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CULTURAL IDENTITY PRESERVATION OF CHINESE ORPHANS FROM THE POST-WORLD WAR II ERA: JAPAN-CHINA FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION FOR NPO CHINA RETURNEES IN JAPAN & FUTURE SCOPE DIRECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the cultural identity of Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era through documentary research and fieldwork, analyzing the formation of their identity and heritage practices within a distinctive historical context. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews employing purposive sampling with seven key representative informants. Particular attention is given to the role of the Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees in supporting returnees and sustaining cultural identity. The findings indicate that Northeast China, where most orphans were raised, profoundly shaped their identity through everyday cultural influences, including cuisine, daily practices, and festive traditions. Following repatriation to Japan, they faced significant challenges such as language barriers, employment difficulties, and social integration. In this context, branches of the association in Osaka and Tokyo became vital support networks, promoting cultural continuity through Chinese language education, traditional festival celebrations, cultural exchange gatherings, transmission of Chinese arts, preservation of culinary traditions, and commemorative activities. These initiatives create collective spaces for maintaining shared memory and identity. The study situates these practices within the frameworks of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The analysis shows that community-based transmission of these practices aligns with ICH safeguarding principles and directly contributes to SDGs 11.4, 10, 16, and 4, underscoring the nexus between heritage preservation and sustainable development. The study argues that the cultural identity of postwar Chinese orphans should be recognized as a form of "World Intangible Cultural Heritage" embodied in a visible community of shared memory and identity, and that its sustainable preservation requires strengthened cross-sector collaboration among NPOs, academic institutions, local communities, and government bodies in Japan.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Heritage Preservation, Chinese Orphans from The Post-World War II Era, Japan-China Friendship Association (NPO).

1. INTRODUCTION

The experiences of Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era are deeply intertwined with Japan's imperial invasion and occupation of Northeast China between 1931 and 1945. Following the Mukden Incident in September 1931, Japan occupied Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning provinces and established the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932 (Zhang, 2025). During this period, large-scale Japanese civilian migration was promoted through state-led settler programs known as Kaitakudan, resulting in the relocation of approximately 1.55 million Japanese civilians by the end of the war. These settlers lived in segregated communities that maintained Japanese lifestyles while remaining socially distant from local Chinese society (Hui, 1943). The collapse of the Japanese empire in August 1945 and the subsequent Soviet invasion of Manchuria led to chaotic evacuations, during which many civilians were displaced, killed, or separated from their families.

As a result, thousands of children were left behind and later became known as war orphans (Wang, 2013; Zhang, 2025). Many of these children were adopted by Chinese families and raised within Chinese linguistic, cultural, and social systems, forming identities rooted in Chinese everyday life and collective memory (Pan, 2006). Following the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan in the 1970s and the Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1978, repatriation policies enabled many war orphans and their descendants to return to Japan. From the 1980s onward, a number of Chinese returnees resettled in urban areas such as Osaka, where support networks and community organizations facilitated their settlement (Nagayama, 1992). However, this return was not merely a geographic relocation but a complex process of cultural readjustment, memory reconstruction, and identity negotiation. Many returnees encountered linguistic barriers, social marginalization, and challenges in preserving cultural practices shaped during their upbringing in China.

The study of cultural heritage preservation among this group holds particular significance because their identities and memories reflect layered histories of war, displacement, and transnational belonging. Cultural heritage for Chinese orphans encompasses language, traditions, oral histories, and everyday practices that connect personal experiences with collective memory and trauma (Cheung, 1989; Lyu & Zhu, 2022). These elements are not only individual resources but also shared cultural assets that require active preservation, especially as this generation ages. The original organization, Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees, was first established in 2008,

Tokyo, as a non-profit civil society group dedicated to supporting Chinese returnees. It served as the foundational entity for the broader network of Japan-China Friendship Associations, especially to Osaka prefecture. Over time, this initial Tokyo-based organization expanded its activities, leading to the establishment of numerous affiliated associations across other prefectures in Japan, even though the prefecture started earlier than NPO Tokyo prefecture. (Ikeda, 2025) These regional branches have played a pivotal role in broadening the organization's reach and enhancing its efforts to preserve the cultural heritage and support the community of returnees throughout the country.

In this context, non-profit Japan-China Friendship Association (NPO) especially from Tokyo and Osaka Prefecture have played a crucial role in supporting cultural activities, maintaining collective memory, and fostering cross-cultural understanding (Fujinami, 2022). Despite expanding scholarship on migration and minorities in Japan, limited attention has been paid to cultural heritage preservation among older migrant populations whose displacement was shaped by war and colonialism rather than economic motivations (Han, 2013; Li, 2023).

Existing research often overlooks how cultural identity and heritage are sustained through community-based practices and organizational support (Chen, 2014) Addressing this gap, the present study contributes academically and socially by foregrounding the voices and cultural practices of Chinese orphans from Northeast China. By situating their experiences within broader frameworks of sustainable development and UNESCO cultural heritage preservation, this study highlights the importance of safeguarding cultural identity as part of inclusive and sustainable societies (Kanemoto et al., 2021; Zhang & Wu, 2015; Klangrit et al., 2025). This study proposes future-oriented policy recommendations that emphasize sustainability, inclusivity, and cultural coexistence. By foregrounding the role of NPOs and community-based heritage practices, the research contributes to broader discussions on cultural heritage preservation, post-conflict reconciliation, and the development of culturally informed policies in aging societies.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the preservation of cultural heritage among Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era, with particular focus on Chinese returnees and the role of the Japan-China Friendship Association (NPO). Using documentary research and fieldwork studies, the article

analyzes how cultural identity, collective memory, and heritage practices are maintained and transmitted. The study further situates these processes within sustainable development (SDGs) and UNESCO cultural heritage frameworks to propose future-oriented recommendations for sustainable heritage preservation.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

As illustrated in *figure 1*, this study adopts a conceptual framework to examine the preservation of cultural heritage among Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era, focusing on Chinese returnees and the role of the Japan-China Friendship Association (NPO). The framework is based on documentary analysis and fieldwork studies, which provide historical, institutional, and experiential data relevant to cultural identity and heritage preservation. The framework begins with the historical background of Chinese orphans who were displaced during and after World War II. Their early experiences of separation, migration, and survival form the foundation for understanding their cultural identities and long-term social conditions. Building on this background, the

framework highlights the role of non-profit organizations, particularly the Japan-China Friendship Association (NPO), as a key intermediary. The NPO supports Chinese returnees through cultural exchange activities, welfare assistance, and community-based initiatives, contributing to the reconstruction and transmission of cultural identity in a transnational context. Cultural and identity heritage preservation constitutes the central analytical dimension of the framework. This includes the maintenance of cultural practices, collective memories, and identity expressions shaped by both Chinese origins and Japanese social environments. These processes are examined in relation to international concepts of sustainable development and cultural heritage preservation, especially those articulated in the SDGs and UNESCO frameworks. By integrating historical background, organizational roles, cultural identity preservation, and global heritage perspectives, the conceptual framework leads to future scope recommendations. These recommendations emphasize sustainable heritage preservation, the strengthening of NPO roles, and long-term cooperation between the countries to ensure the continued transmission of the cultural heritage of Chinese orphans in contemporary society.

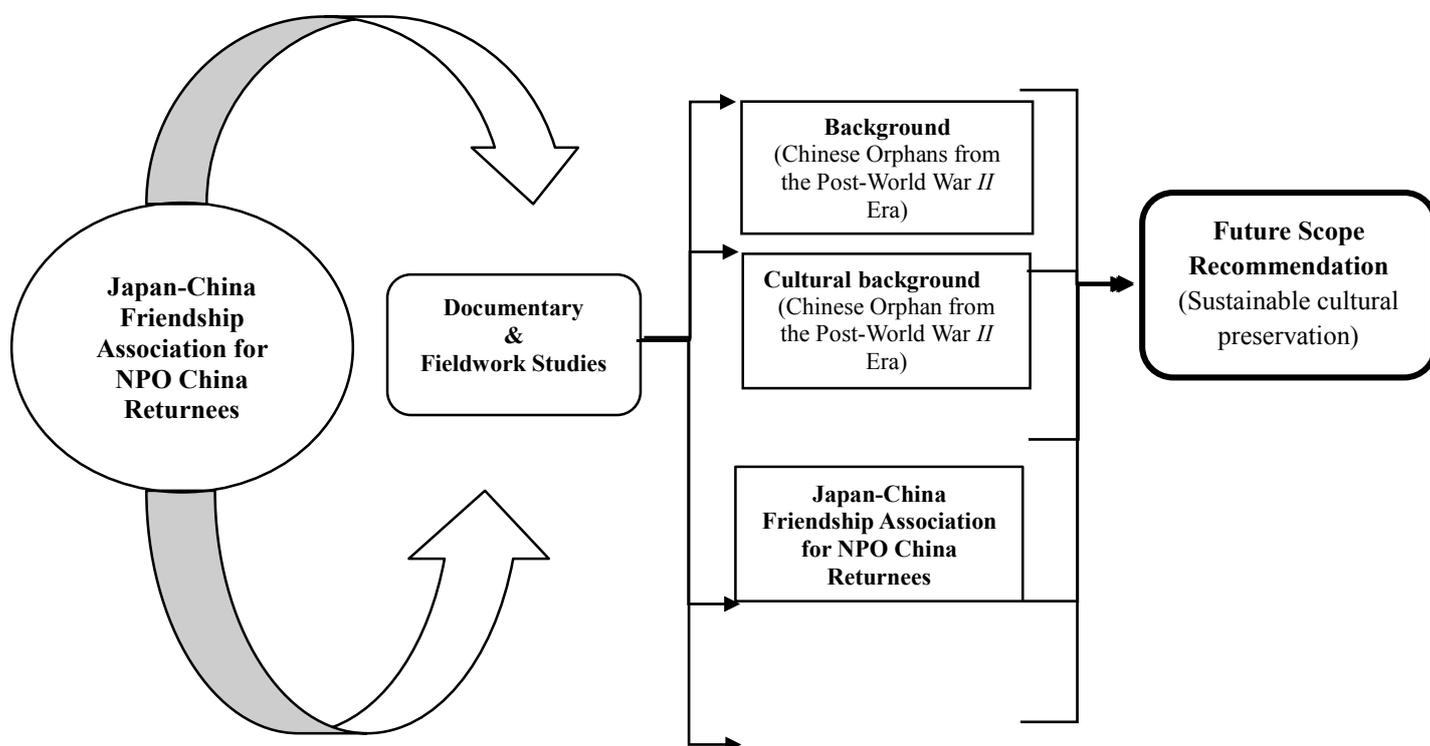


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework of the Study.

4. METHODS OF THE STUDY

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the preservation of cultural heritage among Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era, with particular attention to Chinese returnees and the role of the Japan-China Friendship Association (NPO). A qualitative methodology was considered appropriate for capturing in-depth historical narratives, lived experiences, and institutional perspectives related to cultural identity, memory, and heritage preservation in a transnational context (Bailey, 2017; Creswell, 1998). Data collection was based on two main sources such as secondary documentary research and fieldwork studies. Documentary data were collected through a review of academic journal articles, historical records, organizational reports, and relevant publications related to postwar Chinese orphans, Japan-China relations, Non-profit organizations, and cultural heritage preservation. This documentary analysis provided the historical and conceptual foundation for understanding heritage preservation within broader frameworks such as UNESCO and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Krippendorff, 2019). Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews employing purposive sampling with 7 key representative informants. The interviews were conducted in Chinese and took place at the participants' workplaces or residences. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes to one hour. These interviews provided insights into personal memories, cultural practices, and organizational roles in sustaining and transmitting cultural heritage across generations. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to historical background, cultural identity, collective memory, and heritage preservation practices (Bailey, 2017; Bryman & Burgess, 1999). Documentary data were analyzed using content analysis to support triangulation and enhance the reliability and coherence of the study's findings.

5. RESULTS

5.1. History Background of Northeast Chinese Orphans from the Post-World War II Era

Northeast Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era represent a historically distinctive group whose identities and cultural heritage were shaped through war, colonialism, and long-term processes of socialization and memory formation. Their emergence is rooted not only in wartime

displacement but also in prolonged everyday life within Chinese social, linguistic, and cultural environments. Understanding their historical background is therefore essential for analyzing how identity reconstruction and cultural heritage preservation developed over time, particularly as these individuals navigated fractured personal histories and collective memories resulting from imperial collapse. The historical origins of these orphans are directly connected to Japan's invasion and occupation of Northeast China following the Mukden Incident of September 18, 1931. After occupying Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning provinces, Japan established the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932 under the nominal rule of Aisin Gioro Puyi (Zhang, 2025). Despite its portrayal as a sovereign and multiethnic state, Manchukuo functioned as a Japanese colonial regime administered by the Kwantung Army. Beyond its military significance, the region became a laboratory for demographic and cultural engineering designed to solidify Japanese imperial control.

A central component of this colonial project was large-scale civilian settlement. Through ideological narratives such as "Harmony of the five races" (*Gozoku Kyōwa*) and the creation of an "Ideal land of the kingly way" Japanese authorities promoted a vision of coexistence that masked deep structural inequalities between Japanese settlers and Chinese residents. Beginning in the early 1930s, the Japanese government implemented state-sponsored migration programs known as *kaitakudan*, encouraging farmers and families to relocate to Northeast China with promises of land, economic opportunity, and national duty. By the end of World War II, approximately 1.55 million Japanese civilians had been resettled in the region. Policies such as the "Twenty-year immigration plan for one million households" adopted in 1936, institutionalized these movements and underscored their importance within Japan's imperial strategy (Zhang, 2025). Japanese settler communities were designed as culturally insulated enclaves, maintaining Japanese language, education systems, foodways, religious practices, and social norms. Interaction with local Chinese society was limited, and cultural separation became a defining feature of daily life (Hui, 1943). The outbreak of full-scale war in 1937 and subsequent military expansion profoundly altered these settler communities. As adult men were increasingly conscripted, the demographic structure of Japanese society in Manchuria shifted toward women, children, the elderly, and youth volunteers. By the final years of the war, these communities had

become socially fragile, lacking the institutional and military support that had previously sustained them.

The collapse of Japanese authority in August 1945, followed by the Soviet invasion of Manchuria, marked a moment of abrupt disintegration. Evacuation efforts were chaotic, resources scarce, and administrative control virtually nonexistent. Amid this turmoil, countless children were separated from their families or deliberately left behind as parents confronted impossible survival decisions. Many children were entrusted formally or informally to local Chinese families in the hope that remaining behind offered greater chances of survival than evacuation under violent and uncertain conditions (Zhang, 2025). These children later came to be known as Japanese war orphans. Their subsequent upbringing constituted a critical phase in the reconstruction of identity and the formation of cultural heritage. Raised by Chinese families, the orphans were fully embedded in Chinese social life. They acquired Chinese language fluency, adopted Chinese names, participated in local customs, food practices, religious beliefs, and seasonal rituals, and became integrated into community networks. Over time, cultural practices learned in everyday contexts replaced inherited Japanese cultural markers that had been disrupted or lost through war and separation (Pan, 2006). Cultural identity among these orphans was therefore not transmitted through lineage or national institutions but reconstructed through lived experience, social practice, and collective memory within Chinese households. Their identities were shaped through participation in shared labor, village rituals, kinship systems, and local moral frameworks. Cultural heritage, in this sense, emerged not as a fixed inheritance but as a dynamic and adaptive process grounded in survival, belonging, and emotional attachment to place and people (Cheung, 1989).

The ambiguous positionality of these individuals is reflected in their naming. In China, they were commonly referred to as “Japanese war orphans” while in Japan they were later labeled *Zanryū koji* “remaining orphans”. These labels reveal how national narratives framed them through the lens of loss and abandonment, yet neither fully captured the depth of their cultural embeddedness in Chinese society. Their lived identities often exceeded national categories, resulting in layered and hybrid cultural formations rooted in memory and practice rather than legal status alone (Pan, 2006; Wang, 2013). As diplomatic relations between China and Japan normalized in the 1970s, identification and return programs brought renewed attention to this group. However, identity reconstruction did not simply involve rediscovering Japanese origins; instead, it required negotiating deeply internalized Chinese cultural identities with external expectations of national belonging. Many orphans encountered pressure to “Reclaim” a Japanese identity that felt distant from their lived experience, highlighting tensions between official narratives and personal cultural memory. Institutional recognition further complicated this process. Early Japanese policies narrowly defined war orphans based on age at the time of adoption, excluding many individuals particularly women whose life experiences were deeply shaped by Chinese cultural environments. It was not until 1993 that broader recognition was extended to include all “Japanese left behind in China” reflecting a delayed acknowledgment of historical responsibility and cultural complexity (Wang, 2013). Over time, cultural heritage preservation became an increasingly urgent concern as this generation aged. Language, oral histories, rituals, food practices, and embodied memories formed vital links between personal experience and collective history.



Figure 2: Northeast Chinese Orphans from the Post-World War II Era (Zijun Shen, 2026)

These elements represented not only individual identity resources but also shared cultural heritage shaped by war and cross-cultural coexistence. Preserving such heritage required intentional effort, especially as social invisibility and generational loss threatened to erode embodied knowledge and memory. In this context, community organizations and non-profit institutions, including the Japan-China Friendship Association (NPO), have played a crucial role in supporting cultural activities, storytelling practices, and commemorative events. Through these initiatives, cultural heritage has been reframed as a shared human legacy rather than a marginal historical anomaly. Such efforts contribute to the reconstruction of dignity, recognition, and continuity for individuals whose identities were shaped by historical rupture rather than voluntary migration. *Figure 2* illustrates Northeast Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era, highlighting the generation whose lived experiences of war, displacement, and separation have profoundly influenced processes of cultural identity formation and collective memory. In summary, the historical background of Northeast Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era reveals a process in which identity reconstruction and cultural heritage preservation emerged through everyday life, memory, and social practice. Rooted in wartime abandonment and sustained through Chinese cultural environments, their identities challenge rigid national frameworks and underscore the importance of safeguarding lived cultural heritage shaped by care, survival, and historical injustice. This background provides the foundation for analyzing contemporary heritage preservation efforts and the role of NPOs in sustaining cultural identity within aging and historically marginalized communities.

5.2. The Cultural Background of Northeast Chinese Orphan from the Post-World War II Era

Northeast China, particularly the provinces of Heilongjiang and Liaoning, constitutes a crucial cultural and social context for understanding the lived experiences and identity formation of Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era. Beyond its role as a historical site of Japanese colonial expansion, the region functioned as the primary cultural environment in which many war orphans grew up, developed everyday practices, and reconstructed their identities through long-term immersion in Chinese society. As such, Northeast China represents not merely a geographical setting but a foundational cultural landscape that profoundly shaped habits of

living, bodily memory, and cultural belonging. Urban centers such as Shenyang, Dalian, Harbin, and Fushun played a significant role in structuring the everyday lives of these orphans. These cities served as spaces where food consumption, labor routines, and social interaction were embedded in local Northeastern Chinese cultural norms. Markets, communal kitchens, factory canteens, and neighborhood dining practices shaped daily rhythms and reinforced shared experiences through food and collective life. Northeastern Chinese cuisine characterized by hearty flavors suited to a harsh continental climate became central to everyday sustenance. Staple foods such as soybeans, corn, sorghum, potatoes, pork dumplings, corn grits, and fermented cabbage were not only sources of nourishment but also carriers of cultural meaning and social memory (Guan & Zhang, 2005). Oral histories documented by Wang (2013; 2015) reveal that many orphans were originally born into Japanese settler families who migrated from rural regions of Japan under state-led pioneer group policies. Prior to wartime disruption, their early familial environments were shaped by agricultural life, seasonal rituals, and traditional Japanese foodways such as Udon noodles, handmade sweets, and festival-related meals. However, following separation and adoption by Chinese families, these inherited cultural practices were gradually replaced through everyday adaptation to local conditions in Northeast China. This transition was not abrupt but occurred through repeated exposure to local diets, cooking practices, and domestic routines necessary for survival.

The natural environment of Northeast China exerted a powerful influence on lifestyle formation. The region's long winters, extremely low temperatures, and strong seasonality structured housing arrangements, patterns of subsistence, and social interaction. Traditional dwellings equipped with the Kang (炕), a heated brick bed, served as multifunctional domestic spaces where families cooked, slept, ate, and socialized together. These cultural elements are illustrated in *Figures 3 and 4*, which depict the Kang (a traditional fire-warmed bed) and examples of traditional northeastern foods, reflecting everyday practices and material culture within the community. Such spatial arrangements fostered close interpersonal relationships and reinforced collective modes of living that became deeply internalized by orphaned children raised within these households. Over time, bodily practices associated with cold-weather endurance, food preservation, and shared domestic labor became

integral elements of everyday identity (Wang, 2015). Statistical data further indicate that Heilongjiang and Liaoning provinces housed the largest concentrations of this orphan population. By 2000, Heilongjiang alone accounted for nearly half of the national total, reflecting the region's enduring role as a primary site of settlement and cultural formation (Guan & Zhang, 2005). Urban industrial



Figure 3: Kàng (Fire-Warmed Bed)
(Zijun Shen, August 2025)

Life histories also demonstrate how political culture intersected with everyday life and cultural formation. Growing up during periods of socialist transformation and political campaigns, many orphans engaged in factory work, revolutionary performances, and collective rituals that framed identity in terms of labor, contribution, and belonging to the social collective (Wang, 2013). These experiences became layered onto earlier domestic and cultural practices, producing identities shaped simultaneously by family-based cultural learning and broader ideological environments. Importantly, the cultural background of Northeast Chinese orphans reveals that identity was neither fixed nor inherited through nationality alone. Rather, it emerged through prolonged participation in local cultural practices food preparation, shared meals, household labor, seasonal routines, and community interaction. Cultural heritage in this context was not transmitted formally but accumulated through repetition, memory and bodily experience. Taste preferences, emotional attachments to familiar foods, and notions of "Home" remained deeply tied to Northeast Chinese life even later in life, underscoring the durability of culturally embedded memory. Overall, the cultural background of Northeast Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era illustrates a process in which identity and heritage

environments offered access to education, factory employment, and collective institutions, which further shaped everyday routines and cultural experiences. Participation in industrial labor, neighborhood communities, and state-organized activities embedded orphans within shared social frameworks that emphasized collectivism, discipline, and endurance.



Figure 4: Traditional Northeastern Foods
(Zijun Shen, August 2025)

were reconstructed through everyday life within a specific regional environment. The interaction between natural conditions, food culture, household practices, urban industrial settings, and political contexts collectively shaped distinctive forms of cultural identity. These experiences underscore the importance of viewing cultural heritage as a lived and embodied process, rooted in daily practices rather than formal ethnic or national categories. Understanding this cultural background provides a critical foundation for analyzing contemporary efforts to preserve and transmit the cultural heritage of this historically marginalized group (Wang, 2013; Guan & Zhang, 2005).

5.3. Background of Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees

The Japan-China Friendship Association (NPO) in Osaka represents one of the most enduring civil society organizations dedicated to fostering people-to-people relations between Japan and China. Established in 1950, only five years after the end of World War II, the Association emerged within a historical moment marked by unresolved war memories, diplomatic rupture, and the absence of formal bilateral relations between the two countries. Its early formation signaled a grassroots desire among Japanese citizens, intellectuals, and activists

to restore dialogue, peace, and cultural exchange beyond the constraints of Cold War geopolitics. While the Association initially focused on cultural exchange, peace advocacy, and mutual understanding, its role gradually expanded in response to shifting historical conditions and emerging social needs. The normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China in 1972 marked a critical turning point in the Association's development. Key bilateral agreements including the Japan-China Joint Communiqué (1972), the Japan-China Peace and Friendship Treaty (1978), the Japan-China Joint Declaration on Building a Partnership of Friendship and Cooperation for Peace and Development (1998), and the Japan-China Joint Statement on the Comprehensive Promotion of Strategic Mutual Benefit Relations (2008) provided an institutional framework that legitimized and expanded civil society exchange (NPO Japan-China Friendship Association of Osaka Prefecture, 2026) These documents not only shaped state diplomacy but also served as ideological and normative foundations for the Association's long-term activities in Osaka.

In parallel with diplomatic normalization, the gradual return of Chinese war orphans and

"Japanese left-behind orphans" from China to Japan from the late 1970s onward introduced a new social reality. Many returnees arrived with limited Japanese language ability, minimal economic resources, and deeply rooted cultural identities shaped by decades of life in Northeast China. Recognizing that state-led support mechanisms were insufficient to address cultural, emotional, and historical needs, civil society organizations increasingly became central actors. Although the Tokyo-based NPO Japan-China Friendship Association for China Returnees was formally established in 2008 as the earliest government-certified NPO specifically for Chinese returnees, the Osaka JCFA played a crucial foundational role by providing grassroots networks, cultural platforms, and long-term institutional memory that supported returnees long before formal policy responses emerged. (Kaji Moto, 2026) These can be observed in *Figure 5 & 6* below, which illustrates the official website and the map of the Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees (Tokyo now), which functions as an important communication platform for disseminating organizational information, activities, and support services for Chinese returnees.

Table 1: Some Prefectures of Japan-China Friendship Address and Details of Contact (Zijun Shen, February 2026)

Japan-China Friendship Association Chiba Branch	Address: Takehiro Sasamoto, 3-8-8 Matsugaoka, Funabashi City, 274-0064	047-466-9255 090-4832-0292
Japan-China Friendship Association Higashikatsushika Branch	Tanaka Seiju, 512-3 Sendabori, Matsudo City, 270-2252	047-384-7593
Japan-China Friendship Association Tokyo Federation	4th Floor, Toho Gakkai Building, 2-4-1 Nishikanda, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 101-0065	03-3261-0433
Japan-China Friendship Association Edogawa Branch	*Please see the website	
Kanagawa Prefecture Federation of Japan-China Friendship Association	Yokohama Peace and Labor Hall, 3-9 Sakuragicho, Naka-ku, Yokohama, 231-0062	045-663-0041



Figure 5: Website of Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees, Tokyo Prefecture (NPO Japan-China Friendship Association, 2026)



Figure 6: The Map of Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees, Tokyo Prefecture (NPO Japan-China Friendship Association, 2026)

As illustrated in *Table 1*, some branches of the Japan-China Friendship Association are listed. Notably, those that have been granted NPO government authorization, particularly the branches in Osaka and Tokyo, hold significant importance. The table includes detailed information on their locations and contact details, which are essential for academic collaboration and engagement. The certification of the Osaka association as a Non-Profit Organization (NPO) in 2001, earlier than the Tokyo Prefecture, and further consolidated its institutional status and enabled systematic programming, including regional branch associations and sustained collaboration with Chinese governmental and civil institutions. Over time, the Osaka JCFA evolved into a hub connecting local friendship associations across Osaka Prefecture with partner cities in China, creating a multi-layered civil society infrastructure that later became indispensable for supporting Chinese returnees and preserving their cultural heritage. The core mission of the Japan-China Friendship Association, particularly its Osaka NPO organization, extends beyond conventional cultural diplomacy. At its foundation lies a commitment to peace, historical reconciliation, and mutual respect, grounded in the lived experiences of war, displacement, and postwar reconstruction. For Chinese returnees especially war orphans raised in Northeast China this mission translated into practical support for cultural continuity, dignity, and grassroots survival. Unlike state-led welfare frameworks that focus primarily on legal status and employment, the prioritized everyday cultural practices as fundamental components of identity reconstruction.

One of the Association's most significant missions is language preservation and cultural transmission.

The provision of Chinese language classes, regular cultural tea gatherings, speech contests, and public lectures reflects a clear recognition that language functions as a core repository of memory and identity for returnees (NPO Japan-China Friendship Association of Osaka Prefecture, 2026). These activities are not simply educational but serve as spaces where embodied memory, emotional attachment, and collective identity are reaffirmed. For returnees who grew up speaking Chinese as their first language, such programs counteract pressures of linguistic erasure and affirm the legitimacy of their lived cultural experience.

Another central mission involves sustained collaboration with Chinese governmental and civil organizations. The maintains long-standing partnerships with Chinese cities such as Shanghai, Suzhou, Changzhou, Jiading, and Shantou through district-level friendship associations. These trans local networks enable cultural exchange, commemorative activities, and humanitarian cooperation that reinforce shared historical consciousness. Importantly, the Association frames these collaborations not as diplomatic formalities but as moral obligations rooted in gratitude toward Chinese foster families and communities that cared for war orphans during periods of extreme vulnerability. The mission of the NPO also explicitly includes advocacy for social justice and historical recognition. This is particularly evident in the parallel activities of the Tokyo-based NPO, which pursued legal action against the Japanese state seeking compensation and recognition for wartime abandonment. While the Osaka JCFA did not lead these lawsuits, it functioned as a supportive civil platform that legitimized such claims by situating them within broader narratives of historical

responsibility and human dignity (NPO Japan-China Friendship Association of Osaka Prefecture, 2026) Together, these organizations articulated a mission

that integrates cultural preservation, humanitarian ethics, and social accountability.

Table 2: Four Basic and Significant Historical Events for Prefecture with China (1950-2023) (NPO Japan-China Friendship Association Osaka Prefecture, 2026)

1	Japan-China Joint Statement (1972)
2	Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China (1978)
3	Japan-China Joint Declaration on Building a Partnership of Friendship and Cooperation for Peace and Development (1998)
4	Japan-China Joint Statement on Comprehensively Promoting a "Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests" (2008)

As illustrated *Table 2*, there are four basic events for branch with China (1950-2023), the historical and cultural significance of the, Japan-China Friendship Association lies in its ability to operate at the intersection of memory, identity, and grassroots governance. For Chinese returnees, particularly war orphans, identity reconstruction is not merely a psychological process but a deeply political and cultural one. Having lived most of their lives embedded in Chinese society, their identities challenge rigid national frameworks that equate cultural belonging solely with citizenship. The Association's activities provide institutional legitimacy to these hybrid and layered identities, transforming marginal personal histories into collectively recognized cultural narratives.

discourses that frame returnees either as passive victims or administrative burdens, instead highlighting their agency, resilience, and cultural contributions. The emphasis on lived experience aligns with UNESCO's conceptualization of intangible cultural heritage as practices, expressions, and knowledge transmitted through social interaction rather than formal institutions. The leadership of figures such as Ikeda further underscores the Association's significance. Her trajectory from manual laborer to legal activist and cultural mediator embodies the process through which social capital is accumulated and transformed into collective cultural capital. By mediating between Japanese society, Chinese governmental institutions, and returnee communities, she exemplifies how grassroots leadership can challenge structural inequality while sustaining transgenerational cultural memory. In this sense, the Association operates not only as a service provider but as an agent of cultural politics, asserting the value of marginalized heritage against bureaucratic neglect.

From an anthropological perspective, the Association functions as a site of collective memory production. Through journals such as *Osaka and China*, oral history projects, commemorative ceremonies, and cultural performances, the NPO actively curates' narratives that counteract historical invisibility. These efforts resist dominant postwar



Figure 7: The Head of Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees, Tokyo Prefecture (Zijun Shen, January 2026)



Figure 8: Chinese leader Wen Jiabao following a donation to establish a "Japan-China Friendship" (Zijun Shen, November 2025)

The impact of the and its affiliated organizations on Chinese communities in Japan is both tangible and symbolic. On a practical level, the Association

has provided essential support to returnees who lacked financial resources, language skills, and institutional access. Many war orphans relied on

personal savings and informal networks to survive after repatriation, and the NPO often functioned as their only stable support system. Cultural programs, counseling, and community spaces offered a sense of “home” that mitigated social isolation and restored dignity. Symbolically, the Association has reshaped public understanding of Chinese returnees by reframing them as cultural bearers rather than marginal outsiders. Humanitarian initiatives, such as the Tokyo NPO’s donation of one million CNY to rebuild a primary school in Sichuan following the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, exemplify a reciprocal ethics of care that transcends national boundaries (NPO Japan-China Friendship Association of Osaka Prefecture, 2026) These can be observed in *Figure 7 & 8*, which illustrates the leadership of the Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees was engaging with Chinese governmental counterparts.

These actions challenge narratives of dependency and instead highlight returnees as active contributors to transnational humanitarianism and cultural solidarity. Moreover, the Association’s long-term activities contribute to broader social cohesion within Japanese society. By organizing public exchanges, exhibitions, and intergenerational programs, it fosters mutual understanding and reduces stigma toward culturally hybrid populations. For younger generations of Chinese descendants and Japanese citizens alike, these initiatives offer alternative historical perspectives that emphasize coexistence, shared responsibility, and cultural plurality. The sustained presence of the demonstrates how grassroots organizations can compensate for policy gaps while preserving fragile cultural heritage rooted in everyday life. In conclusion, the Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees represent a critical model of community-based cultural heritage preservation. Their work illustrates that safeguarding the heritage of postwar Chinese orphans requires more than archival documentation it demands living institutions capable of sustaining memory, practice, and social recognition. As this generation ages, the Association’s role becomes increasingly urgent, offering important lessons for future policy directions in heritage preservation, migration governance, and civil society participation.

5.4. Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees and Cultural Identity & Heritage Preservation

1. Chinese Language Identity

Chinese language preservation constitutes a

central cultural identity and heritage preservation activity of the Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees in Osaka, Japan, serving as a key medium through which Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era reconstruct collective memory and cultural belonging. The association organizes cultural events that provide structured spaces for the public expression of Chinese linguistic heritage. Activities such as group singing are frequently incorporated into gatherings and commemorative occasions, with song selections often centered on themes of wartime displacement, loss, and shared historical experience. Through these performances, language becomes an emotional and embodied medium linking personal life histories to collective memory, while simultaneously affirming the social presence and legitimacy of Chinese orphan identity within Japanese society. In addition, the association actively promotes bilingual communication as a strategy of cultural heritage preservation. During New Year festivals, meetings, and public forums, members regularly engage in presentations conducted in both Chinese and Japanese, reflecting their bilingual competence and hybrid cultural positioning. This bilingual practice enables participants to navigate Japanese institutional and social contexts while sustaining attachment to Chinese linguistic and cultural roots. Rather than indicating cultural assimilation or erosion, bilingualism functions as a dynamic form of identity reconstruction shaped by historical displacement and long-term resettlement. (Dong Xiaofang, November 15, 2025)

These activities can be observed in *Figures 9-11*, below which document cultural and linguistic heritage practices organized by the Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees in Osaka and Tokyo. Figure 9 illustrates the participation of the in the 43rd All-Japan Chinese Speech Contest (Osaka Prefecture Tournament), highlighting efforts to sustain Chinese language proficiency in public and institutional settings. Figures 10 and 11 further demonstrate bilingual and Chinese-language presentations conducted during New Year festivals and community events in Tokyo and Osaka, reflecting how linguistic expression functions as a key medium for cultural identity reconstruction and heritage preservation among Chinese returnees. The 43rd All-Japan Chinese Speech Contest in Osaka illustrates the NPO’s role in promoting Chinese language and cultural heritage through public engagement. With participants from varied age groups and evaluations by representatives from Japanese and Chinese institutions, the event

positioned language use as a bridge for cultural exchange and mutual recognition. Awards from both local governments and the Chinese Consulate further



Figure 9: Organization The 43rd All-Japan Chinese Speech Contest Osaka Prefecture Tournament Was Held

emphasized the symbolic link between linguistic practice, historical memory, and Japan-China friendship. (Nozawa, January 1, 2026)



Figure 10:



Figure 11:

2. Food Identity

Food culture preservation constitutes a core dimension of cultural identity and heritage maintenance of the Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees, food functions not only as daily sustenance but also as an embodied medium through which memory, belonging, and social relationships are reconstructed. At the organizational, traditional Chinese cuisine plays a central role in collective practices, particularly during major Chinese festivals aligned with the lunar calendar. Communal cooking and shared meals enable members to reconnect with familiar tastes from China, strengthen kinship-like bonds, and reaffirm a shared cultural past shaped by displacement and resettlement. In addition, food-

related initiatives such as Chinese cooking classes organized by the provide structured spaces for transmitting culinary knowledge, techniques, and meanings across generations and to the wider Japanese public. These activities support cultural continuity while fostering intercultural exchange. Another important aspect of food culture identity preservation is the operation of Chinese restaurants by some families, through which Northeastern Chinese culinary traditions are sustained in everyday life and made visible within local society. As illustrated in *Figures 12 and 13*, food-centered activities from organized cooking classes to reunion meals during Wangnianhui festivals demonstrate how cuisine functions as a living form of cultural heritage, anchoring identity reconstruction in shared practice, sensory memory, and community

interaction. These activities which documents food-centered cultural heritage practices organized by the Takatsuki City Japan-China Friendship Association following its establishment as an NPO. The figure illustrates a communal cooking and reunion event held during the Wangnianhui festival, where traditional Chinese cuisine was prepared and shared



Figure 12: Cooking Class in Takatsuki by Organized (Zijun Shen, October 2025)

alongside songs and traditional artistic performances from China, highlighting how food-related activities function as a key medium for cultural identity reconstruction, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and community-based heritage preservation.



Figure 13: Reunion Time For Cuisine During Wangnianhui Festival (Zijun Shen, December 2025)

3. Beliefs And Rituals Identity

The preservation of beliefs and ritual identity practices constitutes an important dimension of cultural identity and heritage preservation within the activities of the Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees. Beyond private household worship, religious and commemorative practices are actively sustained through collective, transnational, and memory-oriented rituals organized by the NPO. One significant example is the participation of the and other regional Japan-China Friendship Associations in memorial ceremonies related to the Nanjing Massacre, where members laid white floral wreaths in accordance with Chinese commemorative and religious customs. These acts function not only as expressions of mourning and prayer for peace but also as moral and spiritual practices that connect historical memory, ethical reflection, and collective identity. (Klangrit et al., 2025) Guided visits to the

Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall further reinforced shared understanding of historical trauma and the importance of peace-oriented remembrance grounded in ritual practice. In addition, ancestral veneration remains a central religious practice among Chinese returnees. (Klangrit et al., 2026; Tong Guiguang, August 12, 2025) As illustrated in *Figure 14 & 15* below, the NPO Tokyo documents and facilitates access to tomb sites of Chinese returnees, organizing collective visits for members to pray and pay respects to deceased relatives. Through these activities, religious rituals operate as embodied forms of cultural heritage, linking personal loss, collective history, and transgenerational memory. Together, commemorative ceremonies, ancestral worship, and peace-oriented rituals demonstrate how religious belief functions as a living cultural resource that supports identity reconstruction, ethical reflection, and cultural continuity among Chinese orphans in contemporary Japan.



Figure 14: Attended the Nanjing Massacre by Chinese Religious Way for This White Flower (Wreath) (Zijun Shen, January 2026)



Figure 15: Chinese Returnees Tomb Place Donated by A Merchant (Zijun Shen, February 2026)

4. Festival Identity

Festival-related activities constitute a key dimension of cultural identity and heritage preservation within the activities of the Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees. As illustrated in *Figures 16 and 17*, festivals such as the Chinese spring festival function as important social platforms through which cultural continuity, visibility, and community cohesion are actively sustained. Participation of the in large-scale events such as the 2nd Chinese cultural festival demonstrates how festival spaces extend beyond internal community gatherings to broader public and intercultural contexts. Through music, singing, dance, and artistic performances, these events enable the expressive transmission of Chinese cultural values and aesthetics while fostering recognition and

dialogue within Japanese society. (Li Huaixi, November 5, 2025) The inclusion of multi-ethnic performances and cultural displays further situates Chinese orphan heritage within a wider framework of cultural diversity and coexistence. In addition, preparatory meetings for organizing spring festival celebrations highlight the importance of collective planning, cooperation, and intergenerational engagement in sustaining festival traditions. These practices reinforce shared cultural rhythms structured around the Chinese lunar calendar and provide opportunities for community members to reconnect through food preparation, performances, and ritualized celebration. These festivals serve as embodied cultural practices through which memory, identity reconstruction, and cultural heritage preservation are continuously reproduced in communal and public settings.



Figure 16: Invited to the 2nd Chinese Cultural Festival (Zijun Shen, January 2026)



Figure 17: Meeting For Organizing the Chinese Spring New Year Festival (Participated) (Zijun Shen, February 2026)

5. Performing Arts Identity

Performing arts constitute an important medium for cultural identity reconstruction and heritage preservation within the activities of the Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees. (Wang Yuxiu, December 1, 2025) As demonstrated in *Figures 18 and 19*, musical and artistic practices are integrated into organizational and community-based settings to sustain cultural continuity among Chinese orphans in Japan. In Tokyo, group singing of Chinese literary songs during NPO activities functions as a collective practice through which shared memory, language, and cultural emotion are reinforced. These songs, often rich in historical and literary meaning,



Figure 18: Sing Chinese Literature Songs Organized by NPO Tokyo Organization (Zijun Shen, January 2026)

provide an accessible and embodied form of cultural expression. In Osaka, traditional performing arts are preserved through cultural events such as tea gatherings featuring Chinese classical music. The 62nd *Cultural tea party*, centered on the performance of the Chinese pipa alongside narratives on its historical background, illustrates how artistic performance is combined with cultural education. Through such organized activities, performing arts operate not only as aesthetic expressions but also as vehicles for transmitting historical knowledge, strengthening community bonds, and ensuring the intergenerational preservation of Chinese cultural heritage.



Figure 19: The 62nd Cultural Tea Party "The Charm of the Chinese Pipa" Was Held (Play the Pipa and Tell the History of Pipa in (Zijun Shen, February 2026)

5.5. Chinese Orphan Identity from the Post-World War II Era, Concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage Preservation (UNESCOs) & Sustainable Developments (Sdgs) & Literature Review

UNESCO's Concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage Preservation and Its Role in Promoting the Chinese Orphan's Identity from the Post-World War II Era

UNESCO's concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) provides a crucial theoretical framework that broadens the meaning of "heritage" beyond tangible objects and historic monuments to include cultural practices, knowledge, memories, and lived identities. In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which came into force in 2006, addressing a long-standing gap whereby intangible forms of heritage had not received adequate legal and institutional protection compared to World Heritage sites (UNESCO, 2003, 2024) UNESCO defines intangible cultural heritage as practices,

representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, and related cultural forms that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage and transmit from generation to generation through lived practice. Such heritage is characterized as "Living heritage" dynamic and adaptive, rooted in community participation and collective recognition rather than static preservation. This framework is particularly effective in explaining the cultural identity preservation of Chinese orphans from the Post-World War II Era. The cultural identity of this group does not exist in the form of physical artifacts or monuments but is sustained through language, shared memories, wartime experiences, rituals, beliefs, food practices, festivals, and everyday social practices embedded within community networks and non-profit organizations (NPOs). These modes of cultural transmission correspond directly with the core elements of ICH as articulated by UNESCO, including representativeness, contemporaneity, and community endorsement. Moreover, UNESCO's emphasis on cultural dynamism enables an understanding of Chinese Orphans' identities as

layered identities shaped by displacement, upbringing in China, repatriation to Japan, and ongoing life within contemporary Japanese society. Their bilingual practices, hybrid cultural expressions, and reinterpretations of wartime memory reflect an evolving form of intangible cultural heritage that continues to be recreated through social practice rather than fixed national categories.

Contemporary research on cultural heritage and sustainable development offers analytical frameworks that can be meaningfully applied to the study of cultural identity preservation among Chinese orphans. Notably, the work of El Faouri and Sibley (2024), *Balancing Social and Cultural Priorities in the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for UNESCO World Heritage Cities*, although focused on heritage cities, highlights structural limitations within development frameworks that prioritize economic and physical indicators while marginalizing intangible cultural values. This critique resonates strongly with the case of Chinese Orphans, whose language, memories, and lived practices cannot be adequately measured through conventional SDGs indicators such as income or employment rates. As a result, their cultural identities face the risk of “silent disappearance” without appropriate social and institutional support mechanisms. Zhang (2023) further demonstrates how structural inequality affects the capacity for cultural identity preservation, showing that socially and economically vulnerable groups rely heavily on community organizations and NPOs as spaces for transmitting language, memory, and cultural practices. Meanwhile, Parameswara et al. (2021) introduce the concepts of local genius and the orange economy, illustrating how intangible cultural heritage can be sustained when embedded in social and cultural economic activities. In the context of Chinese Orphans, NPO-led initiatives such as festivals, musical performances, Chinese cuisine, and intercultural exchange events function similarly as cultural-economic mechanisms, transforming identity into living heritage rather than static memory. Ethical frameworks for safeguarding ICH also provide critical insight. As Yan (2023) emphasizes, communities must occupy a central role in defining, protecting, and transmitting their heritage, a principle that aligns closely with the activities of the NPO China Returnees and the Japan-China Friendship Association, which empower Chinese Orphans to articulate and negotiate their own cultural identities.

When examined together, UNESCO’s ICH framework and relevant research clearly

demonstrate that the preservation of cultural identity among Chinese Orphans from the Post-World War II era is not a marginal cultural concern but an integral component of sustainable development, cultural rights, and human dignity within the SDGs and UNESCO’s normative frameworks (UNESCO, 2024). The cultural identity of Chinese orphans meets the defining criteria of intangible cultural heritage; it is transmitted across generations, holds deep social meaning, and is maintained through continuous community participation. NPOs play a critical mediating role in bridging the gap between international policy frameworks and the lived realities of historically marginalized individuals. Through cultural events, storytelling practices, memory reconstruction, and the creation of safe spaces for lived experiences to be voiced, NPOs translate abstract heritage concepts into everyday social practice. These processes exemplify UNESCO’s core principle that intangible cultural heritage must remain “Living” and community-validated rather than externally imposed. Viewing the identity of Chinese Orphans also through the lens of social identity highlights dimensions of belonging, recognition, and meaning negotiation within contemporary Japanese society. Their identity preservation is therefore not confined to remembrance of the past but operates as a dynamic process connecting historical trauma to present social participation and future cultural continuity.

UNESCO’s concept of intangible cultural heritage preservation, together with contemporary research frameworks on social and cultural sustainability, provides strong academic and policy-based legitimacy for recognizing the cultural identity preservation of Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era as a genuine form of intangible cultural heritage. This cultural identity encompasses not only language, memory, food practices, and rituals but also profound historical experiences of displacement, loss, and recovery that hold universal human significance. Promoting and formally documenting the cultural identity of Chinese orphans within the ICH framework is therefore not merely an act of minority cultural preservation but a process of advancing historical justice and fostering collective learning for future generations. This article argues that future collaboration among NPOs, community networks, scholars, and UNESCO policy frameworks holds significant potential to elevate the cultural identity of Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era as a form of “World Intangible Cultural Heritage: a community of visible cultural and identity heritage” to international recognition as

a form of global intangible cultural heritage. Such recognition would serve as a living memorial to collective memory, cross-cultural coexistence, and the enduring value of human dignity, ensuring that the historical experiences and cultural contributions of this marginalized group continue to resonate across generations. As illustrated in *Figures 20 and 21*, the concepts of sustainable development (SDGs) and UNESCO's framework for intangible cultural heritage preservation provide the principal theoretical and normative foundations for this study. These frameworks serve as key sources of principles used in the critical analysis and interpretation of the cultural practices of Chinese orphans from the post-



Figure 20: Concepts Of Sustainable Development (Sdgs) (UNODC, OHCHR, & UNDP, 2024)

Concepts Of Sustainable Development (Sdgs) In Supporting to Cultural Identity Preservation of Chinese Orphans from the Post-World War II Era

The preservation of cultural identity among Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era can be meaningfully framed within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recognize culture not only as a resource for development but also as a foundation for social inclusion, justice, and intergenerational continuity. Although the SDGs are often operationalized through economic and environmental indicators, several goals explicitly and implicitly support the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and minority identities, making them highly relevant to this study.

SDG 11.4; Cultural heritage protection provides the most direct linkage between sustainable development and cultural identity preservation. SDG 11.4 calls for strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage,

World War II era. By integrating the SDGs particularly those related to cultural heritage protection, social inclusion, peace, and education with UNESCO's concept of living and community-based intangible cultural heritage, this study develops an analytical lens to examine how cultural identity, memory, and everyday practices are sustained through NPO-led activities in Japan. These international frameworks are not treated merely as background references, but as guiding principles that inform a critical approach toward proposing future-oriented and sustainable pathways for the preservation and development of the cultural heritage of Chinese orphans in Japan.



CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Figure 21: UNESCO's Concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage Preservation (UNESCO, 2023)

including intangible dimensions such as memory, narratives, and inherited identities (UNESCO, 2022). The preservation of shared histories, collective memories, and cultural practices maintained by Chinese orphans such as oral testimonies, wartime experiences, language use, food traditions, and communal rituals aligns closely with this target. These practices function as living heritage rather than static historical records, reinforcing SDG 11.4 emphasis on safeguarding cultural continuity within contemporary societies.

SDG 10.2; Social and identity equality further supports cultural identity preservation by addressing structural inequalities experienced by minorities and vulnerable populations. This target emphasizes promoting social, economic, and political inclusion for all, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, origin, or economic status by 2030 (UNODC, OHCHR, & UNDP, 2024). For Chinese orphans, whose identities have historically been marginalized within dominant national narratives, the creation of social spaces such as those facilitated

by NPOs that allow them to preserve, express, and transmit their culture directly contributes to inclusive development. Cultural identity preservation thus becomes a mechanism for reducing identity-based inequality and fostering social recognition rather than merely a cultural activity.

SDG 16; Peace, memory, and justice are deeply connected to the documentation and preservation of the historical experiences of Chinese orphans affected by war. SDG 16 promotes peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice, and accountable institutions, and it implicitly recognizes the importance of historical memory in reconciliation processes (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2025). Preserving non-dominant wartime narratives contributes to historical justice by acknowledging experiences that have been overlooked or silenced. The safeguarding of these memories helps prevent the repetition of historical violence and fosters a more pluralistic understanding of the past, positioning cultural memory as a peace-building resource.

SDG 4.7; Education and intergenerational transmission highlight the role of education in achieving sustainable development, global citizenship, and respect for cultural diversity. Target 4.7 explicitly calls for education that promotes sustainable lifestyles, human rights, peace, and appreciation of cultural diversity by 2030 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2025). The documentation and transmission of the language, memories, and identities of Chinese orphans contribute to cultural learning across generations and societies. These processes support what may be described as cultural learning capacity, enabling younger generations to engage with complex historical experiences while fostering empathy and cross-cultural understanding.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive conceptual and normative framework for understanding and supporting the preservation of cultural identity among Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era. The integration of SDG 11.4 (cultural heritage protection), SDG 10 (reduction of inequalities), SDG 16 (peace, justice, and historical memory), and SDG 4 (education and intergenerational transmission) clearly demonstrates that safeguarding language, memories, narratives, and everyday cultural practices is not merely a cultural activity, but a vital dimension of sustainable social development. Insights from existing research further suggest that the lived experiences and collective identities of Chinese orphans can be understood as intangible

cultural heritage that is fragile, community-based, and transmitted through practice rather than material form. Community organizations and NPOs play a crucial role in sustaining this heritage by providing social spaces for memory-sharing, cultural activities, and self-representation, ensuring that cultural identity remains dynamic and meaningful in contemporary society. Recognizing Chinese orphans from the post-war period as bearers of intangible world cultural heritage offers a more sustainable and humane development perspective. Such recognition transforms their cultural identity into a living memorial, enabling younger generations to learn about war, displacement, resilience, and coexistence. This approach aligns strongly with the spirit of the SDGs by promoting cultural diversity, historical justice, social inclusion, and long-term cultural sustainability, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and people-centered vision of sustainable development.

Literature Review as a Conceptual Framework for Supporting to Cultural Identity Preservation of Chinese Orphans from the Post-World War II Era

The scholarly works reviewed above collectively provide an interdisciplinary framework for understanding and promoting the preservation of cultural identity among Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era as a form of sustainable development. Tamanoi's study highlights that war orphans should not be understood merely as passive victims of history, but as subjects whose identities were shaped through displacement, violence, and humanitarian intervention (Tamanoi, 2023). The documentation and public recognition of their lived experiences therefore function as a process of restoring dignity and historical justice, directly aligning with SDG 16, while the emphasis on civil society and humanitarian organizations resonates with SDG 10 by addressing identity-based inequalities. Smith's theory further strengthens this framework by arguing that warfare acts as a catalyst for ethnic identity formation through shared memory and experiences of exclusion (Smith, 1981). This perspective is particularly relevant to Chinese orphans in Japan, whose identities exist across national, linguistic, and mnemonic boundaries. Preserving language, narratives, rituals, and collective memory thus correspond with SDG 11.4, which focuses on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Similarly, Carden-Coyne demonstrates how states, families, and ritual practices construct children's wartime cultural heritage, showing that

orphan identity is socially produced rather than naturally given (Carden-Coyne, 2020). This insight underscores the need to view identity preservation as a socially embedded process linked to inequality reduction (SDG 10) and intergenerational knowledge transmission through education (SDG 4.7). From a critical perspective, Deloria emphasizes cultural rights and warns that minority identities are often delegitimized by dominant national frameworks (Deloria, 1981). This approach reinforces the importance of community-led heritage preservation under SDGs 10 and 11.4. Finally, the concept of “orphan heritage” articulated by Price and later expanded by Wang et al. explains how transnational wartime heritage such as the memories and identities of Chinese orphan’s risks neglect without institutional or community stewardship (Price, 2005; Wang et al., 2021). Together, these studies situate the preservation of Chinese orphans’ cultural identity as a transnational, ethical, and sustainable heritage practice grounded in the SDGs framework. (Klangrit et al., 2025)

Taken together, the reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that preserving the cultural identity of Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era is not merely an act of conserving historical memory, but a form of sustainable development that integrates culture, human rights, and long-term peace. The SDGs framework particularly SDGs 11.4, 10, 16, and 4 reveals that the language, memories, narratives, rituals, and lived experiences of Chinese orphans can be elevated to the status of intangible cultural heritage with universal value. Although largely invisible in physical terms, this heritage carries profound social, ethical, and moral significance. Reflections from the existing scholarship further suggest that advancing Chinese orphans as a form of intangible cultural heritage often described as living or orphan heritage should not be monopolized by any single nation-state. Instead, it should be grounded in cross-border cooperation and supported by non-profit organizations, local communities, and educational institutions. The documentation of life histories, the organization of commemorative activities, intergenerational learning, and participatory research all serve as key mechanisms that allow this cultural identity to remain “alive” and continuously transmitted to younger generations. Therefore, recognizing Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era as bearers of intangible cultural heritage not only restores dignity to a marginalized and historically overlooked group, but also presents a sustainable development paradigm that values memory, cultural diversity, and

humanitarian principles. Such an approach contributes to the foundation of a peaceful future society and ensures that the historical experiences of this minority group are not silenced or erased in the contemporary world.

5.6. Future Scope Recommendation for Promoting to Cultural Identity Preservation of Chinese Orphans from the Post-World War II Era

UNESCO’s concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) provides a powerful and internationally recognized framework for promoting the cultural identity preservation of Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era as a living and sustainable form of heritage. According to UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage encompasses practices, expressions, knowledge, memories, and lived experiences that communities themselves recognize as part of their cultural legacy. This community-based and people-centered approach aligns strongly with the historical realities of Chinese orphans in Japan, whose cultural identities were shaped not through monuments or fixed artifacts, but through language retention, collective memory, food practices, rituals, storytelling, and intergenerational relationships formed under conditions of displacement and social marginalization. Within this framework, the cultural identity of Chinese orphans can be conceptualized as a form of “World Intangible Cultural Heritage: a community of visible cultural and identity heritage” in which invisibility in material terms does not imply insignificance. On the contrary, visibility is achieved through lived experience, social practice, and memory work embedded in everyday life. UNESCO’s emphasis on safeguarding rather than freezing culture allows this identity to remain dynamic and adaptive, ensuring sustainability rather than fossilization. Crucially, the ICH framework prioritizes the agency of bearers of heritage, meaning that Chinese orphans and their descendants are not merely subjects of documentation, but active participants in defining, transmitting, and sustaining their own cultural identity. Future policy development should therefore focus on aligning documentation initiatives, oral history projects, community archives, and participatory cultural events with UNESCO’s safeguarding principles. Collaboration among non-profit organizations (NPOs), academic institutions, local communities, and international bodies is essential to establish ethical guidelines, community consent mechanisms, and inclusive platforms for representation. By operating within UNESCO’s normative framework, cultural identity preservation

becomes not only a cultural project, but also a legitimized global commitment grounded in human dignity, memory justice, and intergenerational continuity.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a comprehensive and future-oriented framework for integrating cultural identity preservation into broader agendas of sustainable development. In the context of Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era, SDG 11.4 provides the most direct justification, as it explicitly calls for efforts to safeguard cultural heritage, including intangible heritage. Recognizing language, memory, rituals, and lived narratives as cultural heritage underscores the idea that cultural sustainability is inseparable from social and historical sustainability. Beyond SDG 11.4, the interconnected application of SDG 10 (reduction of inequalities), SDG 16 (peace, justice, and inclusive societies), and SDG 4 (quality education and intergenerational learning) strengthens the conceptual basis for long-term cultural preservation. Identity-based inequalities experienced by Chinese orphans rooted in nationality, displacement, and postwar political structures demonstrate that cultural preservation must also address social exclusion and historical invisibility. SDG 10 thus reinforces the need for inclusive policies that acknowledge minority identities and create equitable platforms for cultural expression. Similarly, SDG 16 emphasizes the importance of preserving historical memory as a pathway toward peace and reconciliation. Documenting and transmitting the experiences of Chinese orphans contributes to a more inclusive historical narrative that confronts the long-term consequences of war and displacement. Meanwhile, SDG 4 highlights the role of education not only as formal schooling, but as a means of intergenerational knowledge transmission. Educational initiatives that incorporate oral histories, community storytelling, and participatory research ensure that cultural identity remains alive and meaningful for younger generations. The SDGs enable cultural identity preservation to be framed as a multidimensional form of sustainable development one that integrates culture, human rights, peace-building, and social inclusion. This alignment strengthens advocacy efforts and provides a robust policy rationale for international recognition and long-term institutional support.

Related scholarship in history, social sciences, and cultural heritage collectively demonstrates that the cultural identity of Chinese orphans in the post-World War II era should not be understood merely as a consequence of loss or victimhood. Rather, this

identity was shaped through shared experiences of war, displacement, violence, humanitarian intervention, and transnational existence across ethnic and national boundaries. These studies affirm that such identity constitutes a form of “Living cultural heritage” formed and sustained through memory, language, narratives, rituals, and social relationships, rather than being anchored primarily in physical objects or specific geographical sites. Furthermore, the research highlights that orphan identity is the product of complex social and power relations operating at the levels of the state, family, and community. As a result, cultural identity preservation cannot be achieved through state-centered mechanisms alone, but requires meaningful participation from local communities, civil society organizations, and cross-border cooperation. The concept of “Orphan heritage” further explains why the cultural identity of Chinese orphans is particularly vulnerable to disappearance if it is not supported by systematic structures of documentation, transmission, and collective care. Overall, these academic frameworks support the view that preserving the cultural identity of Chinese orphans can be elevated to the status of world intangible cultural heritage with universal value. Such preservation functions simultaneously as a source of historical learning, a means of restoring memory-based justice, and a foundation for sustainable development that meaningfully connects the past, present, and future.

Taken together, UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage framework, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and existing scholarly research collectively demonstrate that the cultural identity of Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era can and should be recognized as a form of “World Intangible Cultural Heritage: a community of visible cultural and identity heritage” This recognition transcends symbolic commemoration; it represents a long-term commitment to sustaining memory, dignity, and cultural continuity through living practices. By integrating these three frameworks, future development strategies can move beyond static remembrance toward dynamic cultural sustainability. Documentation initiatives, community-led storytelling, educational programs, and cross-border collaboration serve not only to preserve heritage, but to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful for future generations. Importantly, this approach prevents cultural monopolization by any single nation-state, instead promoting shared stewardship grounded in humanitarian principles and cultural pluralism.

Positioning Chinese orphans as bearers of intangible world cultural heritage transforms their lived experiences into a living memorial one that educates younger generations about war, displacement, resilience, and coexistence. Such an approach aligns with the spirit of sustainable development by valuing human dignity, cultural diversity, and peace-building over material accumulation. Ultimately, recognizing and safeguarding this living heritage ensures that the historical experiences of this marginalized group are not erased, but continue to inform global society as a lasting testament to humanity's collective responsibility toward memory, justice, and sustainable cultural futures.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the cultural identity of Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era constitutes a form of living, community-based intangible cultural heritage shaped by war, displacement, and transnational migration. Raised primarily in Northeast China and later repatriated to Japan, these orphans developed hybrid cultural identities grounded in language, food practices, rituals, and everyday social relations. Their identities cannot be confined within a single national framework, but instead reflect dynamic processes of

cultural adaptation and continuity. The findings highlight the critical role of non-profit organizations particularly the Japan-China Friendship Association for NPO China Returnees in sustaining this cultural identity. Through language education, cultural events, commemorative practices, and community-based activities, these organizations create collective spaces that enable the transmission of memory and identity across generations, especially in the context of an aging population. Situating these practices within UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage framework and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and literature review reveals that cultural identity preservation is inseparable from sustainable development. The safeguarding of language and lived experience aligns closely with goals related to cultural heritage protection, social inclusion, peace-building, and education. Based on this analysis, the study argues that the cultural identity of Chinese orphans from the post-World War II era should be recognized as a form of "World Intangible Cultural Heritage: a community of visible cultural and identity heritage" Such recognition affirms the universal human value of this living heritage and underscores the importance of community-based, ethical, and cross-sector collaboration in ensuring its long-term sustainability.

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Declarations Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate: This study received ethical approval from the Central Institutional Review Board (IRB), Mahidol University, under approval number **MUCIRB 2025/473.2309** all research procedures were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Institutional Review Board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study.

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