

Review: *Chūgoku Zanryū Koji no Shakaigaku: Nihon to chūgoku wo ikiru sansedai no raifusutōri*

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Lan Zhang, *Chūgoku Zanryū Koji no Shakaigaku: Nihon to chūgoku wo ikiru sansedai no raifusutōri* [*Sociology of Japanese War-Displaced Orphans Left in China: Life Stories of Three Generations Living in Japan and China*], Seikyusha, 2011. 316 pages. ISBN 978-4787233295

By the end of World War II, around 1,550,000 Japanese people lived in 'Manchukuo', most of whom were repatriated after the Japanese defeat in the war. However, in the wartime chaos of the invasion of Soviet Army and the collapse of 'Manchukuo', and above all in the postwar chaos of the Japanese repatriation, more than 15,000 Japanese people were left behind in China. The majority of them being adopted children or wives of Chinese nationals, the former are called Japanese war-displaced orphans left in China, and the latter are called Japanese women left in China. Ninety percent of the orphans abandoned in China who are mentioned in this book came back to Japan during the 1980's and 1990's, after the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China.

Japanese war-displaced orphans left in China are people who have crossed borders between 'Manchukuo' and the new China, and China during the period of reforms and open-door policies. They further crossed borders into Japan after the period of high economic growth. In particular, they were the subject of much attention during the 1980's from the mass media as well as in novels and movies. They also attracted interest from scholars in the humanities and social sciences. In Japan, the media in particular created a tragic image of them as being "war orphans" coming from "torn families," destroyed because of the war. The research that was conducted based on this popular image in Japan has focused on the process of orphans returning to Japan and adapting to Japanese society; it largely focuses on notions of inclusion and exclusion as Japanese. On the other hand, in China, the research on the lives of war orphans has most extensively explored how the children and women had been left in China; in the case of the children, attention is given to the Chinese foster parents and the humanitarian adoption of the children, or the humanitarian work by Chinese local societies. In both Japan and China, research has largely focused on the situations of their own country, and has lacked mutual understanding or points of view from both nations. However, Lan Zhang has now broken with this tendency.

Shinzo Araragi, "Review of *Chūgoku zanryū koji no shakaigaku*." *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 37 (2017), Special Issue on Generations and Memory: Continuity and Change.

Lan Zhang, a Chinese scholar who studied in Japan, does not passively adopt the broad narrative of nation states. She stands out not only for her bilingual linguistic abilities but also for her ability to pick up small stories told in interviews and to foreground the polyphony and contradictions in the stories. She has closely reviewed the previous studies and she has conducted numerous interviews in both Japanese and Chinese. Above all, she was fortunate in her advanced study to learn directly from Atsushi Sakurai, who advocates methods of “interactive constructivism”.¹

The method Sakurai advocates focuses on a holistic treatment of speakers. He encourages interviewers to actively try to access the lives and world of their subjects through interaction with the speakers, and then utilize these details in their studies. Zhang utilizes the essence of this method. The method works particularly well in her case as she used Chinese to interview war-orphans and people around them whose origin and mother tongue is tied to Chinese culture, while she interviewed Japanese volunteer groups and administrations using Japanese. She successfully conducted interviews in both Japan and China, which had not been possible before because of language difficulties. Moreover, she was able to interview three generations: that is, war-orphans who lived or are living in both Japan and China, the second generation living in Japan, and the Chinese foster parents. Her fieldwork, which consisted mainly of interviews, had a balanced approach to the life worlds of war-orphans who moved beyond the border between Japan and China. Her work also succeeds in overcoming the biased interviewing that had been problematic in previous studies, and the limitations of research of a nationalistic bent.

Zhang’s largest contribution is in describing the various experiences and ideas surrounding war-orphans through the use of life story interviews with three generations of people related to the orphans. In particular, the chapters about the migration experiences of two generations and the various identities originating from these different experiences are very interesting. The two generations include multiple possible experiences, such as those of (a) the suffering war-orphan returning Japan, (b) war-orphans who have chosen to stay in China, (c) a few war-orphans who have not been able to come back to Japan for some reason, and (d) the second generation of war-orphan returning to Japan.

Previous studies constructed a narrative archetype in which war-orphans were represented by type (a) alone, and depicted as people suffering from an identity crisis between Japan and China because of their painful history. However, Zhang suggests that various and multiple identities and an amorphous sense of self, a flexible self and a fixed self-type coexist among abandoned orphans. She reveals

¹ Atsushi Sakurai, *Intabyū no shakaigaku* [Sociology of the Interview], (Tokyo: Serika shobō, 2007), pp.28-31.

the diversity of their identities by describing the three selves as follows. An amorphous self is the most common; here, they have to construct a Chinese identity by being excluded from a Japanese identity, at the same time as they have a Japanese identity. In addition to this, the term ‘flexible self’ means that they positively express themselves as either Japanese or Chinese in interactions, while a ‘fixed self’ marks an established self-identity as Chinese. Additionally, concerning group (d), the self-identity of this second generation also describes not only the negative identity of being neither Japanese nor Chinese but also the positive identity of being Japanese and Chinese.

Zhang does not interpret the narratives, but uses the method of Sakurai, which lets the narratives tell themselves. In this way, she points out the varied and positive life patterns of war-orphans by describing active and positive identities that contrast with the conventional dominant story, which emphasized lives torn between two mother countries, Japan and China, and the tragedy of unstable identity between Japan and China. This is the result of her unique interviews and fieldwork, and her great contribution to the research on Japanese war-orphans in China.

In Japan, the conventional dominant story had been formed by focusing on negative identities because of a Japanese sense of remorse and as a kind of expiation for colonization and the second Sino-Japanese war; in contrast, the Chinese side’s historical view of the puppet state ‘Manchukuo’ influenced their national narratives as well. This is because Zhang’s interviews about themes closely related to issues of understanding history, nationalism and trials were ruled by the ‘narrative place,’ encompassing languages, situations and social contexts, such as the directions of the trials, public opinion about them, and nationalism. In other words, her work is ruled by a ‘magnetic field of narrative’, from which neither interviewers nor interviewees can easily escape. However, while Zhang understands what lies beneath both interpretations, she stands in a different position, noticing stories of flexible and positive identities, and taking up the ‘plurality of identity’ of war-orphans. This was possible because she conducted interviews in two languages as well as her analysis that was relatively free of national historical narratives and nationalism.

The “plurality of identity” of Japanese war-orphans revealed by this book must be the result of Zhang’s cheerful and positive personality, her fluent use of both Japanese and Chinese, and her exquisite sense of positionality. This book not only discloses new aspects of Japanese war-orphans left in China, but also is an example that teaches us how life story interviews about such a difficult theme can be done.