Oral History Research across Cultures and Languages: Reflections from the Study of 'Japanese Orphans' in China and Japan

Zhang Lan, Jinan University, Guangzhou

This article reflects on oral history research conducted with three generations of 'Japanese orphans' in China and Japan. In a context involving differences in cultural experience between interviewer and narrators, interview methods must emphasize dialogue, and position the interviewer as a listener. In particular, this reflection the linguistic differences were handled, how effective responses were elicited, how results were disseminated, and how a principle of flexibility can inform to practice of oral history.

The Japanese Orphans and their Context

Since 2005, I have taken a keen interest in the study of a group I will refer to as 'Japanese orphans', a short form for those known in China as *'rì běn qīn huá yí gū'*(orphans after the Japanese War of Aggression Against China).[1] These are children of Japanese who had been in China during the war. Either during the Japanese retreat or after the repatriation of soldiers that followed Japan's surrender to the Allied Forces in 1945, these children had been left behind in China and brought up by Chinese adoptive parents, with whom they lived for decades afterward. Compared to Japanese culture, Chinese culture has had more influence on this generation of orphans: Chinese is their mother tongue, and they abide by Chinese values and lifestyles.

At the same time, they – and the generation of their descendants – are considered *Japanese* orphans, to have been abandoned by the Japanese government after the war and made to remain in the puppet state of Manchukuo, in northern China. Their situation changed in 1972 when diplomatic relations between China and Japan became normalized. Thereafter, owing to the joint efforts of governments and civil society organizations from both countries, the Japanese orphans remaining in China were successively allowed to return to Japan. According to the Japanese Labour Ministry, by December 31, 2016, a total of 20,897 people, some in their infancy, from 6717 Japanese orphan families had

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returned to Japan. The different generations of these orphans have had differing cultural experiences. For example, although the youngest have learned Japanese most easily, they are nonetheless faced with many novel experiences, fraught with trouble and confusion in their daily life of Japan.

An ethnic Chinese researcher born in China, I have so far conducted interviews and surveys with over 100 Japanese orphans of two generations, as well as with the generation of their adoptive parents.[1] Because the oldest generation is becoming elderly, this unprecedented research was originally motivated by a dire need to record their tumultuous lives. I also sought to elucidate the circumstances that Japanese orphans now face, believing that this would help to promote the mutual understanding of both countries and remind many people now leading a peaceful life of the tragedies of warfare.

Further, the study of these orphans can provide a perspective through which the intertwining of migration and cultural diversity issues can be examined. As globalization escalates, migration has become an ever more common phenomenon. However, in Japan, however, research on international migration and its impact is relatively new. This may be because of the traditional perception that "Japan is not, and has not been, a country of immigrants." However, given the trend toward global integration, many concepts about international migrants are applicable to migrants in Japan. Some scholars even point out that although Japanese policy is to not actively accept new immigrants, it is already an immigrant country.[2] Since the mid-1980s, Japan has seen a large influx of migrant workers from other Asian countries. In the 1990s, many of these immigrants' descendants followed them. Later, social problems such as the social integration of overseas migrants and their capacity to construct social networks began to arise, garnering much attention. As larger numbers of immigrants with different languages, religions, and cultures arrive in Japan, the government has had to adjust its polices. People with cultural experience from elsewhere are often seen as social minorities and placed in the margins of society. Due to their small numbers, in many investigations, their lives in Japan are hidden or ignored.

Addressing Cultural and Personal Differences in Oral History

After years of research and reflection, my research interest has gradually evolved. At first, I had focused on understanding the current situation of the Japanese orphans. Then, I gradually came to pay close attention to the narrative. Currently,

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[1] Zhang Lan. *Chūgoku Zanryū Koji no Shakaigaku: Nihon to chūgoku wo ikiru sansedai no raifusutōrī* [*Sociology of Japanese War-Displaced Orphans Left in China: Life Stories of Three Generations Living in Japan and China*] (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2011).
[2] Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (4th edition). (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

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I regard the interviews as 'conversations' between respondents and myself, and have gradually come to realize that in order to understand these conversations, it was necessary to understand how culture underlies the discourse. This led me to apply the methodology of interactive constructivism,[2] developed by a Japanese student of phenomenologist Alfred Schütz. In this methodology, the interaction between interviewer and narrator is understood to be important in constructing the narrative. (Readers of English-language sociology and history will recognize the parallels between this concept and those of Eliot Mishler's "joint construction of meaning"[3] and Michael Frisch's "shared authority".[4]) I not only focused on the details of the Japanese orphans' narratives, but also attached importance to their 'literal context', 'narration mode', and 'narrative consistency.' In other words, the most important thing is not *what* respondents narrated, but *how* they narrated it.

During the interview, I always followed the respondents' choice of language: Japanese or Chinese. What was more important, and even more difficult, however, was to understand how respondents' cultural backgrounds – whether at a national or regional level – are latent in their narrative forms. To arrive at such an understanding, it is vital for oral history researchers (and readers alike) to understand the cultural backgrounds in which the respondents have lived. In the case of my participants, such backgrounds could span from the rules of the Japanese Empire, the puppet state of Manchukuo, and the People's Republic of China. Oral history methods have been significant means to such understanding, as they make manifest in interview form the goal of observing participants in dialogic self-representation – the goal that W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki had so importantly championed in their landmark study of immigrants' letters and other documents.[5] How we are to understand and recount such "cultural differences" is closely related to the cultures that lie behind the dialogue. If a researcher and a respondent are of the same cultural background, matters of culture will not be conspicuous enough to attract our attention. In contrast, the greater the cultural difference, the greater the difficulty of interpreting interview results, particularly because considering one's own culture – encompassing nation, ethnicity, and religion – as superior remains regrettably common, even in today's

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[2] Atsushi Sakurai, *Intabyū no shakai-gaku — raifusutōrī no kikikata [Sociology of the Interview: How to Listen to Life Stories]* (Tokyo, Serika Shobō, 2002).

[3] Elliot G. Mishler. *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[4] Michael Frisch. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (New York: SUNY Press, 1990).

[5] William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an Immigrant Group*. Vol. 2. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1918).

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globalized era. That two parties may unconsciously or deliberately ignore cultural aspects makes matters even more difficult.

Oral history interviews are an interaction between respondents and researchers, a dialogue between narrators and listeners, in which cultural factors and ethnic differences will have inevitable impact. In a research context such as mine, marked by such substantial differences between respondents' and my experiences, as well as differences between our experiences and various potential readerships, it is important to reflect, first, on how cultural beliefs matters in respondents' interpretations of their experiences, second, on how language choices and standpoints are consequential in the interview, and third, on how translation can affect readers' understandings.

Language and culture in interpretations of experience

How do we effectively interact with people that have different cultural background than our own? In the classic, *An Essay on Man,* Ernst Cassirer characterized humans as "symbolic animals."[6] He considered language as the key to the communication of culture, to be a medium that expresses attitudes, lifestyles, ethics, values and deep cultural and psychological models. Therefore, if we want to master, accept and understand across cultural difference, linguistic competence is the prerequisite of establishing a 'dialogue'. This involves not only language proficiency and adaptability, but also proficiency in cultural and societal knowledge bases.

Japan and China, my country of origin, both lie within the East Asian cultural circle and share certain cultural factors, such as the use of Chinese characters and aspects of religion. However, the two countries differ in their geographies, environments, histories, and social organization. During the interviews, as mentioned, I made sure to respect the respondents' language preference. Meanwhile, I paid close attention to their specific language usage, both in Chinese and Japanese, in order to discern the sensibilities underlying it. For example, almost all Japanese orphans tend to use the phrase *luò yè guī gēn* (fallen leaves return to the roots) when speaking of their motivation to return. It is a traditional Chinese cognition from ancient times, meaning that the people living far from their homeland will ultimately return to it. In both China and Japan, citizenship and belonging are discursively determined on the basis of the *jus sanguinis* principle. If a person wishes to be naturalized as a Chinese, his or her lineage is still an evaluation criteria today. Many Japanese orphans living in China who have been influenced by Chinese outcasts hold the opinion that:

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[6] Ernst Cassirer. *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944).

"Because I have Japanese blood in me, I am Japanese and I will come back to Japan when I am old." Japanese orphans who survived the war and fled to China suffer from discrimination, alienation and a sense that their lives are tragically doomed. They say, "I want to go back to Japan one day," and the notion of "roots" has become a spiritual pillar of support for them. In the interview, as a native speaker of Chinese, it helps that I am familiar with the culture and history of China. Further, the respondents and I share the cultural experience in that we have crossed the border between China and Japan, and have lived in both. This, too, enables me to more easily understand the narratives and deeper, but subtler feelings of the respondents based on the Chinese culture.

The interviews hold many further examples. During interviews with the foster parents of the Japanese orphans in China, almost all of them mentioned that, "The child is too pathetic and if I don't save him, he will die." One story told by a woman named F began with her marriage in April 1945. That August, when Japan surrendered to the Allied Forces, F's husband was working in a refugee camp for Japanese, his job being to handle corpses. In the refugee camp, there was a four-year old boy who was sick and dying. F decided to adopt him. Her husband initially opposed this decision, because the couple had just married and would have to raise their own children in the future. However, F persuaded her husband, saying, "He will die if we don't adopt him."

> *His mother has already died, and if no one else adopts him, he will die. I saw him dying, his black hair turning white with lice swarming all over his head. He wore a yellow coat, with black lice inside. Wherever he walked, his toenails and fingernails were curved and long. I thought, he will die. I talked with my husband. I said, "Let's adopt the kid, or he will die." War is a matter between two nations; the child is innocent. I said, I will adopt the boy, and he said, you are going to give birth to a child. But he agreed with me in the end. Otherwise, the child would have been dead.*

Thus, F became the mother of the four-year old boy when she was seventeen years old. F's brother became the victim in the war of resistance against Japan after a Japanese military unit had conducted bacterial experiments. F hated the Japanese army. Nevertheless, she resolutely adopted Japanese orphans. I asked F again about this issue:

> Interviewer: *Since your brother was persecuted to death by the Japanese army, why did you decide to adopt a Japanese child? What were you thinking?*
> F: *Just as I've said, I thought, a war is a war between*

different countries; the child is pathetic, he doesn't know about anything, and I adopted him. He would die if we didn't save him. Later, when he learnt to speak, I taught him words like "eat" and "drink water" using gestures bit by bit. And I have raised him up to now.

It is an extraordinary fact that during the Japanese war, so many orphans were adopted by the people whose country had suffered the invaders' slavery and ravage. The war and aggression had separated the Japanese orphans from their homeland. Humanitarian hearts, however, transcended lineage and borders, making it possible for the orphans to have Chinese parents. Some Japanese even ask themselves, "Could I do the same if the situation were the opposite?" Since ancient times, Confucianism and Buddhism have had a far-reaching influence on Chinese people. The Confucian concept of the "original goodness of human nature" differs considerably from the western Christian creed in which "All men are born to sin." *Sān zì jīng* [*The Three-Character Primer*], the classic of Confucianism, emphasizes that, "*Rén zhī chū, xìng běn shàn. Xìng xiāng jìn, xí xiāng yuǎn.*" [Human nature at birth is fundamentally good. Although natures are similar to each other, they vary according to habit.] Mencius, the famous ideologist of Confucianism, put forward the 'four-sense theory', which emphasizes the importance of compassion, shame, humility and justice. In addition, he advocated the importance of education for children.

Meanwhile, *Lǐ jì·lǐ yùn piān* [*The Book of Rites*] states, "*Gù rén bù dú qīn qí qīn, bù dú zǐ qí zǐ. Shǐ lǎo yǒu suǒ zhōng, zhuàng yǒu suǒ yòng, yòu yǒu suǒ cháng, guān guǎ gū dú fèi jí zhě, jiē yǒu suǒ yǎng.*" This means that people not only should support and wait upon their own parents and bring up their own children, but also should support all elders in fulfilling their natural lives, and allow all children to grow up happily under the care of society. This is not only a social ideal, but also a demand, arising from the people, for social morality.

Moreover, Buddhism stresses that "a grass, a tree, or an ant is life which cannot be belittled." It also says that "there is greater merit in saving one life than in building a seven-tier pagoda." That is, saving a life is more meritorious and more meaningful than building a tower for the dead. It is believed that saving lives has immeasurable merits and virtues, and people will be rewarded with a better life for doing kindness.

Under the influence of these two ideologies, Confucianism and Buddhism, and traditional culture, Chinese foster parents succored Japanese children instinctively. Chinese adoptive parents invariably say, "Kids are too poor, and they cannot sit alone". This is a most representative narration of Chinese traditional culture. Without understanding the tradition and culture behind such

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narrations, it would be difficult to understand participants' answers to the question: "Why would we save a child of the enemy?"

Understanding the meaning of narrators' language choices

When I conducted interviews with the three generations of Japanese orphans, it was not always easy to decide which language to use: Japanese or Chinese. There are several reasons: the mother tongues of the three generations differ; there are generation gaps in language use; and, even within the same generation, narrators' command of Japanese varies according to when they returned to Japan. Their situation can be compared to that of three generations of Japanese-Americans, for whom maintaining Japanese language competence has been complicated by the second and third generations use of several other languages.[2] The result, in the United States, is a "Japanese-descent society [that] is, at least in several generations, a bilingual community using Japanese and its local language, from which the offspring shift completely to the situation with local common language only. The language situation of Japanese people living overseas will present a variety of forms according to the acquisition level and performance ability of the local common language and Japanese, or according to the situation where both are used."[3] Finally, the choice of an interview language can depend not only on the respondent's language ability, but also, sometimes, on their will.

Thus far, my interviews with the first generation of Japanese orphans have all been conducted in Chinese, the language with which they are familiar. The exception was the interview with Y, who stated: "I want to be interviewed in Japanese." Let us now closely look at his reasons. Y expressed his strong will to emulate Japanese people. He actively participated as a leading member in the Japanese orphans' suit against the Japanese government, which began in 2002. This lawsuit accused the government of being delinquent by not providing enough support for the orphans' return to Japan or for their life after returning. When Y first returned to Japan, he suffered considerable ridicule and contempt in his workplace because he could not speak Japanese. Being desperate, he applied for public assistance so as to meet his most basic needs. His Japanese colleagues mocked him, "Because of people like you, we need to pay so much tax." To Y, this was a "disgrace." Believing that, "Even if I am a Japanese orphan, I cannot be inferior to 'Japanese,'" Y was absorbed in learning Japanese by himself as he travelled to work and during daily breaks in his workplace. Using Japanese in the interview was, for him, a strong expression of confidence that he is not inferior.

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[2] Yoshinori Yanagida, *Amerika no nikkeijin ― toshi shakai seikatsu* (Tokyo: Dobunkan Shuppan, 1995). p. 241, translation mine.
[3] Ibid., p.264, translation mine.

Y's language choice reflects his history of diligent efforts to help other Japanese orphans succeed. After he went back to Japan on his own, he established the "Back from China Independent Fraternity", because of how bitterly he remembered the experience of returning. Y supports Japanese orphans who have just returned to Japan: finding them jobs, interpreting at their job interviews, offering security for them, helping them to return to China, and finding their Japanese birth parents if possible. He always encourages those who have difficulty learning Japanese and who do not fit into Japan's society, even after having settled there for ten years. As Y puts it, "We can succeed by being hard-working, even if we are Japanese orphans." By deliberately asking me to use Japanese in the interview, Y reaffirms how resolutely he recognizes his own identity, even if the state had not. As Y puts it, "Japan is my homeland. But, the Japanese government didn't treat us as Japanese after we came back to Japan. Though we are Japanese, we cannot live an ordinary Japanese life."

The influence of standpoint in the interaction between narrators and listeners

As Sakurai said, "even the narrator's story and his/her self-concept are not inherent to her or his character and unchangeable, but created through the interview",[4] constructed in the interactive context and through the cooperation of narrator and listener, rather than belonging to the narrator alone. Both sides play indispensable roles in making effective interviews. Following from standpoint theory[5] would note, differences in interviewers' and respondents' generational positions, racialization, gender, nationality, or even the institution from which a person has graduated can influence a narration.

Although my life experiences as a researcher in Japan are not entirely the same as those of the Japanese orphans who had been living in Japan, we still have something in common. They, too, had grown up in China, moved to Japan, and experienced a process of adaptation to a foreign culture. Because we shared the Chinese language and cultural background, sometimes I felt that I was able to

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[4] Atsushi Sakurai, *Intabyū no shakai-gaku,* p.7, translation mine.

[5] Standpoint theory was initially developed by scholars such as Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, Dorothy Smith, and Patricia Hill Collins. See, for example: Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism,' pp. 283-310 in Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (eds.), *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (Boston: Kluwer, 1983); Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism.* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press); Dorothy Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press); and Patricia Hill Collins (1989) "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society.*

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understand the subtle and delicate nuances of their thoughts both profoundly and readily. In the interviews, the orphans often said to me, "Since we are both Chinese, I will tell you frankly," or, "You are also Chinese, so I'm sure you can understand well." These words reflect an intimacy and rapport that greatly affect the process of interpreting the respondents' lives and the resulting. Of course, there is no doubt that they may also be hesitant to opening their hearts just because I am Chinese. Further, because we share a language and cultural background, we may regard some things as taken for granted, and thus overlook certain key issues. In taking my Chinese identity into consideration, respondents may avoid entering into sensitive topics or may speak selectively. These factors are more difficult to observe.

It is also important to note that, through the process of interaction between a respondent and an interviewer, the respondent may reaffirm his narration or come to perceive it in a new light. An example of this arose in my interview with M. He indicated that the reason he came back to Japan was just because other people had done so, and because the Japanese government had actively assisted him during the application procedure. However, as we spoke about M's family, another story emerged by chance. I had learned that M's son had preceded him to Japan, going there half a year earlier in order to attend university. When I mentioned that I had attended the same university, the interview topic took a turn:

> *Interviewer: I've heard that your son studied at Chiba University, Is that right? If so, we are both alumni.*
> *M: Oh, really? He went to Japan as an overseas student when he had graduated from a college in China, and he has completed graduate school.*
> *I'er: Your son came to Japan as an overseas student, but not as a Japanese orphan, right?*
> *M: Yes, the descendants of the Japanese orphans have the privilege of studying in Japan if they have a senior school education background. That's why he came to Japan earlier than me. He came to Japan and studied in Chiba University. He was deeply impressed by Japanese modernization, so he used to send me letters so often, practically every day, to ask me to come. He persuaded me that, "Compared to China, Japan is really a developed country, come on!" He also said "You can live here for a period of time and then decide to stay or to come back to China." I felt he was right, because I could go back to China if I turned out to be a misfit in Japan. So, my stay in Japan was directly motivated by my son's persuasion.*

In this new narrative, elicited by the coincidence of M's son and my common experience, M's primary reason to return to Japan, was a different one. He no longer emphasized the government's active help, but rather, his son's passionate persuasion. This phenomenon, in which illuminating different facets of identities and experiences brings forth different narrations, can be found throughout interview research. This example points to the value of understanding respondents' family histories and experiences in China and Japan, and not only their more general cultural background.

Issues of translation and readerships

As mentioned above, language differences can be a challenge when interviewing respondents of a cultural background different from one's own. After the interview, however, another problem arises: How can we translate migrants' narratives, which reflect their culture of origin, so that the interviewer, as well as readers in the host society, may understand the narratives correctly? Like other scholars who have considered this question, I see three answers. Below, I will discuss the challenges of each.

The first commonly-used approach is for the mother tongue of the respondent to be used during the interview, and then to translate passages into the language of the host society. For example, after interviews conducted in Chinese with the first generation of Japanese orphans, I, as a Chinese researcher fluent in Japanese, can translate the dialogue into Japanese and disseminate it to Japanese society. The respondent can express their thoughts freely in this case. However, errors of translation – or of readers' reception of a translation – are inevitable, especially as cultural background is entwined with language use. A relevant example here is how to translate the specific Chinese terms *rìběn guǐzi* [Jap devil] and *xiǎo rìběn* [Little Japan] for Japanese readers. During the Sino-Japanese War, these had been the most widely-used and influential slurs that Chinese used for Japanese, and they remain in use today. Respondents mentioned these terms in interview passages with varied thematic emphases. For example, in these three typical narratives, being labeled "Japanese" was associated with discrimination, bullying, exclusion, and alienation:

> *All the kids except for me can go to school.[6] Every time I've finished*
> *my farm work and am on my way home, tears stream down when I*
> *see the students have a good time in the schoolyard. Once I had a*
> *quarrel with other children while playing with them, they insulted*

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[6] In a few families, foster parents requested that a child work instead of attending school.

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me, calling me "Jap devil." Since then I don't go outside and play with them.

When I was a kid, I didn't know that I'm a Japanese, but my neighbors sometimes called me "Jap devil." If I was insulted, called "Jap devil" by someone, I would cry. At that time, I felt that Japanese are bad people, and if others called you a "Jap devil", I felt it was like being labeled as a bad boy. I used to cry many times because of this, [it was] very humiliating. Since then, I came to understand that I am a Japanese child. I have never forgotten that.

The greatest pain that I can't bear is the attitude and the words of the people around me. In China, I'm abused as "Jap devil, Jap devil," but in Japan, as "the Chinese, the Chinese." Some people ask me, "Where are you from?" when I buy vegetables, and some officials say, "Show your foreigner registration certificate," when I'm looking for a job. It makes me feel very hurt and regretful. I'm neither Chinese nor Japanese, who am I?

To Japanese readers, terms such as "Jap devil" and "Little Japan" would generally sound derogatory. However, it must be emphasized that these terms do express multiple meanings, associated with different contexts. Sometimes they express anger and hatred toward Japanese militarism and invaders, sometimes they simply indicate that the geographical area and population of Japan are smaller than those of China, and sometimes they refer to the fact that Japanese people are generally shorter than northeast Chinese local people. In other words, the degree of hatred being referenced may be deep or shallow, depending on the context. Moreover, sometimes these terms may not be interpreted by respondents themselves as marking hatred. Rather, they may be a source of pride, as this interview passage illustrates:

Interviewer: For you, as a Japanese orphan, do you think this is a good thing or a bad thing?
G: I think that is a good thing. There are so many Chinese people, but there is [one] Japanese: that's me. So. I feel very proud (laughs).
I'er: Why?
G: Why? Because China is so big, I am alive as a Japanese, and I think it's something to be proud of. Now, nobody calls me by my name, but they call me "Little Japan," "Japanese

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elder sister,"[7] which makes me happy.

For this reason, we must interpret and translate "Jap suckers" according to its contexts.

Importantly, this means that, as Halai and Reeves-Ellington have each discussed,[8] we also must be flexible in considering how to select expressions and contextualize them for different potential readerships – in my study, for Japanese and Chinese readers. For both readerships, it is necessary to introduce historical background information. For Japanese readers, it is useful to mention aspects of the Chinese social environment of which the readers are unaware. (It is also, of course, necessary to use the Japanese term for the orphans, which translates to the English "residual orphans in China.") For Chinese readers, we need to make other adjustments when speaking of the group they know of as "Japanese orphans." The term can underscore a perception that this group was, in childhood, affected by the sequelae of war. It can also point to an essentialism in which the orphans are considered intrinsically Japanese, and to the resulting bias and segregation that the orphans face from some Chinese people.

A second common approach to linguistic difference in interviews with migrants is to use the language of the migrant narrator's host country, with which the respondent may not be very familiar. In that case, the narrator may be hindered from accurately conveying their meanings, so the host country language should be used as a last resort. Involving a professional interpreter in the interview may be another alternative. However, this too can give rise to substantial problems: interpretation will not be effective unless the interpreter has expertise in the interview topic; the interview may be affected by the reactions that occur during simultaneous interpretation;[9] and errors in interpretation can easily be made owing to contextual differences.

The third approach is simultaneously use the native language of the respondent and the language of the host society. Yamamoto usually adopts this method in her research on Japanese wives living in South Korea. As she puts it, "I am always obsessed with the feeling that the tone of the language can't be fully

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[7] "Elder sister" is a common form of address in China. It can be used among friends, for example.

[8] Nelofer Halai, "Making Use of Bilingual Interview Data: Some Experiences from the Field," *The Qualitative Report,* 12, no.3 (2007): 344-355; Barbara Reeves-Ellington, "Responsibility with Loyalty: Oral History Texts in Translation." *Target. International Journal of Translation Studies* 11, no. 1 (1999): 103-129.

[9] A striking example appears in A.N. Beasley. "Kuru Truths: Obtaining Fore Narratives." *Field Methods*, 18, no. 1 (2006): 21-42.

represented."[10] Use of a bilingual method does not solve the problems mentioned in the first and second approaches.

Conclusion

For more than a decade, I have conducted interviews and surveys with three generations of Japanese orphans (the first and the second generations and their Chinese foster parents) from the standpoint of a Chinese student in Japan. Based on these data, I have clarified the circumstances in which the orphans now live, and sought to analyze their identities, focusing on the interplay of their life stories, generational locations, and senses of national belonging. Oral history is a method that can provide insight into the subtle emotions hidden in narrators' hearts. But, how to conduct this method well when cultural and linguistic differences divide respondents from interviewers or from the readerships of research – as they so often may in today's increasingly diverse societies – must be considered carefully. In this reflection, I have discussed some facets of these differences by using the Japanese orphans as a case study.

These orphans have been affected by both Chinese and Japanese culture, growing up in a kind of middle space. In China, they are labeled as Japanese and treated like outsiders by some people. Upon returning to Japan, they were considered as Chinese and could not easily adapt to Japanese society. Such cross-cultural experiences have made many Japanese orphans feel insecure about their identities. As the listeners and researchers to narrators such as these, we need to consider how to utilize our common ground so as to facilitate better understanding across linguistic, cultural, or generational divides.

In countries with substantial proportions of immigrants, diversity in cultural understandings is, of course, very obvious. However, these reflections can also be generalized to consider how to sensitively conduct research with groups that are identified in terms of other forms minority statuses, and who are socially isolated or marginalized. These groups may be based, for example, on social class, on sexual orientation, on specific beliefs, values, or rites, on disability or illness (such as living with HIV or AIDS), or on specific historical experiences, such as those of surviving the bombing of Hiroshima or the Sino-Japanese war. The cultures of these groups may differ from those of the 'mainstream.' Although I have focused on Japanese orphans, as a group with a special status in both China and Japan, the ideas that I have expressed can transcend the particularities of the

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[10] Kaori Yamamoto, "Zaikan nihonjin dsuma no seikatsushi," ["Oral histories of Japanese wives in Korea"] pp. 62-88 in Tomio Tani (ed.), *Raifuhisutorī o manabu hito no tame ni* (Kyoto: Sekai shisō-sha, 2002). p.70, translation mine.

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borders between these two countries, and can pertain to the understanding of all diverse societies and cultures.