last, but perhaps most important, they are unsure or ignorant of their identity (or *mimoto*, a primordial notion that literally means “the roots of a person’s body”).



Japanese tanks captured by Soviet forces, August 1945.

Mr. Yamamoto, however, acknowledged several problems with this official (and media) definition of *zanryû koji*. First, *zanryû koji* naturally grew up. Second, they were raised by Chinese adoptive parents and have Chinese names and Chinese nationality. Third, until 1993, the government did not include in the category of *zanryû koji* the Japanese women who were older than 13 at the time of Japanese capitulation. Although many of these women eventually married Chinese men, the Japanese government deemed them to be old enough (at the time) to decide their own life courses. Consequently, until 1993, the government ignored them. In September of that year, 12 such women returned to Japan from northeast China. Since they arrived on Sunday, all government offices were closed. Without money or anyone to rely on, they spent a night in the airport lobby with a banner attached to their piled up luggage. It read: “Dear Prime Minister Hosokawa, please let us die in Japan, signed *zanryû fujin*.” These women changed *koji* (orphans) to *fujin* (women) to indicate their female gender and older age.

Since then, Mr. Yamamoto said, the government has been paying for the return passage of these women, as it has done for the orphans since 1981. Although the government still distinguishes “women” from “orphans,” I deny the difference between them, and use “orphans” for all. In so doing, I suggest that, regardless of their age and gender, orphans were forced to stay behind in northeast China.

While the life trajectories of these orphans vary greatly, they have one thing in common. They were once abandoned by their Japanese parents and the Japanese state, were adopted by Chinese parents, and became Chinese citizens. Due to the special circumstance at the end of the war, they have been compelled to search for their often unverifiable *mimoto*

(deep identities). However hard they try to belong to a single family and a single nation, they are still, and will always continue to be, in a state of non-belonging (or, more strictly speaking, belonging to multiple families and nations, none of which overrides the others). Hence, repatriation does not necessarily solve their identity problems. Rather, for these orphans, the state of forlornness has continued since the time of separation from their families. It is true that war everywhere causes the breakup of families, but the case here is special in several respects. The first factor is the economic discrepancy between China and Japan, both before and after World War II. Before the war, the Japanese came as colonists and occupiers; after the war, the Japanese economy came to dominate East Asia and much of the world. The children of this legacy are hardly just any orphans; in an area that was—and is—relatively poverty-stricken, a shadow of economic undertones is always present for both the adoptive parents and adoptee children. Second, some of the older children no doubt had lingering memories of their lives as Japanese, as opposed to the Chinese they had become. Finally, from both sides of the Sea of Japan are notions of race, language, and culture—of what it means to be Japanese (apart from mere nationality or citizenship).

MEMORIES, IMAGINED AND REAL, OF OVERSEAS JAPANESE IN THE AGE OF GLOBAL CAPITAL

In 1988, I met Hisayo, another repatriate from Manchuria, in Nagano. Recalling her ordeal of repatriation, she said:

I covered my son’s face with a scarf. As the soil was completely frozen, my neighbor could not properly bury him. But later I wondered, and I still wonder, whether he might still have been still then, and whether he is still alive today somewhere in China.

Her son died of the typhoid that spread quickly among the children at one of the temporary shelters for Japanese. Nevertheless, Hisayo still hoped to be reunited with her son, however slender the odds. In contrast, those who “gave up” their children to the custody of Chinese couples have greater hope of discovering them. We should also remember that, if the children of agrarian settlers are still alive, they may not have forgotten their parents either. While the parents in Japan remember their children, some children in northeast China may remember their parents. Yet separated by time and space, they are yet to meet.

In the early 1970s, these parents finally brought the memories of their loved ones to the attention of the Japanese public. Urged by them, in 1974 the Asahi Newspaper, a leading national newspaper, published a partial list of the orphans still stranded in northeast China. Titled “The Record of Those Who Parted Alive from Their Loved Ones,” the article consists of two sections. “Tracing Memories from China,” introduces memories of the orphans remaining in China who are searching for their relatives in Japan. “Tracing Memories from Japan,” offers narratives of Japanese repatriates remembering loved ones whom they believe are still alive in China. What follows are two entries from the section “Tracing Memories from China.”

Wu Guilan (Female): Although I do not remember when and where this happened, my mother and I boarded a freight train and arrived at Fushun. There, we lived in a big garage of a house with a huge gate. A Chinese man later arranged adoption for me so that I began to live with Wu Qinglin. In the spring of the following year, when my mother was about to return to Japan, my neighbor, a Chinese woman, hid me in the closet [at her home]. My mother frantically searched for me, but could not find me and returned [to Japan] alone. I am now 34-years-old. I live with my adoptive father. According to his memory, the my

mother is probably now between 59 and 61.

Zhang Yuhua (Female): My Japanese name is probably Aihara Kazuko. I think I was born in 1940 but do not remember my birthday. After the war’s end, my aunt took me to Changchun where we lived in a concentration camp. Around the summer of 1946, I was entrusted to Fan Qingwen, who ran a tailor shop in Changchun. I was wearing a kimono then, and had bobbed hair.

The memories of orphans are necessarily vague due to their ages at the time of separation. To verify their Japanese nationality, they must rely on the memories of others, including their adoptive parents, neighbors, and friends in China. These entries are representative of the experiences of many people.

If one entry in “Tracing Memories from China” matches another entry in “Tracing Memories from Japan,” it becomes possible for the orphan to discover his or her deep identity. The entry below (from “Tracing Memories from Japan”), however, demonstrates that such a match could be extremely difficult to obtain. The entry begins with the names of the missing orphans. The numbers in parentheses are their ages at the time of separation in Manchuria.

Yamamoto Hiroe (age 5), Ihara Takashi (age 18), Ihara Satomi (age 14), Ihara Sumiko (age 10), Nonaka Yoshie (age 9), Nonaka Fumiko (age 7), Takama Kuniaki (age 13), Ihara Setsu (age 4), Tanaka Kiyoko (age 15), Andô Kôichi (age 6), Andô Kimiko (age 3), Ihara Kazuko (age 8): In May 1945, as the last group of agrarian colonists from Japan, those from Achi county in Nagano prefecture, settled in the province of Heilongjiang. However, because of the Soviet invasion of Manchuria, they moved to another farm colony named Sado in the prefecture of Boli in the same province. There Soviet soldiers attacked and many [if they survived] were dispersed. In October of the same year, those who had survived returned to their agrarian settlement of Sado, but they

were attacked again, and the Soviets captured all the Japanese men and took them as POWs. The women [who had been left behind] had to survive an entire winter working for Chinese farmers. During this time, many [of these] women gave up their children to Chinese families.

In these entries, the Japan-China Friendship Commission speaks of the memories of those who have been searching for their loved ones, since the reopening of Japanese-Chinese relations, particularly since the 1980s. Their entries show how the Japanese agrarian colonists suffered enormously after Japan's capitulation. In the last entry, Yamamoto Jishô, the teacher of these students, searches for them, including his daughter, Hiroe. One of them, Ihara Kazuko, sounds almost identical to "Aihara Kazuko," the Japanese name for Zhang Yuhua. Their biographies overlap substantially, raising the hope of discovery of mimoto, the deep identity of Zhang Yuhua. Yet, some gaps in information given by Zhang, Yamamoto Jishô, and the relatives of Ihara Kazuko were undeniable. In this case, Zhang could not discover her biological parents.

Between 1974 and 1981, on sixteen occasions the Asahi published biographies and photos of orphans still in China. Finally, in 1981, the Japanese government extended an official invitation to the first group of 47 orphans to visit Japan. Since then, in collaboration with the Chinese government, the Japanese government has made efforts to locate more orphans in China. By 2003, the government had invited 2,133 orphans. In addition, about 650 more orphans managed to travel to Japan without the government's assistance and reunite with their relatives. These orphans visit Japan on the government's assumption that they are Japanese. Once in Japan, they are expected to prove their "Japaneseness" by locating their Japanese relatives, thereby proving not only their individual-primordial identities but also their collective-national

identity in the modern system of nation-states. Note here that these numbers do not include several thousand Japanese women who, as we have seen, had little means to return to Japan until 1993 (Ogawa 1995: 235).

Although the orphans are said to have been deprived of their deep identities, they have in fact multiple identities, none of which they have chosen of their own will, and each dependent upon whether viewed from Chinese perspectives (including that of the Chinese state) or Japanese perspectives (including that of the Japanese state). Nonetheless, the Japanese media seems to have focused on only a few such identities.

Reporting on the orphans, the media always presented them with tremendous sympathy as innocent victims, because they were then children, incapable of making decisions. They were indeed *rekishi ni honrô sareta* (tossed around by the waves of history). On the television screen, the orphans always looked poor and uneducated, suggesting the difficulty of these repatriates from rural China ever fitting into a modern, affluent Japan. After all, they did not speak Japanese, nor did they have knowledge of Japanese customs. Scenes of the volunteer workers teaching them Japanese songs or plays surely made them look like children. The government and media's insistence on the continuous use of the word "orphans" seemed only to corroborate these screen images.

Whereas the Japanese media freely appropriates images of human misery, the voices of the orphans who have suffered hardly reach the Japanese audience. Because of the language barrier, direct communication between the orphans and their Japanese relatives are extremely difficult, if not impossible. Consequently, in the past, the Japanese public has tended to assume that all of these orphans suffered in China. The following logic underlies this reasoning, though

it does not necessarily apply in every individual instance.

- At the time of Japan's capitulation, the orphans were small children.
- They grew up in a country that was alien to them.
- They grew up in a poor, rural, region of northeast China.
- They did not learn their mother tongue (Japanese) or have forgotten it.
- They did not learn their own culture or have forgotten it.
- They suffered from various kinds of discrimination in China because they are not Chinese; this suffering was particularly acute during the time of the Cultural Revolution.
- They have been deprived of the love of their birth parents.
- They were forced into a life that they would not have chosen had their parents not immigrated to Manchuria.
- They lost not only their homes but also their homeland, Japan, and they have been deprived of their Japanese nationality.
- Though usually Chinese citizens by default, they have been deprived of the universal human right to a nationality and are therefore unable to find their place in the system of nation-states.
- As a result of all of the above, they do not know their deep identities.

Accepting all of the foregoing to be valid assumptions, it logically follows that there is only one way to redress the suffering of the orphans: restoring to them their Japanese nationality, thereby enabling them to

permanently live in Japan with their Japanese relatives. Predictably, this is the solution to which the Japanese state has adhered since 1981. However, we need to listen to the voices of orphans, rather than being consumed by these media images. Thus, in 1998, I recorded the following narratives of two orphans in Tokyo, whom I call Takashi and Toshio. Since they spoke in Chinese, volunteers, who were then teaching them Japanese translated their stories. Here are summaries of what they said.

Takashi: I was about two when I was separated from my family, so that I hardly remember what happened. Many years later, I found out that my father had died soon after his arrival in Manchuria. [After Japan's capitulation,] I was dying of malnutrition so my mother entrusted me to my adoptive parents in exchange for food. My adoptive parents did not have children of their own. They were very poor and made me work once I regained my health. But they let me attend a school when I was about seven. When I was about eleven, my adoptive father died. My adoptive mother remarried, but my second adoptive father soon died in 1961. I knew I was Japanese since I was seven because the kids at my school called me "a little Japanese" all the time. However hard I pressed my adoptive mother, she did not tell me anything about my parents. In 1960, I married a Chinese woman and we had four sons and one daughter.

A few years after 1972, two Japanese women in the village where I lived returned temporarily to Japan. They were sisters, and older than I was. While in Japan, these two sisters received a visit from my mother and elder sister. I wanted to return to Japan badly, but my adoptive mother pleaded with me not to leave her. I waited until she passed away. It was 1988. The following year, I returned to Japan with my wife and fourth son. My mother lives in Wakayama with my sister and her family. She also has three sons, all of whom are married. They are all good to us, but we decided to move

out of my mother's house to Yokohama. We did not want to rely on them, and this way, I was able to find a job.

Toshio: I was about four when Japan surrendered. This is what I later learned. I am a survivor of the collective suicide that took place in the colony of Hataho. My mother, two brothers, and a sister all died there. As my father had been drafted, he was not with us. My elder sister and I survived this ordeal. Later, a Chinese man took me to his home, while someone else took my sister to his home. My adoptive parents were poor. I remember they had five or six children of their own but they died one after another, except for one daughter. I guess they needed a boy. I worked very hard. When I first went to school, I was already ten years old. I knew I was Japanese. My friends called me "a little Japanese" and often ridiculed me. In 1960, I married a Chinese woman and we had two daughters and one son. Soon after, I met a Japanese woman who was able to speak and write Japanese. [After 1972] I wrote many letters and asked the Japanese government to search for my relatives in Japan. When, in 1980, a group of Japanese visited our village to pay respects to the Japanese who had died there, I asked them to search for my relatives. In 1982, to my great surprise, I received a letter from my father. He was remarried to a woman who had lost her husband in Manchuria. She already had three children from her previous marriage. Later, my father had two more boys with her. I visited my father in 1982 and told him that I would like to return to Japan, but his wife, that is, my stepmother, adamantly opposed my return. My father told me that I would have nothing to inherit from him. I guess it was his wife who made him say so. After 1982, both my father and stepmother died. Finally, in 1986, I returned with my wife and three children to Hiratsuka. My children quickly learned Japanese and now have good jobs. But they have left us. I worked at a small factory for more than ten years, and now live on my small

pension. My wife is still able to work. When she stops working, I wonder whether we may have to ask the government for livelihood assistance.

The narratives of Takashi and Toshio reveal several common elements of the life histories of orphans. They have many "families," but each of them suffered from forces rooted in the system of nation-states at war. The families to which they were born were shattered in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Manchuria and Japan's capitulation. While the situations of families into which they were adopted varied greatly, the adoptive families were, generally speaking, poor. Thus, in post-colonial Japan, two, mutually opposing, images of the adoptive parents coexist: the benevolent Japanese parents who sacrificed their own lives to raise and protect their children, and the poor Chinese parents who exploited the labor of adopted children for their own survival.

Both are media creations and are, perhaps, untrue. Both Takashi and Toshio told us that, even though most adoptive parents were poor and sometimes strict, they "saved our lives and made us live," for which they are grateful. Lastly, the families raised by the orphans in China also suffer(ed) from the inevitable forces originating in the system of nation-states both during the era of Japanese domination and after Japan's defeat. When the orphans decided to return to Japan, some of their family members opposed the idea. While Toshio returned with his entire family, Takashi returned only with his wife and fourth son. For some orphans, then, returning home meant severing ties with the parents that brought them up and their Chinese relatives including their children. When this happens, it is usually the adoptive parents who suffered most, not only from a financial loss but also from an incalculable social loss. In addition, the Japanese state has monitored which orphans are entitled to return to Japan, and which members of their families are able to return with them.

While in China, these orphans were on the margin of Chinese society. Those that have returned to Japan, are generally on the margin of Japanese society. Indeed, for quite some time after 1975, the Japanese state regarded them as “aliens.” Even though some were able to locate their family registers (koseki) where their names are recorded in Japanese, they still had to carry certificates indicating their alien status while in Japan. For many orphans, restoring their Japanese nationality has become the top priority after their return to Japan. However, their children and grandchildren do not necessarily wish to become naturalized Japanese. In such cases, *zanryû koji* (who must prove their Japanese nationality) and their family members must live with two distinct nationalities in a Japan that does not allow its citizens to hold dual nationality. Orphans and their families must struggle with the systems of nation-states whether they are in China or in Japan, and the repatriation to Japan in itself hardly eliminates that struggle.

The passage of time makes it difficult for the orphans to discover their deep identities. Their parents may well have died, aged, and if they survived, they may have become emotionally distant. Relatives may have at best vague memories of the orphans and be reluctant to acknowledge their relationship with newly arrived relatives from China. Many opt to ignore them. The reasons vary. Some fear entangling obligations to support blood relatives they have never met and who do not speak a common language. Some do not want to associate with the orphans, who neither look like nor act Japanese. Others worry about their meager inheritance. Some prefer not to acknowledge their children legally or emotionally because they have remarried and prefer to forget their past. Chinese adoptive parents have also aged and some are no longer alive. Aging adoptive parents often choose not to reveal the identities of their adopted children for fear of losing them and the lifeline of support in their old age. Without relevant

information coming from parents, some orphans were doubtless forced to give up the idea of discovering their deep-seated identities altogether.

These circumstances forced the Japanese government to change some of its original policies on the repatriation of orphans. For example, until 1989, orphans could not permanently return to Japan without the consent of their Japanese relatives. Since the government originally regarded orphans as dependents of their Japanese relatives, they had no choice but to settle down with them in Japan. In that year, the government implemented a new institution called the special sponsor system, in which orphans whose Japanese nationality has been proved are able to return as long as they have special sponsors. In theory, any Japanese national can apply to be a special sponsor. In reality, however, the Japan-China Friendship Commission has been the primary sponsor.

The passage of time since Japan’s capitulation also means that many of the aged orphans, most in their late sixties or older, cannot return to Japan without one or more of their children to help support them. Yet, until 1992, most orphans had no other choice but to return alone: while in the eyes of the Japanese government, the orphans are Japanese, their family members are foreigners. In 1992, the Japanese government implemented a policy that allowed disabled orphans to return with their immediate families. Two years later, the government adopted the same policy for any orphan over 65 years of age; in 1997, the government lowered this to 60. As a result, many of those who are already in Japan have invited their Chinese family members to join them. Since the early 1980s, more than 6,000 families, or about 20,000 orphans and their relatives, have returned to Japan, not including the Japanese wives of Chinese citizens who, since 1993, have also been returning with their families (or with the families of their children).



Orphans outside an Osaka Court prior to a verdict. The picture is of a deceased orphan. July 14, 2005

RETURNEES, THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT, AND SOCIETY

The former agrarian colonists in Manchuria who returned to Japan in the second half of the 1940s and the orphans who remained in China reflect several sets of oppositions: the classical age of nationalism versus the global age of nomadism, colonialism versus post-colonialism, and colonization versus globalization (Hall 1997). Yet, if generational differences are ignored, one may easily miss seeing the tensions between the colonists and the orphans, as well as how these various oppositions play out. In this global age of nomadism, it is the Chinese and the Japanese orphans who have reversed the earlier route established by the Japanese colonists. But, there is nothing celebratory in the lives of most of these Chinese-Japanese; although they often receive tremendous sympathy from the Japanese public, particularly their Japanese relatives, they also suffer the difficulties associated with having to remake their lives in an unfamiliar culture at an advanced age, problems exacerbated by the discrimination they face after returning to Japan. The government's solution—to offer them Japanese nationality (but not necessarily full citizenship)—often backfires for them; while

they are allowed to legally stay in Japan, their lack of full benefits creates economic hardship, perpetuating the stereotype of them being poor Chinese. Another solution that some orphans employ is to become perpetual nomads, moving back and forth between Japan and China, seeking to access the advantages of global capitalism. However, this solution is open only to those who can afford it. Moreover, these perpetual nomads must move within a system of nation-states that often restricts their freedom of movement.

How do Japanese repatriates from Manchuria who returned to Japan in the late 1940s react to the resurgence of colonial racism based on Japanese concepts of racial supremacy? One option is to simply join mainstream Japanese society and become, once again, the bearers of colonial racism, not only toward the ex-colonized, but also to their own children whom they gave up to Chinese families half a century ago. Another option is to live with profound guilt, recognizing that “we caused the suffering of our children,” but advocating at the same time the restoration of their Japanese nationality—the Japanese state policy since the early 1980s. Yet another option is to challenge the colonial legacy by listening to the genuine voices of orphans and their family members. Doing so could enable them to challenge the meaning of ethnicity, race, nationality, and citizenship in the context of an East Asia caught in the wave of global capitalism.

In Nagano, most of my informants have chosen the second option. That is, prompted by both empathy and guilt, they turned their emotion into action as volunteer workers. They assist orphans in their search for their deep identities. For example, they provide information about lost children in China to the Japanese government, thereby facilitating communications between the orphans and their Japanese relatives. They also offer the orphans moral support by visiting them during the difficult period of identity verification. The

villages in Nagano that sent large numbers of agrarian colonists to Manchuria often invite orphans to spend some time in the Japanese countryside. Once the orphans arrive, they teach the orphans not only the Japanese language, but also how to apply for welfare programs, how to shop at a grocery store, how to install a home telephone, how to open a bank account, and most importantly, how to restore their Japanese citizenship or obtain it for their spouses and children.

These volunteers, however, tend to accept only one kind of orphans—those who are willing to restore their Japanese nationality. They have little sympathy for orphans who wish to keep their Chinese nationality after repatriation to Japan. For example, in 1998, I met Mr. Takahashi, a volunteer worker for the orphans. He was a Brigade member in Manchuria during the war. In 1945, he was arrested by the Soviets and sent to a labor camp in Siberia: he could not return to Japan until 1949. In 1998, he introduced me to Mr. Wang, who told me: “My father had me retain my Chinese nationality, while my brother took Japanese nationality. This is good for us as we plan to start a taxi company in China in the near future after we earn enough money in Japan to do so.” Mr. Wang’s father is an orphan, a child of Japanese agrarian colonists in Manchuria. Yet, Mr. Wang has never met his father’s Japanese relatives. Although he returned to Japan at the Japanese government’s expense, he has retained his Chinese nationality and name because, he said, “my father does not remember his Japanese name anyway.” While his father lives on a pension, Mr. Wang has been leading a busy life in Tokyo with his brother. A former elementary school teacher in northeast China, he now works six days a week, 13 hours a day, in a small factory to earn the money that will allow him to start his business in China.

Since China joined the World Trade Organization, an increasing number of orphans

and their children have opted to retain Chinese nationality. Instead of permanently returning to Japan, they combine Japanese and Chinese nationalities to achieve various economic goals. Mr. Wang’s story suggests the emergence of orphans as active agents who make the best out of often adverse circumstances. Yet it is precisely people such as Mr. Wang whose citizenship decision is problematic for Japanese volunteers such as Mr. Takahashi (and the Japanese state), who believe that the orphans who return from China must become Japanese citizens.

In the summer of 2001, Mr. Takahashi and other volunteers helped about six hundred orphans and their families stage a protest march, and walked with them from Tokyo Station to the busy commercial district of Ginza. Some were holding white and yellow banners with messages reading: “We are orphans from China,” “Assure us our post-retirement security,” and “Please do not forget us.” Even if an orphan worked for 10 years after repatriation to Japan, Mr. Takahashi said, he or she would only be eligible for a monthly pension of about 50,000 yen (about US\$440) after retirement. Since this is by no means enough to live on, such retirees inevitably receive welfare assistance, inviting criticism from the Japanese public. In this march, the orphans criticized the Japanese government for offering them Japanese nationality, but not full Japanese citizenship.

The following year, this group of orphans initiated a lawsuit before the Tokyo Metropolitan Circuit Court against the Japanese government. Helped by Japanese volunteers and lawyers, the 637 plaintiffs claimed the following: First, the Japanese state had deserted them in Manchuria after the Second World War. Second, in 1974 the Japanese state changed their status from “missing” to “dead” in Japanese household registries without due investigation. Third, since repatriation the Japanese state has not

provided orphans with adequate assistance. Therefore, each plaintiff claims compensation from the Japanese state in the amount of 33,000,000 yen (about US\$300,000). In this lawsuit, which has not yet concluded, the orphans question the gap between the Japanese nationality that they have and the benefits of Japanese citizenship (that they believe they do not have). In this way, they have transformed the gift from the Japanese state—Japanese nationality—into the basis for demanding full citizenship.



Japanese war orphans demonstrate in Tokyo for apologies and benefits. March 2, 2005

Does this mean that none among the Japanese repatriates who returned to Japan in the late 1940s has chosen the third option of challenging the colonial legacy by listening to the genuine voices of orphans whether they may be Japanese or Chinese? In concluding this chapter, I will describe one incident that took place first in Tokyo, and later in Liutiaogou in northeast China. It suggests that, by together remembering the Chinese people who were in northeast China, the two generations of Japanese repatriates can better communicate with each other.

CONCLUSION

In 1998 I was introduced to Mr. Yamada, another repatriate from Manchuria who assists returnee-orphans as a volunteer worker. When I visited him at his home in downtown Tokyo, he showed me some 50 tiny figurines of Jizô, placed neatly in a box. Jizô, one of the most important Buddhist deities in Japan, are believed to aid the souls of dead children while simultaneously comforting their mourning parents. Jizô statues are found throughout Japan, and the deity is “perhaps the most ubiquitous, popular, and widely loved in Japanese religion” (Ivy 1995: 144-45; cf., Schattschneider 2001).

Mr. Yamada makes these little figurines. He starts by collecting tiny stones on the beach or by the roadside. Using his artistic skill he polishes the surface of each stone, paints a child’s face on it, and transforms the stone into a Jizô figurine. Each figurine represents an immigrant child who died in Manchuria, as well as the sorrow of the child’s parents. According to Mr. Yamada, however, each Jizô also represents an immigrant child who survived in China, as well as the devotion of his or her Chinese adoptive parents. While the postwar Japanese government counted the orphans as dead, Mr. Yamada resurrected their lives in tiny stones.

Mr. Yamada took me to a gallery near his home. Located in the posh Roppongi district of Tokyo, the small gallery attracted many young women and men. There he displayed his figurines—called Manshû Jizô, (Manchurian Jizô), and sold them to gallery visitors. The money earned went to fund another project: to build a stone monument in China to express gratitude to the Chinese adoptive parents of the Japanese orphans. Indeed, by then, the project was already well underway. A well-known cartoonist, himself a repatriate from Manchuria, was then building a monument of a family of three—a pair of Chinese parents and their adopted son, a child of Japanese agrarian colonists in Manchuria.

In 1999, Mr. Yamada and his group finally completed this grand project. What surprised me greatly when I read a newspaper article reporting this event was that they built the monument in Liutiaogou, the very site of the Japanese incursion into Manchuria on September 18, 1931. In addition, they held a ceremony celebrating the completion of the monument inside the September Eighteenth Museum, a venue that is known for its displays condemning Japanese imperialism. The monument, then, represents more than the suffering of the orphans. It also embodies the pain of their adoptive parents, and by extension, the pain of the people of China who suffered not only the pain of their adopted children leaving for Japan, but also the Japanese invasion during World War II. Representing the orphans, Mr. Tanaka, one of the members of Mr. Yamada's group, spoke at a ceremony to an audience of about two hundred, including his 84-year-old adoptive father. Mr. Tanaka now lives in Japan as a Japanese citizen, but has never forgotten the adoptive parents he left behind in China. He said: "After the resumption of diplomatic relations between Japan and China, my adoptive father saw me off to Japan while crying. ... My adoptive parents let me eat steamed rice every other day while they ate only corn and gaoliang."

Many who attended this ceremony remembered the suffering of the Chinese people. But, the orphans belong to both groups: the Japanese (the former colonizers) and the Chinese (the formerly colonized). If we cling to conventional notions of race, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship—and the idea that a single ethnicity invariably corresponds to a single nationality and a single citizenship—we lose sight of a space where the orphans live both in Japan and in China, that is the space of multiple, often disorganized, identities (Ching 2001: 175). Yet the wisdom of people such as Mr. Yamada gives us hope that a resurgence of colonial racism in Japan can be prevented, not by endorsing Japanese state policy (and the identity politics

of some orphans as well as Japanese volunteers), but by critically addressing the history of Japanese imperialism in China.

Writing on children growing up in an era of global capitalism, Sharon Stephens (1995: 3) asks a series of poignant questions:

What sorts of social visions and notions of culture underlie assertions within international-rights discourses that every child has a right to a cultural identity? To what extent is this identity conceived as singular and exclusive, and what sorts of priorities are asserted in cases where various forms of cultural identity—regional, national, ethnic minority, or indigenous—come up against one another?

Stephens is interested in the "complex globalizations of the once localized Western constructions of childhood," and the impact of those constructions on the everyday lives of children in the contemporary world (ibid.: 8; cf., Schaper-Hughes and Sargent 1998). The Chinese-Japanese war orphans exemplify Stephens' children growing up in a multicultural setting. The orphans (and their children and grandchildren) have a right not to be constrained within an exclusionary Japanese cultural identity, and "not to have their bodies and minds appropriated as the unprotected terrain upon which cultural battles are fought" (Stephens 1995: 4). These cultural battles are often imposed upon the orphans. Furthermore, such battles have been taking place largely in their absence—among the Japanese government, media, society at large, and the parent-generation of Japanese repatriates from northeast China. Unless we find better ways to approach the orphans, there is a serious danger that they will be consumed in these cultural battles, their voices left unheard.

The commemoration of the monument in Liutiaogou makes us reconsider the meaning of both the overseas Japanese and the overseas Chinese. When we critically examine the stories

and memories of those who became both overseas Japanese (in China) and overseas Chinese (in Japan), we become clear that the notions of ethnicity, race, nationality, and citizenship in East Asia today are multifaceted. At the same time, we recognize that the system of nation-states, which is still unable to accommodate flexible citizenship along with flexible ethnicity, race, and nationality (Ong 2002), has made the life of overseas Chinese-Japanese miserable in both locations. Nevertheless, more and more of these “orphans”—both in terms of parentage and nation-state—have developed, and will continue to develop, their own strategies and understandings of family, ethnicity, race, nationality and citizenship.

NOTES

1. According to Nagano-ken Manshû Kaitaku-shi (The History of Colonization of Manchuria by the Agrarian Colonists from Nagano Prefecture), about 20 percent of the agrarian colonists had been drafted into the Japanese military prior to Japan’s capitulation. Among them, 78 percent returned home safely, protected by international agreement. In contrast, only about 40 percent of civilians—women, children and the elderly—returned to Japan (Manshû Kaitaku-shi Kankô-kai 1984: 719).
2. Asahi Newspaper, August 15, 1974.
3. These repatriates of the parent generation were being greatly helped by Nitchû Yûkô Kyôkai, the Japan-China Friendship Commission (hereafter the JCFC). Founded in 1950, the JCFC served as a liaison between China and Japan during the time when the two governments did not have diplomatic relations. Although the JCFC played a major role in realizing the repatriation of Japanese from China, the group suffered from factionalism due mainly to the worsening relationship between the Chinese and the Japanese communist parties. In 1966, one faction severed its relationship with the Japan Communist Party, while another faction continued to maintain its party relationship. The former inherited the group name JCFC and eventually became an interest group for Japanese repatriates from China. The organization not only collaborates with the Japanese government in locating orphans in China; it also demands that the government facilitate their naturalization.
4. See “Koji Kankei Tôkei Ichiran” (Statistical Data on the Orphans) at <http://www.kikokusha-center.or.jp>.
5. For this argument, the media often rely on Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights, which reads: “Everyone has the right to a nationality. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.” See <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>.
6. Indeed, the Japanese government in 1988 built 20 centers called Chûgoku Kikokusha Jiritsu Kenshû Sentâ (Center to Assist the Independence of the Returnees from China). At these centers, former agrarian settlers of the parent-generation work as volunteers in order to transform orphans into independent Japanese citizens, so that they are able to live in Japan without public assistance. Furthermore, before coming to the center, the orphans spend their first four months at one of six institutions called Chûgoku Kikokusha Teichaku Sokushin Sentâ (the Center to Promote Permanent Living [in Japan] for Returnees from China). These center names explicitly express the Japanese state’s intention—that is, to make orphans permanently return to Japan, and to remake them as independent Japanese citizens.
7. In the mid-1980s, the Chinese government officially protested to the Japanese government that the orphans who had returned to Japan, were neglecting their filial obligations toward their adoptive parents. This protest interrupted the Japanese government’s search for the orphans for almost a year. The interruption ended when the two governments reached the following agreements: 1) the orphans must

solve their “family problems” before permanently returning to Japan; 2) the orphans, who return temporarily to Japan to see their relatives, must return to China to solve their family problems; 3) if they refuse to return to China, the Japanese government should be responsible for persuading them to do so; 4) the Japanese government should pay half the expense required by the remaining family of a repatriated orphan in China; and 5) the volunteer organizations in Japan should make efforts to pay the other half. See the Asahi Newspaper, March 17, 1984, September 5, 6, and 7, and October 27, 1986.

8. Until 1992, adults (older than twenty years of age) or married children of orphans were not allowed to return to Japan with their parents at government expense. In that year, the government implemented a policy that allowed a “disabled” orphan to return with one of his or her children. Two years later, the government began to apply the same policy to any orphan over sixty-five years old. In 1995, the government lowered the age threshold to sixty (Kôsei-shô1997: 419).

9. See, for example, Yomiuri Newspaper, November 25, 1994.

10. In 2001, NHK aired a program about a woman who had refused to acknowledge her daughter—an orphan visiting Japan—because she had remarried and entered her second husband’s household registration. Repeatedly prodded by an officer of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, she finally acknowledged her daughter. By then, however, the mother was suffering from serious illness and died shortly after.

11. I obtained these numbers from Mr. Yamamoto at the time of my interview. The current statistics are hard to obtain, presumably because some of the families of orphans fall into the category of “Chinese” immigrants in Japan.

12. Benedict Anderson argues that “postwar nomadism” is a consequence of the metropolis losing the capacity and the interest to naturalize and nationalize its millions of

immigrants (1994). I agree with him only partially, and note, along with Stuart Hall (1997), that such capacity and interest has remained powerful enough to maintain colonial racism.

13. Asahi Newspaper, Evening Edition, August 15, 2001.

14. Asahi Newspaper, December 20, 2002.

15. Asahi Newspaper, August 21, 1999.

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