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CULTURAL IDENTITY OF NORTHEAST CHINESE ORPHANS IN POST-WORLD WAR II OSAKA, JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the cultural identity of Northeast Chinese Orphans in Post-World War II. (Zanryū koji) who settled in Japan after World War II, focusing on the communities of Ikeda and Daito Morofuku in Osaka. It examines how historical circumstances, migration trajectories, and state policies have shaped the formation and transformation of their cultural identity over time. The study adopts a qualitative approach combining historical analysis with in-depth interviews. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 14 purposively selected informants from the Ikeda and Daito Morofuku communities. The findings indicate that participants' cultural identities were strongly shaped by their upbringing in Chinese families in Northeast China, where they acquired local language practices, foodways, social norms, and collective memories. These early experiences contributed to the development of hybrid identities that extend beyond singular national affiliations. Migration to Japan occurred gradually across several decades, particularly from the 1970s onward, influenced by shifts in diplomatic relations and government support measures. While returnees faced considerable challenges related to language, employment, and social integration, community networks and civil society organizations played a crucial role in supporting long-term settlement. The cases of Ikeda and Daito Morofuku highlight the importance of community spaces as sites for the transmission and maintenance of cultural identity. Five key dimensions language, food, religious beliefs and rituals, festivals, and performing arts and music are sustained through daily practices at both individual and collective levels. The persistence of these dimensions demonstrates a strong cultural foundation that enables the community to negotiate its place within Japanese society while maintaining distinct cultural expressions.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Identity, Chinese Orphans, Northeast China, the Post-World War II Era, Osaka, Japan.

1. INTRODUCTION

The orphans from northeast China in the post-World War II era are inseparably linked to Japan's imperial invasion and occupation of Manchuria between 1931 and 1945. Following the Mukden Incident in September 1931, Japan rapidly occupied the three northeastern provinces of China Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning and in 1932 established the puppet state of Manchukuo under the nominal rule of Aisin Gioro Puyi (Zhang, 2025). As part of its colonial strategy, the Japanese government promoted large-scale civilian migration to the region through state-sponsored settler programs known as Kaitakudan (pioneer groups), relocating approximately 1.55 million Japanese civilians by the end of World War II. These settlers lived in socially isolated Japanese communities, reproducing Japanese lifestyles while remaining largely segregated from local Chinese society (Hui, 1943). The collapse of Japan's empire after its surrender in August 1945, combined with the Soviet invasion of Manchuria, triggered chaotic evacuations during which many Japanese civilians were killed, displaced, or forced to flee. Thousands of children were abandoned or separated from their families due to poverty, illness, or death, becoming what later came to be known as Japanese war orphans (Wang, 2013; Zhang, 2025). These children were taken in by Chinese families and raised as Chinese, fully assimilating into Chinese language, culture, and citizenship systems (Pan, 2006). Although biologically Japanese, they grew up with Chinese names, education, and social identities. Following the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan in the 1970s and the signing of the Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty in 1978, both governments-initiated repatriation programs that enabled many war orphans and their descendants to migrate to Japan. During the 1980s and 1990s, significant numbers resettled in urban areas such as Osaka, particularly in Ikeda and Daito Morofuku, where migrant networks, affordable housing, and employment opportunities were available. However, their return did not signify a restoration of belonging; rather, it marked the beginning of a new phase of displacement characterized by legal ambiguity, social marginalization, and identity confusion. (Nagayama, 1992)

The study of cultural identity among orphans from northeast China holds significant academic and social importance because their life experiences challenge conventional understandings of migration and belonging. Unlike voluntary migrants, these

individuals were displaced by colonial violence and war, grew up as cultural outsiders within Chinese society, and later returned to Japan as socially marginalized "returnees" who often lacked linguistic fluency and legal security (Cheung, 1989; Li et al., 2017). Their identities are shaped by layered historical processes including imperial colonization, forced separation, political campaigns such as the Chinese cultural revolution, and postwar Japanese immigration policies. (Wang, 2013) These conditions produced hybrid and fluid identities that transcend simplistic ethnic or national categories, making this group particularly relevant for examining cultural identity formation under extreme historical circumstances (Lyu & Zhu, 2022). Furthermore, cultural identity for these orphans is deeply intertwined with collective memory and trauma. Many experienced discriminations both in China, where Japanese ancestry marked them as political threats during the cultural revolution, and in Japan, where they were often perceived as culturally "foreign" despite their descent (Fujinami, 2022). Media attention in the 1980s briefly generated sympathy, yet public support declined over time, culminating in lawsuits against the Japanese government over insufficient welfare assistance (Zhang, 2025). Understanding how these individuals negotiate identity and belonging within Japanese society is critical for revealing the long-term impacts of historical violence on migrant lives. Their experiences illuminate how cultural identity is reconstructed not only through memory and heritage but also through daily practices and intergenerational transmission within diasporic spaces such as Osaka (Chen, 2014; Vogt, 2018)

Despite growing scholarship on migration in Japan, there remains a notable research gap concerning older migrants whose displacement was rooted in war and colonialism rather than economic motivation. Existing studies largely focus on contemporary Chinese migrants such as international students, skilled laborers, and technical interns, emphasizing legal status, labor participation, and economic integration while neglecting cultural and historical identity dimensions (Han, 2013; Li, 2023). Consequently, the lived experiences of northeast Chinese war orphans many of whom are now over the age of sixty remain underrepresented in migration studies (Nagayama, 1992). Their narratives complicate dominant models of integration by revealing how migration shaped by violence creates enduring identity dilemmas across generations (Fujinami, 2022). Another gap lies in the limited exploration of cultural identity

among this group. Many orphans returned to Japan with limited Japanese language proficiency, resulting in long-term communication barriers and social isolation, particularly in healthcare and public institutions (Cheung, 1989; Li et al., 2017). While transnationalism is increasingly discussed in migration literature, little attention has been paid to how northeast Chinese immigrants maintain emotional and cultural ties to China while adapting to Japanese society, producing identities that are neither fully Chinese nor Japanese (Wang et al., 2021; Lyu & Zhu, 2022). Additionally, few studies adopt ethnographic or community-based approaches that examine how local neighborhoods such as Ikeda and Daito Morofuku function as spaces of cultural preservation and identity negotiation (Chen, 2014; Vogt, 2018; Suriya Klangrit et al., 2025; Reedy, 2011). These gaps highlight the need for research that foregrounds historical memory, everyday cultural practices, and intergenerational transmission among this marginalized population (Zhang & Wu, 2015).

This study makes significant social and academic contributions that align with the research objectives, which focus on examining the historical background and origins of Chinese orphans in the post-World War II period; their cultural and ethnic identity backgrounds; the reasons for their migration to Ikeda, Osaka, Japan; and the ways in which they preserve their cultural identity and heritage within Japanese society. Socially, the study enhances intercultural understanding by elucidating the historical traumas of war, displacement, and sociopolitical conditions that have shaped the identities and lifestyles of Chinese orphans and their descendants in Osaka. By analyzing the roles of cultural traditions, oral histories, and community networks in sustaining identity and community resilience, the study generates knowledge that is valuable for the development of social services sensitive to historical and cultural contexts, aging care policies, and frameworks for multicultural coexistence in Japan (Kanemoto et al., 2021; Radermacher & Feldman, 2016). In addition, the research amplifies the voices and lived experiences of a historically marginalized group whose narratives have often been excluded from both Chinese and Japanese war histories (Miladinovic, 2020). Academically, this study contributes to migration, cultural, and identity studies by linking the historical circumstances of postwar orphanhood with contemporary processes of identity negotiation and cultural preservation in Japanese society. It advances theoretical discussions by conceptualizing cultural identity as a dynamic and adaptive process

shaped by memory, language, everyday practices, and sociopolitical structures, rather than as a static inherited attribute (Chan, 2017). By focusing specifically on Chinese orphans and immigrants from Northeast China, the research introduces regional and historical specificity that is often absent from generalized studies of Chinese migration to Japan. Overall, the study contributes to broader global discussions on forced migration, diaspora, and historical memory by demonstrating how identities forged through colonialism and displacement continue to influence community life and intergenerational relationships (Henry et al., 2009; Tani, 1992). Through the case of Ikeda and Daito Morofuku in Osaka, Japan, (Fujinami, 2022). This study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage among Chinese orphans from Northeast China, highlighting the historical development, background, and ways of life, as well as the cultural practices that have been maintained and passed down by this generation of Chinese orphans from the post-World War II period to the present within Japanese society.

2. THE PURPOSE OF STUDY

This article examines the cultural identity of Chinese orphans from Northeast China who settled in Japan after World War II by analyzing their origins, migration experiences, and the influence of state policies. Focusing on case studies in Ikeda and Daito Morofuku in Osaka, Japan, it explores processes of cultural identity preservation and community formation, highlighting how this group has sustained its cultural identity from the postwar period to the contemporary context in Japan.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

As illustrated in figure 1, this study adopts a conceptual framework designed to examine the cultural identity of Chinese orphans from Northeast China who settled in Osaka, Japan, in the post-World War II period, with specific focus on the communities of Ikeda and Daito Morofuku. The framework begins with an analysis of the historical origins and wartime conditions that shaped the early experiences of these orphans in Northeast China. It then incorporates migration processes and state policies as critical structural factors influencing their relocation, settlement, and integration into Japanese society. Building upon this foundation, the framework examines the cultural backgrounds and lived experiences of the orphans, including their

lifestyles, cultural practices, values, which were carried into the host society. These cultural elements are understood to interact dynamically with the social, political, and cultural environment of postwar Japan, contributing to processes of community formation in Ikeda and Daito Morofuku. Central to the framework is the analysis of cultural identity preservation through which the orphans and their communities sustain, adapt, and

reinterpret their cultural identities over time. By linking origins, migration experiences, state policies, and community dynamics, the framework provides an integrated understanding of how cultural identity has been maintained from the postwar period to the contemporary context in Japan, ultimately contributing to the preservation and transmission of the cultural heritage of Chinese orphans in Japanese society.

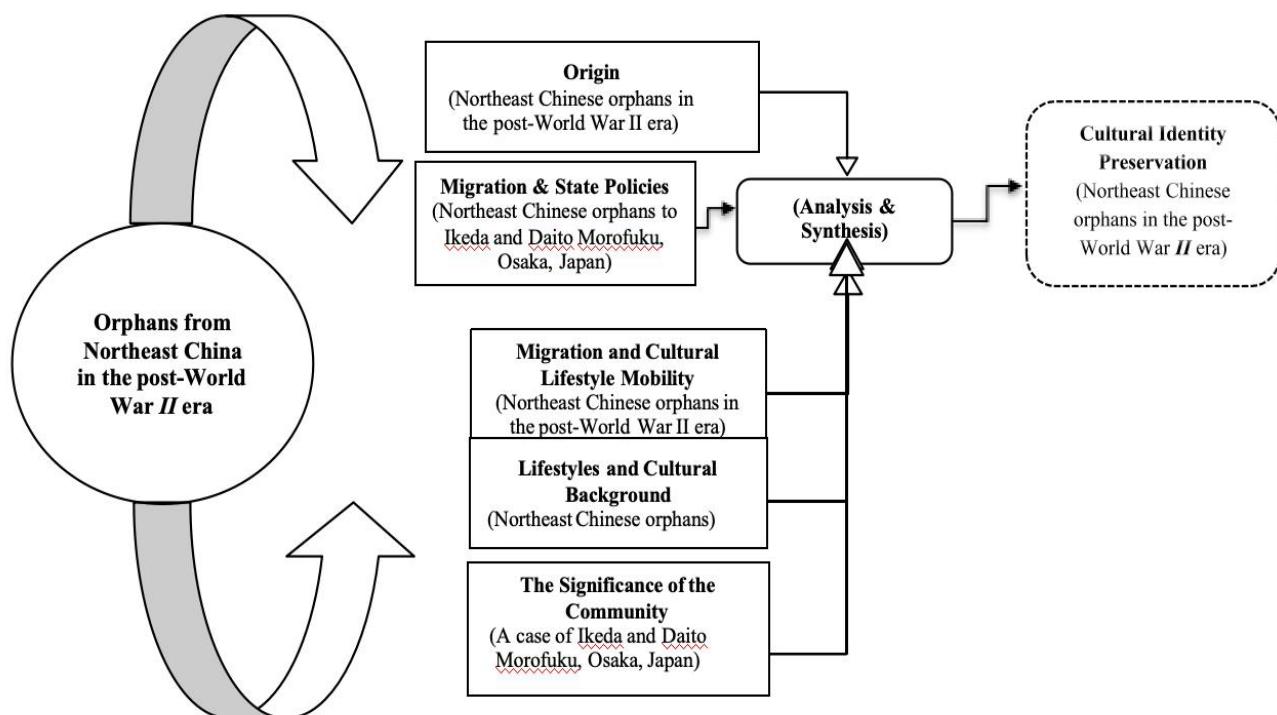


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework of the Study.

4. METHODS OF THE STUDY

This study employed a qualitative research approach, which is appropriate for generating an in-depth and contextual understanding of historical experiences, cultural identity, and preservation practices within specific social and cultural settings. Qualitative methodology is particularly suitable for exploring identity formation, migration experiences, and cultural continuity among marginalized groups in post-war contexts. (Bailey, 2017; Creswell, 1998) Data collection focused on two main sources; secondary documentary research and in-depth interviews. Secondary data were collected through a comprehensive review of academic journal articles, historical records, research reports, and relevant publications related to post-World War II orphans from Northeast China, Sino-Japanese migration history, and cultural identity and heritage preservation in Japan. This documentary study

provided the historical, social, and theoretical foundations for the analysis. (Krippendorff, 2019) Primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews with 14 key informants selected through purposive sampling from the Ikeda and Daito Morofuku areas in Osaka, Japan. These informants consisted of two groups; six Chinese orphans from Northeast China who experienced migration and settlement in Japan, and two representatives from organizations actively involved in promoting and preserving the cultural identity and cultural heritage of Chinese orphans in the study area. Data collection was conducted by the researcher between 1 November and 30 December 2025 through in-depth interviews lasting approximately 40 minutes to one hour. All interviews were conducted primarily in Chinese to facilitate natural communication and deeper understanding. Participants were contacted through community

acquaintances and interviewed at locations of their convenience, mainly in their homes or community spaces, to ensure comfort and openness. Their lived experiences and institutional perspectives were essential for understanding both personal and collective dimensions of cultural identity and preservation. (Creswell, 1998) Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis for interview data, enabling the identification of recurring themes related to historical background, migration, cultural identity, and preservation practices. (Bailey, 2017; Bryman & Burgess, 1999) Documentary data were analyzed through content analysis to support interpretation and triangulation of findings, strengthening the credibility and coherence of the study's conceptual framework.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Origins of Chinese orphans from Northeast China (The post-World War II era)

Chinese orphans from Northeast China emerged as a direct consequence of the upheavals caused by World War II and the collapse of the Japanese empire. In the postwar period, many Japanese children were left behind in China and raised by Chinese families, resulting in identities shaped by displacement, loss, and cross-border memory. This section explores the historical origins and contexts of these orphans in order to understand the foundations of their identities and life trajectories in the postwar era. The historical roots of Chinese orphans from Northeast China can be traced directly to Japan's invasion and occupation of the region known historically as Manchuria. Following the Mukden Incident on September 18, 1931, Japan launched a full-scale military occupation of the three northeastern provinces of China, Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning. In 1932, Japan established the puppet state of Manchukuo, installing Aisin Gioro Puyi, the last emperor of the Qing dynasty, as its nominal ruler. Although presented as a sovereign state, Manchukuo functioned in practice as a colonial regime controlled by the Japanese Kwantung Army, serving Japan's broader imperial ambitions in East Asia (Zhang, 2025). From its inception, Manchukuo was structured not only as a military outpost but also as a site for large-scale social and demographic engineering. Central to this project was the systematic relocation of Japanese civilians to Northeast China as part of Japan's "continental development" strategy. Under slogans such as "Harmony of the Five Races" (Gozoku Kyōwa) and the creation of an "Ideal land of the kingly way" Japanese authorities promoted the image of

Manchuria as a utopian frontier where ethnic groups could coexist under Japanese leadership. In reality, these slogans functioned as colonial propaganda designed to legitimize territorial occupation and demographic domination. (Zhang, 2025). This event is illustrated in the Figure 2 shown below.



Figure 2: Harmony of the Five Races (Manzhou Photography Museum, 2009).

Beginning in the early 1930s, the Japanese government initiated large-scale, state-sponsored settler programs known as kaitakudan (開拓団), or pioneer groups. This event is illustrated in the Table 1: Japanese pioneer group dispatches shown below. These programs encouraged Japanese farmers, laborers, and their families to migrate to Northeast China, offering land, financial incentives, and ideological appeals to national duty. By the end of World War II, approximately 1.55 million Japanese civilians had been relocated to the region, with plans formalized in policy documents such as the "Twenty-year Immigration Plan for One Million Households" adopted by the Hirota Koki Cabinet in 1936. This plan envisioned relocating five million Japanese settlers to Northeast China over two decades, underscoring the centrality of civilian migration to Japan's imperial project (Zhang, 2025). Settler communities were deliberately structured as self-contained Japanese enclaves, complete with separate police stations, hospitals, schools, and administrative systems. Daily life within these settlements reproduced Japanese cultural norms in food, clothing, housing, and education, while maintaining strict social boundaries from local Chinese populations. Interaction with Chinese residents was limited, and local customs were often regarded by settlers as symbols of backwardness or poverty rather than cultural difference (Hui, 1943).

As the war expanded following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937, Japan faced severe shortages of military personnel. This shortage led to the conscription of Japanese adult males, which in turn destabilized the settler system in Manchuria.

To compensate, the Japanese government established the Manchurian and Mongolian Development Youth Volunteer Army, recruiting boys aged sixteen to nineteen. These minors underwent military and agricultural training before being stationed in rural Manchukuo as quasi-military settlers, blurring the lines between civilian

migration and militarization. By the final years of the war, Japanese society in Northeast China consisted of a fragile population structure composed of elderly settlers, women, children, and youth volunteers, increasingly vulnerable to military collapse.

Table 1: Japanese Pioneer Group Dispatches (October 1932-May 1945).

编号	府县	“开拓团”员	“义勇队”员	合计	编号	府县	“开拓团”员	“义勇队”员	合计
1	长野	31 264	6 595	37 859	25	爱媛	2 200	2 325	4 525
2	山形	13 252	3 925	17 177	26	兵库	2 170	2 230	4 400
3	熊本	9 979	2 701	12 680	27	埼玉	2 900	1 968	4 868
4	福岛	9 576	3 097	12 673	28	佐贺	2 800	1 500	4 300
5	新潟	9 361	3 290	12 651	29	栃木	1 429	2 802	4 231
6	宫城	10 180	2 239	12 419	30	大坂	2 030	2 125	4 155
7	岐阜	9 494	2 596	12 090	31	三重	2 753	1 309	4 062
8	广岛	6 345	4 827	11 172	32	鸟取	1 339	2 287	3 626
9	东京	9 116	1 995	11 111	33	茨城	1 551	2 022	3 573
10	高知	9 151	1 331	10 482	34	宫崎	1 769	1 613	3 382
11	秋田	7 814	1 638	9 452	35	京都	1 418	1 952	3 370
12	静冈	6 147	3 059	9 206	36	德岛	1 243	2 082	3 325
13	群马	6 957	1 818	8 775	37	和歌山	1 272	1 877	3 149
14	青森	6 510	1 855	8 365	38	北海道	2 002	1 127	3 129
15	香川	5 506	2 379	7 885	39	福冈	1 669	1 445	3 114
16	石川	4 463	2 808	7 271	40	岛根	1 507	1 528	3 035
17	山口	3 763	2 745	6 508	41	冲绳	2 350	644	2 994
18	岩手	4 443	1 993	6 436	42	大分	735	1 836	2 571
19	冈山	2 898	2 888	5 786	43	爱知	634	1 724	2 358
20	鹿儿岛	3 432	2 268	5 700	44	长崎	747	1 403	2 150
21	奈良	3 945	1 298	5 243	45	千叶	1 037	1 111	2 148
22	富山	3 775	1 425	5 200	46	神奈川	1 013	575	1 588
23	福井	3 057	2 079	5 136	47	滋贺	93	1 354	1 447
24	山梨	3 166	1 939	5 105	总计	47	220 255	101 627	321 882

The situation deteriorated rapidly following Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945, and the subsequent Soviet invasion of Manchuria. What followed was a chaotic and often violent retreat, as Japanese military protection collapsed and repatriation routes became overcrowded or inaccessible. Many Japanese civilians attempted to flee under desperate conditions, frequently lacking food, transportation, or official guidance. In this context, countless children were separated from their families or deliberately abandoned as parents faced impossible survival choices. Widowed mothers, injured civilians, or families without access to evacuation resources often left children behind, hoping they might survive under the care of local residents rather than perish during flight. These children later became known as Japanese war orphans. They were taken in by Chinese families often impoverished themselves who raised them as their own, providing shelter, food, and social belonging in the absence of any state support

(Zhang, 2025). Raised within Chinese households, these children grew up speaking Chinese, adopting Chinese names, and practicing Chinese customs, foodways, and belief systems. Over time, many acquired Chinese citizenship and were fully embedded in local communities, with little knowledge of their Japanese origins during childhood. In China, they were commonly referred to as "Japanese war orphans" while in Japan they came to be labeled *Zanryū koji* (残留孤兒) meaning "remaining orphans" This dual naming reflects their ambiguous position between national categories and the transnational consequences of war and empire. Following the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan in 1972, and particularly after the signing of the Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty in 1978, both governments began to facilitate the identification and repatriation of these orphans and their families. With the assistance of civil society organizations and humanitarian groups, thousands of individuals

gradually returned to Japan from the late 1970s onward. (Zhang, 2025). This event is illustrated by an example in Figure 3 shown below, which depicts



Figure 3: Chinese Orphans from Northeast China in the Post-World War II Era (Zijun Shen, 2026).

Despite these repatriation efforts, the institutional recognition of Japanese war orphans remained uneven and contested. Early Japanese government policies defined orphans narrowly as individuals under the age of thirteen at the time of adoption by Chinese families, excluding older children particularly girls who were categorized as "left-behind women" and stripped of Japanese nationality. It was not until 1993 that both war orphans and left-behind women were collectively recognized as "Japanese left behind in China" (Zanryū Nihonjin), making them eligible for return assistance (Wang, 2013; Pan, 2006). By January 31, 2023, official records from Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare indicated that 2,557 orphan families approximately 9,381 individuals had returned under formal programs, while broader estimates including extended family members suggest that nearly 100,000 people have been affected by this return migration. Media coverage in the 1980s, including televised reunion programs and the NHK drama *The Children of the Earth*, temporarily brought widespread public attention to their plight. However, public sympathy diminished over time, and in 2002 a group of returned orphans filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government, demanding compensation and criticizing inadequate post-return support. This legal action reignited debates about historical responsibility, citizenship, and the consequences of empire.

Chinese orphans from Northeast China emerged within the historical context of population movement and settlement during and after World War II, shaped by the migration of Japanese

civilians into Northeast China and the transitional conditions following the war. Some children grew up under the care of local Chinese families and gradually developed life experiences shaped by their surrounding social and cultural environments. Understanding the origins of this group is therefore essential for explaining the dynamics of migration, the formation of cultural identity, and the meaningful processes of cultural identity preservation.

5.2. Migration and State Policies for Chinese Orphans to Japan

The migration of Chinese orphans from Northeast China to Japan developed through historical circumstances shaped by post-World War II, movements and changing state policies. Many of these individuals grew up in China and later migrated to Japan under specific governmental arrangements. Their movement was influenced not only by personal life trajectories but also by diplomatic relations and policy frameworks between China and Japan.

The origins of migration among Chinese orphans from Northeast China are deeply rooted in the immediate aftermath of Japan's defeat in 1945, when large numbers of Japanese civilians withdrew from Northeast China. During this chaotic transition, many Japanese children were separated from their families and remained in China, where they were raised by local Chinese households and gradually integrated into rural communities. In the late 1940s, particularly between 1946 and 1948, many of these children lost formal documentation of their origins

and were absorbed into Chinese family systems as adopted children, developing linguistic, cultural, and social ties within their local environments (Guan & Zhang, 2005). As the political landscape in China shifted in the early 1950s, these individuals adapted to new social realities under the establishment of the People's Republic of China. During land reform movements and subsequent political campaigns, many avoided public discussion of their backgrounds and focused on participating in collective labor and village life. Their everyday experiences during this period were shaped less by migration than by settlement and social belonging within Chinese society.

From the mid-1950s onward, questions surrounding identity and nationality gradually re-emerged as Japan began tracing displaced nationals abroad. However, these efforts initially concentrated on Southeast Asia, and those who remained in China received little attention. Throughout the 1960s, broader political movements within China, including the Cultural Revolution, brought renewed scrutiny to individual backgrounds, prompting some individuals to reassess personal histories and familial connections. Despite these challenges, many Chinese orphans maintained strong ties to their adoptive families and local communities, reflecting a deeply rooted sense of place developed over decades (Guan & Zhang, 2005). A major turning point occurred in 1972 with the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan. This moment marked the first official opportunity for governments, families, and civil organizations to address the presence of Japanese war orphans in China. Public discussions emerged, family searches resumed, and the restoration of personal histories gradually became possible within an improved diplomatic framework.

Following this diplomatic normalization, the 1970s witnessed increased attention to the issue through both governmental and civil initiatives. In 1974, a plane crash involving individuals returning to Japan drew national attention and encouraged the formation of civic support organizations, including the Society to Support War Orphans in China. These grassroots movements played a crucial role in raising public awareness and prompting government action in Japan. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, official investigations were launched, and structured policies began to take shape. The 1980s marked a decisive period in which the Japanese government introduced immigration arrangements allowing war orphans and their Chinese spouses to resettle in Japan. Special

residency statuses were granted, offering a legal basis for migration while acknowledging Japanese ancestry. However, social integration presented ongoing challenges, particularly for individuals who had spent most of their lives in Chinese linguistic and cultural environments. Many migrants arrived in Japan in middle adulthood, navigating employment, education, and social systems that differed significantly from their lived experiences. (Guan & Zhang, 2005; Zhang, 2025).

Throughout the 1990s, the limitations of existing support frameworks became increasingly visible. Although legal residency and welfare provisions were available, access to stable employment, linguistic training, and social inclusion varied widely. These experiences prompted collective reflection on the responsibilities of the Japanese state toward returning orphans and their families. In the early 2000s, legal actions were initiated by groups of returnees seeking recognition and expanded support. While court rulings differed, the broader political discussion contributed to significant legislative developments. In 2007, Japan enacted the Support Law for Chinese Returnees, strengthening welfare access, housing assistance, and social services. Public statements by Japanese political leaders during this period further acknowledged the historical circumstances underlying these migrations, reinforcing a framework of long-term support and reconciliation. (Zhang, 2025).

Meanwhile, community-level initiatives continued to play a key role in shaping everyday life for returnees. Cultural associations, local networks, and support groups facilitated adaptation while maintaining social connections rooted in shared experiences. Anniversaries of Sino-Japanese normalization, such as the 40th and 50th years, were marked by official visits, academic forums, and cultural productions that highlighted personal narratives and historical reflection. In recent years, policy attention has increasingly focused on the aging population of returnees, emphasizing permanent residency for Chinese spouses and expanded welfare measures. These initiatives reflect an evolving understanding of migration as a long-term process shaped not only by initial movement but also by sustained support across the life course. Across decades, the migration of Chinese orphans from Northeast China to Japan thus represents a layered historical journey involving settlement, return, and re-integration across national boundaries (Guan & Zhang, 2005; Zhang, 2025). The events from the beginning to the completion of the

migration process, as well as the policies that affected each stage, these can be observed in Figure

4 below, which illustrates the timeline of major events of Chinese orphans.

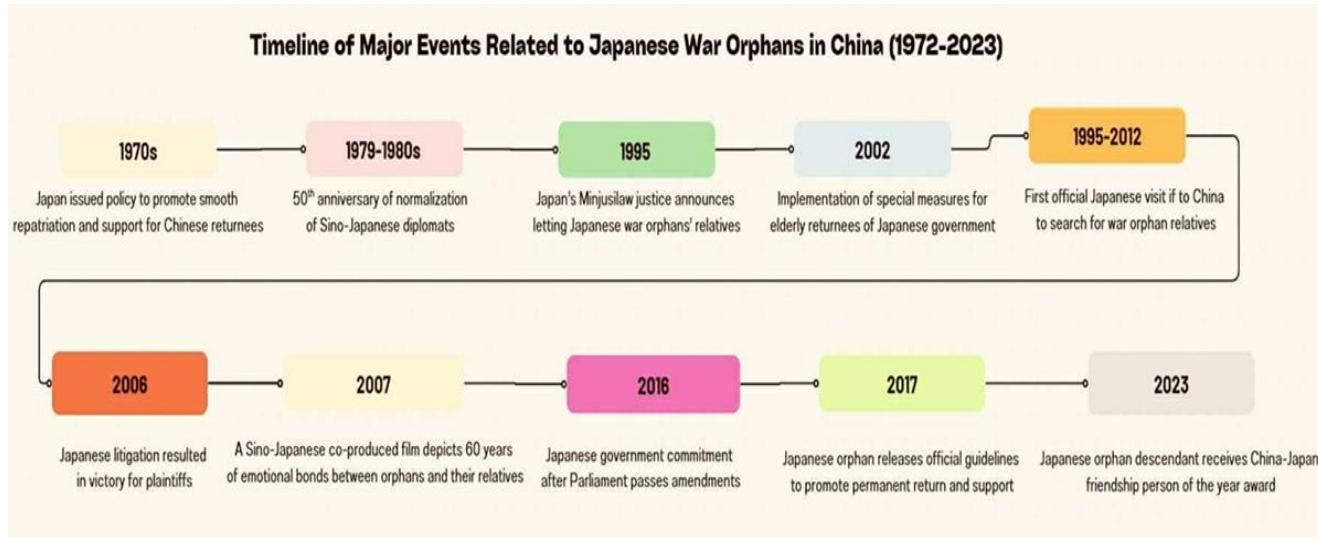


Figure 4: Timeline of Major Events of Chinese Orphans (Zijun Shen, August 2025).

The migration of Chinese orphans from Northeast China to Japan reflects the significant influence of state policies and political contexts on human mobility and the formation of cultural identity. This group of orphans was shaped by post-World War II displacement, shifts in Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations, and the development of migration and welfare policies. Their migration unfolded gradually over several decades under structural conditions determined by the state. This process offers important insights into how historical events, government policies, and support from civil society collectively shaped opportunities for resettlement. As such, the experiences of these Chinese orphans constitute an important case study for understanding the long-term relationship between migration and cultural identity within the postwar context of China-Japan relations.

5.3. Route of Migration and Cultural Lifestyle Mobility of Chinese Orphans in Osaka

The migration route of Chinese orphans from Northeast China to Japan reflects a complex interplay between personal life histories, state policies, and broader postwar political transformations. Based on the oral history of a second-generation *Zanryū koji* (remaining orphan) who continues to reside in Ikeda, this case illustrates how individual mobility was shaped by both family background and shifting institutional frameworks during the 1980s. The migration journey began in the mid-1980s, a period marked by evolving discussions within the Japanese government

regarding the establishment of a Special Status System for remaining orphans. Between 1985 and 1986, the orphan and his wife traveled from China to Japan using a combination of land and air transportation. Their initial route involved long-distance bus and train travel from their place of residence in China to Shanghai, a major transportation hub. From Shanghai, they boarded a flight to Fukuoka, a common entry point for migrants traveling from mainland China to Japan at the time. They arrived in Fukuoka in 1986, marking their first physical entry into Japanese territory after years of separation rooted in postwar displacement. Following their arrival, the couple continued their journey southward by local trains to Kagoshima, where they arrived in 1987. (Wang & Tong, 2026)

This settlement choice was closely connected to family ties. The orphan's mother was Japanese, and Kagoshima was her hometown. As a result, the couple resided there for approximately one to two years, between 1987 and 1988. During this period, Kagoshima functioned as a transitional space where they could rely on kinship networks for housing and emotional support while gradually adapting to Japanese society. However, limited employment opportunities and constrained living conditions made long-term settlement challenging. In response, the couple joined a broader collective movement initiated by remaining orphans living across the Kansai region. Seeking improved access to employment, social services, and community support, this group coordinated a collective resettlement to Ikeda city, located near Osaka

prefecture. They moved there in 1989, coinciding with the formal recognition and implementation of the Special Status System by the Japanese government. Ikeda subsequently became a key settlement site, offering more stable living conditions and opportunities for long-term integration. These events are illustrated by Figure 5 & 6 shown below,



Figure 5: Migration Mobility Route in China (1985-1986) (Zijun Shen, January 2026).



Figure 6: Migration Mobility Map in Japan (1986-1989) (Zijun Shen, January 2026).

Overall, this migration route from Northeast China to Shanghai, Fukuoka, Kagoshima, and finally Ikeda demonstrates that the movement of

Chinese orphans to Japan was not a single, linear journey, but rather a step-by-step process shaped by policy transitions, family connections, and collective decision-making. The route itself embodies the lived realities of postwar displacement and the gradual reconfiguration of belonging across national borders.

The cultural lifestyle mobility of Chinese orphans from Northeast China in Japan reflects not only physical movement across urban spaces, but also the continuous negotiation of identity, belonging, and everyday cultural practices. Based on the shared experiences of multiple remaining orphans (Zanryū koji), this pattern of mobility illustrates how changes in living environments, social networks, and institutional support gradually reshaped their collective lifestyles in postwar Japan. The earliest phase of cultural lifestyle mobility emerged around 1989 and continued throughout the 1990s, when many Chinese orphans had already settled in Ikeda City, near Osaka. During this period, Ikeda served as an initial residential base; however, everyday cultural needs often required movement beyond this local space. Remaining orphans frequently traveled to Nankinmachi (Chinatown) in Kobe to purchase Chinese ingredients that were difficult to obtain in Ikeda. Food played a central role in sustaining cultural continuity, as traditional northeastern dishes allowed them to recreate familiar tastes from their formative years in China. These trips were also family-oriented, with visits often combined with leisure activities such as taking children to nearby beaches. Such practices reveal how cultural maintenance and family life were intertwined with urban mobility during this stage, lasting approximately from 1989 to 1997. This event is illustrated by Figure 7 shown below,

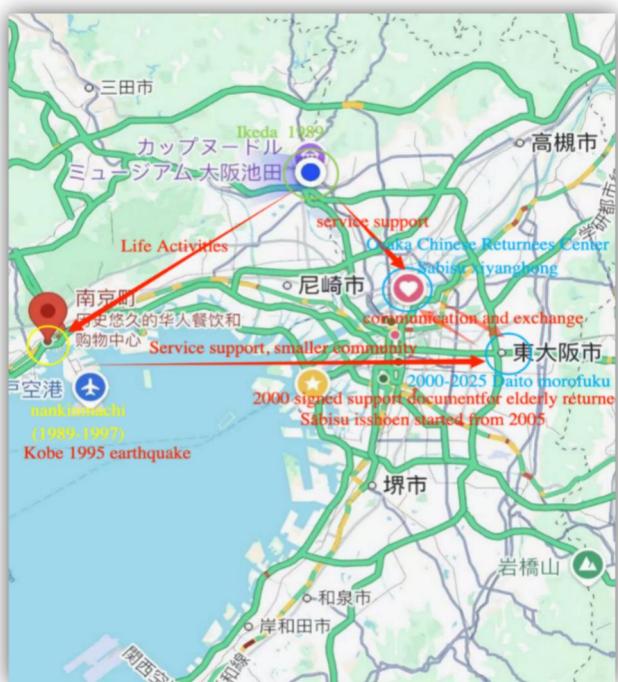


Figure 7: Map of Cultural Lifestyle Mobility in Osaka (Zijun Shen, January 2026).

Following the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995, the significance of collective security and mutual support became more evident. Although Ikeda remained an important residential area, northeastern Chinese orphans began to seek opportunities for closer communal living. This search led to a gradual relocation toward the Daito Morofuku community in eastern Osaka around the year 2000. Prior to this large-scale movement, few remaining orphans resided in the area. However, advancements in information exchange, transportation, and community organization facilitated the rebuilding of social networks. Daito Morofuku gradually developed into a new cultural center where daily interactions revolved around shared meals, the purchase of northeastern-style breakfasts, regional foods, seasonings, and snacks, and the reestablishment of familiar social routines. Institutional support further shaped this phase of cultural lifestyle mobility. In 2000, following the signing of specific support agreements between Japan and China for remaining orphans who returned to Japan, the China Osaka Returnee Association expanded its role in community assistance. This organizational development provided a structural foundation for cultural continuity and social welfare. In 2005, the establishment of the small-scale northeastern returnee nursing home, Isshoen, in the Daito area marked a significant milestone. The facility not only

offered care for aging returnees but also created a culturally familiar environment where northeastern heritage remained an integral part of daily life. (Nagayama, 2025)

As government financial support increased over time, the Returnee Association further strengthened its networks. In 2022, collaboration with Osaka's Xiyanghong Nursing Home enabled more independent and culturally sensitive care for elderly returnees. Exchanges between Isshoen and Xiyanghong focused on heritage preservation, caregiving practices, and the mental well-being of elderly orphans. Notably, many remaining orphans who continued to live in Ikeda eventually moved to Xiyanghong to spend their later years, reflecting long-standing participation in cultural exchange activities and shared community histories. The cultural lifestyle mobility of Chinese orphans from Northeast China in Japan demonstrates how movement across spaces from Ikeda to Kobe and later to Daito was driven by the pursuit of cultural familiarity, community cohesion, and dignified aging. This mobility underscores the dynamic relationship between place, cultural practice, and social belonging within the lived experiences of this unique group.

5.4. Lifestyles of Chinese Orphans from Northeast China

Northeast China, particularly provinces such as Liaoning and Heilongjiang, provides an essential geographical and cultural context for understanding the everyday lives of Chinese orphans shaped by war, migration, and long-term settlement. As major sites of Japanese migration during the Manchukuo period, these regions later became home to large populations of war orphans who grew up within Chinese society and gradually embedded themselves in local patterns of living. Urban centers such as Shenyang, Dalian, and Harbin played a crucial role in shaping daily routines, food consumption, and social interactions. These cities offered access to local markets, communal dining spaces, and traditional Northeastern Chinese food cultures, which strongly influenced the formation of dietary habits and everyday lifestyles. After the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations, many orphans later participated in state-led repatriation and migration to Japan. Nevertheless, their food preferences, cooking practices, and notions of home continued to reflect cultural experiences deeply rooted in Northeast China. The demographic growth of orphan households, particularly in Heilongjiang, further illustrates how everyday

practices related to food and family life expanded into multi-generational cultural traditions, underscoring the region's enduring significance as both a living space and a cultural point of origin. (Guan & Zhang, 2005).

The lifestyles of Chinese orphans from Northeast China are closely intertwined with changes in food culture and patterns of subsistence that emerged from their historical circumstances. Oral narratives documented by Wang (2013; 2015) reveal that many orphans were originally born into Japanese settler families who migrated from rural Japan, such as Yamanashi prefecture, under the state-led "pioneer group" policy. Prior to migration, everyday life in Japan was centered on agriculture and seasonal rhythms, accompanied by traditional foods such as Udon noodles, handmade sweets, and festive meals linked to celebrations like Girls' Day and other seasonal rituals. However, upon arrival in Northeast China particularly in Heilongjiang these families encountered a radically different food environment shaped by a harsh continental climate and local agricultural conditions. Diets shifted toward staple foods commonly found in Northeastern Chinese cuisine, including soybeans, sorghum, corn, potatoes, and preserved vegetables. Traditional Northeastern Chinese foods such as corn grits, pork dumplings, and fermented cabbage became integral components of daily meals, reflecting both environmental necessity and cultural adaptation, transformed patterns of household living and food consumption, as cooking, resting, and family interactions often took place in shared domestic spaces. This is illustrated by an example in Figure 8 & 9 shown below, which depicts a case of Traditional Northeastern foods and appetizer.



Figure 8: Traditional Northeastern Chinese Foods (Zijun Shen, August 2025).



Figure 9: Northeast Traditional Appetizer (Zijun Shen, August 2025).

Over time, these material and culinary practices became deeply embedded in everyday life, shaping not only survival strategies but also cultural taste, bodily memory, and a sense of belonging. Through prolonged immersion in Northeastern food culture and lifestyle, Chinese orphans gradually formed hybrid but locally grounded identities rooted in the rhythms, flavors, and social practices of Northeast China. (Wang, 2013; 2015). Northeast China played a critically important role in shaping the lifestyles and cultural formation of a group of Chinese orphans who grew up within the context of war and profound historical change. This region is characterized by a harsh temperate continental climate, with long winters and extremely low temperatures, which directly influenced housing styles, dietary practices, everyday routines, and household relationships. Such environmental conditions functioned not merely as a physical backdrop, but as a cultural framework that deeply shaped people's adaptive skills, resilience, and strategies of everyday survival in the region. During Japan's occupation of Manchuria between 1931 and 1945, Northeast China became a central site for Japanese settlement under state-led migration policies. Large numbers of pioneer groups were relocated to engage in agriculture and industrial development, transforming the region into a multiethnic and multicultural space. Following the end of the war, the collapse of family structures and the disorder accompanying Japan's defeat resulted in the emergence of a large number of orphans. Many of these children were taken in by Chinese families and raised within the social and cultural environment of Northeast China, forming a population later referred to as "Japanese war orphans" (Guan & Zhang, 2005).

Statistical data indicate that Heilongjiang and

Liaoning provinces housed the largest concentrations of this population. By 2000, Heilongjiang was home to 2,010 orphans, accounting for nearly half of the national total, while Liaoning had approximately 850. Most resided in major industrial cities such as Shenyang, Dalian, and Fushun urban centers that offered greater access to education, employment opportunities, and social networks than rural areas (Guan & Zhang, 2005). Patterns of settlement in these cities contributed to differences in educational attainment and lifestyles, particularly distinguishing orphans in Liaoning from those in other parts of Northeast China. The cultural significance of Northeast China is vividly illustrated through the life history of one orphan documented through oral narrative by Wang (2015). Born into a Japanese family from Yamanashi Prefecture, he migrated to Northeast China with his parents as part of a pioneer group. Prior to migration, his childhood was shaped by agricultural life, seasonal festivals, and traditional Japanese foods, reflecting rural Japanese culture. Upon arrival in Heilongjiang, however, he encountered an entirely unfamiliar environment marked by extreme cold, low earthen houses, and a distinctly different way of life. Daily life in Northeast China gradually led him to absorb local cultural practices through routine activities. Diets based on soybeans, sorghum, and potatoes, along with the use of the Kang (炕) a heated brick bed common in Northeast China became central elements of household life, shaping patterns of living and family relations. These can be observed in Figure 10 below, which illustrates the significant and meaningful way of life of this community.



Figure 10: 炕 Kang (Fire-Warmed Bed) (Zijun Shen, June 2025).

This process of cultural learning was gradual rather than immediate, unfolding through everyday adaptation and interaction with the surrounding community. After the end of the war, the loss of his father and separation from his mother resulted in

his becoming an orphan, after which he was adopted by a Chinese family. Growing up within Chinese society, his lifestyle became closely tied to work, education, and the values promoted by the socialist state. Particularly during the period of industrial development and political campaigns after the 1950s, his daily life involved factory labor, revolutionary songs, and participation in propaganda work, reflecting the powerful role of political culture in shaping identity and everyday experience (Wang, 2013). However, the life experiences of Chinese orphans from Northeast China demonstrate that ethnic and cultural identity is not fixed or predetermined, but rather shaped through an ongoing process influenced by the natural environment, geographical context, historical circumstances, and political structures across different periods. Growing up under harsh climatic conditions, within patterns of settlement shaped by industrial urban spaces, and amid the social and political contexts of postwar China all played a concrete role in shaping the behaviors, lifestyles, and worldviews of this group. These experiences reveal that the cultural identity of Chinese orphans from Northeast China emerges through the interaction between structural forces and everyday life, continually formed and transformed within shifting historical and political contexts (Wang, 2013; Guan & Zhang, 2005).

5.5. *The Significance of the Chinese Orphan Community in Japan: A Case Study of Ikeda and Daito Morofuku, Osaka, Japan*

The significance of the Chinese orphan community such as, Ikeda city and Daito Morofuku are significant spaces that reflect the lived experiences of Chinese orphans in the aftermath of World War II. Through processes of settlement, community formation, and the continued maintenance of cultural identity, these places have become more than residential or economic areas. They are sites of memory and emotion, where everyday adaptation takes place alongside the preservation of cultural identity. As such, Ikeda and Daito Morofuku provide an essential framework for understanding how Chinese orphans in Japan have negotiated, sustained, and protected their cultural identities within Japanese society.

Osaka plays a highly significant role in Japan's migration history and provides an ideal setting for examining the lived experiences of Chinese orphans from Northeast China. As the city with the second-largest Chinese population in Japan after Tokyo, Osaka was home to approximately 333,564 foreign

residents, accounting for 8.8 percent of its total population in 2024 (Zhang, 2023). This demographic composition reflects Osaka's long-standing multicultural character and its role as a major economic and labor center since the post-World War II period. In particular, the rapid economic growth of the 1980s created favorable conditions for Chinese migrants, who were drawn by employment opportunities, a lower cost of living compared to Tokyo, and urban infrastructure that supported long-term settlement. Within this broader migration context, Chinese orphans from Northeast China many of whom are historically connected to the group known as *Zanryū koji* (Japanese war orphans left in China) possess historical and social characteristics that distinguish them clearly from more recent generations of migrants. Many experienced family separations during the chaos following Japan's defeat in World War II, grew up with complex and layered identities, and later migrated to Japan during the 1970s and 1980s under state policies that designated specific areas for the resettlement of migrants from Northeast China. These conditions contributed to the formation of concentrated Chinese communities in Osaka. (Liu-Farrer, 2017; Gong, Xu, & Wang, 2021; Suehiro & Ito, 2021)

Ikeda city is a particularly significant site because of its direct connection to the life histories of this group. According to Tong Guiguang, a Chinese orphan from Northeast China, Ikeda once served as a residential area for *Zanryū koji* during a period when their rights and welfare were not yet fully recognized. An apartment complex in Ikeda subsequently became a shared living space for Chinese orphans and low-income households reliant on government assistance. Between 1990 and 2000, as Osaka underwent rapid industrial expansion, many second-generation orphans moved to this area in search of employment and opportunities to rebuild family life (Tong Guiguang, 2025). It also holds important cultural and spiritual significance for the Chinese orphan community. Nearby Nakayama-Kannon Station on the Hankyu railway is home to a major temple dedicated to the Bodhisattva Guanyin, who is deeply revered in Chinese culture. Many families recalled that before having children, they would travel to this temple to pray to "Guanyin who grants children" and during the new year they would visit in groups to seek blessings and good fortune (Yuxiu Wang, 2025). This site therefore functions not only as a spiritual center but also as a space through which Chinese cultural identity is reaffirmed within Japanese

society.

While Ikeda reflects residential settlement and everyday adaptation, Daito Morofuku illustrates the preservation of cultural identity through concentrated cultural and economic space. Daito is significant for its long-standing Chinese grocery store and market, which have existed for over fifty years and serve as a central gathering point for Chinese orphans from Northeast China, particularly those from Liaoning province and Harbin. (Sato, 2025). Knowledge of this site has been transmitted across generations through oral networks, reinforcing its importance within the community (Li Huaixi, 2025). The Daito market closely resembles the traditional northern Chinese *Gan Daji* (large periodic markets), especially on weekends. Vendors sell Northeastern-style breakfast foods such as *youtiao* and *Mahua* (麻花), along with Chinese vegetables and preserved foods. Some of these products are produced by community members themselves, particularly women, who use the market as a supplementary source of income and social connection (Dong Xiaofang, 2025). The shops also sell northeastern Chinese fermented cabbage, spices, and seasonings rarely found in mainstream Japanese supermarkets, including Sichuan peppercorns, cinnamon, star anise, and commercial blends such as "Thirteen Spices." These items function as embodied cultural and mnemonic symbols that sustain collective memory and culinary identity within the community (Luo Hua, 2026). Moreover, Daito Morofuku is closely linked to the Isshoen nursing home, which primarily accommodates first and second-generation Chinese orphans who rely on state welfare. Isshoen functions not only as a care facility but also as a culturally specific social space where Chinese language, dialects, activities, and symbolic practices dominate (Yang Huaxue, 2026). These can be observed in Figure 11 & 12 below, which illustrates the significant and meaningful areas of Ikeda and Daito Morofuku. These areas are home to the Xiyanghong Nursing House and Isshoen Nursing House, located in two districts of the city. Historically, both sites served as shelters for Chinese orphans during the early stages of their migration to Japan, as a result, these locations have become important places of memory and symbolize the meaning of migration for this community.



Figure 11: Xiyanghong Nursing House (Zijun Shen, January 2026).



Figure 12: Isshoen Nursing House (Zijun Shen, November 2025).

Daily and festive activities including Yangge dance, singing revolutionary-era songs, and Lunar new year celebrations actively sustain cultural identity and foster a strong sense of community. Although many residents have limited proficiency in Japanese, the institutional structure of Isshoen provides a supportive environment that enables the continued maintenance of Chinese cultural identity in later life (Wang Lan, 2026). The Chinese orphan community such as, Ikeda city and Daito Morofuku reflect the life stories of Chinese orphans in the postwar period through processes of settlement, community building, and the ongoing preservation of Chinese cultural identity. The experiences of Chinese orphans stand as important evidence of human resilience the ability to sustain a sense of self and to preserve culture. These areas therefore represent more than geographically significant areas for employment or commercial activities; they are meaningful spaces that embody the lived experiences, emotions, and shared memories of

Chinese orphans. These sites reveal everyday processes of settlement and adaptation, while simultaneously demonstrating the preservation of cultural identity practices, kinship relationships, and the continuity of cultural identity. (Sato, 2025; Tong Guiguang, 2025) Together, these areas illuminate, in a profound and compelling manner, the ways in which Chinese orphans have negotiated and maintained their cultural identities within the context of Japanese society.

5.6. Cultural Identity & Heritage Preservation of Chinese Orphans in Ikeda & Daito Morofuku, Osaka, Japan

There are five keys of cultural identity of Chinese orphans, such as

1. Language

The preservation of Chinese language identity plays a crucial role in maintaining the cultural heritage of Chinese orphans from Northeast China who have settled in Ikeda and the Daito Morofuku, Osaka, Japan. These preservation activities operate at both the individual and social levels, such as,

Individual Level of Preservation

The use of Chinese language reflects an intimate and embodied form of cultural preservation. 1) Writing, Chinese characters whether in personal notes, everyday expressions, or religious contexts such as Buddhist chants serves as a practice of remembering and maintaining a cultural system rooted in Chinese tradition. These writing practices are especially significant because they reinforce familiarity with Chinese script, which carries deep historical and symbolic meaning beyond spoken language. In this sense, writing becomes an act of cultural resistance to linguistic erosion and a means of sustaining identity within a predominantly Japanese-language environment. 2) Speaking, Chinese in everyday life further strengthens this process. Through regular interaction with peers of the same generation or long-term acquaintances, Chinese orphans continue to use their mother tongue to express emotions, recall shared experiences, and reinforce social bonds. These informal linguistic spaces allow cultural identity to persist organically in daily life, rather than being confined to formal or institutional settings. (Tong Guiguang, 2025) These can be observed in Figures 13 and 14 below, which illustrate the Chinese song lyrics ("Meng Tuolin") and the Chinese calligraphy of Buddhist scriptures written by a Chinese orphan.

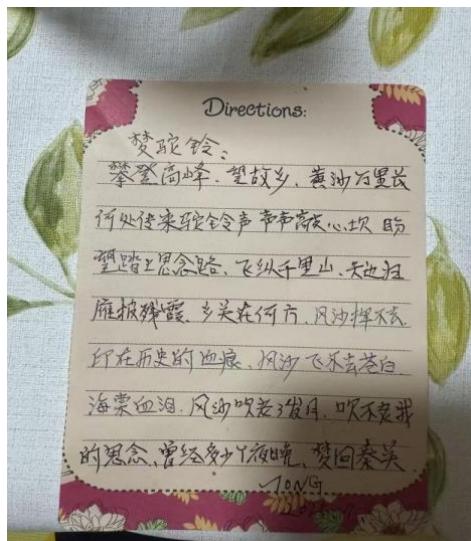


Figure 13: Chinese Lyrics (Meng Tuolin) Written by Orphan (Zijun Shen, August 2026).

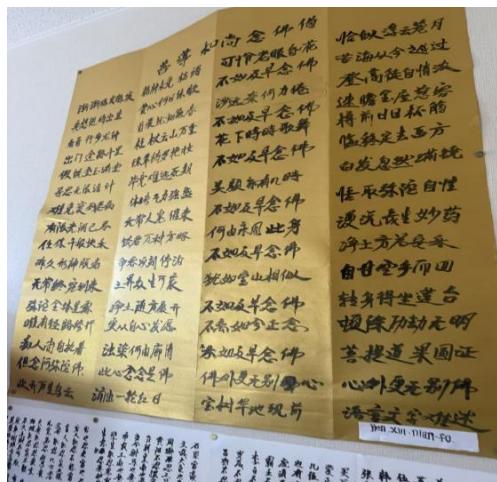


Figure 14: Chinese Calligraphy of the Buddhist Scriptures (Zijun Shen, November 2025).

Community level of preservation

At the social and communal level, language preservation takes on a more performative and collective character. Organized activities by community-based associations, such as the Chinese Orphan Returnee Association, provide structured spaces in which Chinese language and cultural heritage are publicly expressed. 1) Group singing, for example, plays an important role in reinforcing collective identity. Songs chosen for community events often carry themes related to displacement, memory, and shared historical experience, transforming language into an emotional medium that connects personal narratives with collective history. These performances are not merely cultural displays but also acts of recognition, affirming the presence and legitimacy of Chinese orphan identity within Japanese society. 2) Formal speech and

bilingual presentations represent another critical dimension of heritage preservation. In meetings, academic forums, and public events, Chinese orphans frequently employ both Chinese and Japanese, reflecting their bilingual competence and hybrid cultural positioning. The use of bilingual communication underscores the adaptive strategies of this group, allowing them to navigate institutional contexts in Japan while simultaneously asserting their Chinese linguistic heritage. Rather than indicating assimilation or loss, bilingualism in this context functions as a dynamic expression of layered identity shaped by historical displacement, migration, and resettlement. These can be observed in Figures 15 and 16 below, which illustrate organizational activities at two language levels, including group screenings of Chinese films for Chinese language preservation and bilingual presentations at New Year festivals conducted in both Chinese and Japanese. (Li Huaxi, 2025).



Figure 15: Organization for Two Levels of Language Groups to Watch the Chinese Film to Preserve the Chinese Language (Zijun Shen, November 2025).



Figure 16: Bilingual Presentation in New Year Festival (Chinese Speaking) (Zijun Shen, December 2025).

2. Foods

The preservation of Chinese food identity plays a crucial role in maintaining the cultural heritage of Chinese orphans from Northeast China who have settled in Ikeda and the Daito Morofuku, Osaka, Japan. These preservation activities operate at both the individual and social levels, such as,

Individual level of preservation

At the individual level, the preservation of Chinese food culture among Chinese orphans from Northeast China who have settled in Ikeda and Daito Morofuku, Osaka, is primarily reflected in everyday practices. A key activity is home cooking. These orphans regularly prepare meals in their households, particularly traditional dishes from Northeast China. They actively seek out specific ingredients from specialty markets that sell Northeastern Chinese foods. Through the selection of ingredients and the reproduction of regional recipes, everyday cooking becomes an important means of preserving culinary cultural identity. (Dong Xiaofang, 2025) These can be observed in Figures 17 and 18 below, which illustrate Mahua (麻花), a traditional Northeastern Chinese snack, and other examples of traditional Northeastern Chinese cuisine.



Figure 17: Mahua 麻花 (Northeast Snack) (Zijun Shen, August 2025).



Figure 18: Traditional Northeast Food (Zijun Shen, August 2025).

Community level of preservation

At the social level, food plays a central role in collective cultural practices. One prominent activity is the preparation and sharing of traditional Northeastern Chinese dishes during, 1) Major Chinese festivals. Members of the orphan community gather to cook together and use food as a focal point for social interaction, celebration, and the strengthening of kinship and friendship networks in accordance with the Chinese lunar calendar. In addition, some families operate 2) Chinese restaurants, which represents another important dimension of cultural preservation. Through food-related businesses, Northeastern Chinese culinary traditions are maintained, shared with the broader society, and sustained across generations within the Japanese context. (Ikeda, 2025) These can be observed in Figures 19 and 20 below, which illustrate Chinese restaurant businesses and communal reunion meals centered on traditional cuisine.



Figure 19: Chinese Restaurant (Business) (Zijun Shen, December 2025).



Figure 20: Reunion Time for Cuisine (Zijun Shen, December 2025).

3. Religious Beliefs and Rituals

The preservation of Chinese religious beliefs and ritual identity plays a crucial role in maintaining the cultural heritage of Chinese orphans from Northeast China who have settled in Ikeda and the Daito Morofuku, Osaka, Japan. These preservation activities operate at both the individual and social levels, such as,

Individual level of preservation

At the individual level, the preservation of religious and belief-related cultural identity among Chinese orphans from Northeast China who have settled in Ikeda and Daito Morofuku, Osaka, is reflected in everyday spiritual practices within the household. Two main belief systems are evident. 1) Maintain traditional Daoist beliefs originating from Northeast China, particularly those related to auspiciousness and sacred symbols. These symbolic objects are placed and enshrined in the home to invite good fortune, ensure safety, and ward off negative influences. 2) Chinese Mahayana Buddhist beliefs are also widely practiced. Individuals engage in personal acts of worship and devotion, such as prayers and offerings, following practices commonly observed among Chinese Buddhists. (Wang Yuxiu, 2025) These can be observed in Figures 21 and 22 below, which illustrate a Chinese Buddhist altar and related ritual practices, as well as a traditional Northeastern Chinese Taoist Chuma ritual carpet.



Figure 21: Chinese Buddha Altar and Rituals (Zijun Shen, January 2026).



Figure 22: Chinese Taoism Chuma Division of Northeast China Carpet (Zijun Shen, August 2025).

Community level of preservation

At the social level, religious and belief-based cultural identity is preserved through collective religious practices. Chinese orphans frequently visit and pay respect at Japanese-style Buddhist temples, which serve as important religious spaces in Japan. Because Japanese Buddhism has historically been influenced by Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, these temples are culturally familiar to Chinese practitioners.

This shared religious tradition facilitates cultural assimilation while allowing Chinese orphans to continue practicing their beliefs. As a result, religious activities become a space of cultural integration, reflecting the blending and coexistence of Chinese and Japanese religious traditions within the postwar Japanese context. (Nozawa, 2026) These can be observed in Figures 23 and 24 below, which illustrate religious places of Buddhism.



Figure 23: Nakayama Kannon (Guanyin Buddha Temple) (Zijun Shen, August 2025).



Figure 24: Nakayama Kannon Chinese Buddha System Sign (Dizang and Rulai) (Zijun Shen, August 2025).

4. Festivals

The preservation of Chinese festival identity plays a crucial role in maintaining the cultural heritage of Chinese orphans from Northeast China who have settled in Ikeda and the Daito Morofuku, Osaka, Japan. These preservation activities operate at social levels,

Community level of preservation

Activities related to the preservation of festival-based cultural identity among Chinese orphans from Northeast China who have settled in Ikeda and Daito Morofuku, Osaka, are primarily conducted at the social level. This is because festivals inherently emphasize collective participation, social interaction, and community cooperation. Most festival activities therefore take the form of group gatherings that bring together family members, relatives, and community networks to celebrate important occasions in accordance with the Chinese cultural calendar. Key examples include the Lunar New Year and the Chinese Spring Festival, which serve as central moments for social reunion and cultural continuity. During these festivals, community members prepare and share special meals featuring traditional Northeastern Chinese cuisine, such as handmade dumplings and fermented cabbage dishes. The process of cooking together is itself a cultural practice that reinforces intergenerational transmission of knowledge and shared identity. In addition to food-related practices, festival celebrations also include the organization of cultural performances rooted in Northeastern Chinese folk traditions. These performances are often rehearsed and presented by members of the orphan community or by Chinese residents within the local area, creating opportunities for collective expression

and cultural visibility. Through shared preparation, performance, and celebration, festivals function as important social spaces for reinforcing cultural belonging and sustaining the collective identity of Chinese orphans in Japan. (Yang Huaxue, 2026) These can be observed in Figures 25-28 below, which illustrate communal practices during the Chinese New Year, including traditional Northeastern Chinese dumpling-making across generations, as well as organized meetings and dance performances prepared for the Spring festival celebration.



Figure 25: Boiling Dumplings with Northeast China Fermented Cabbage during New Year's Day (Zijun Shen, November 2025).



Figure 26: Teaching Kids to Learn How to Make Dumplings by Hand (Zijun Shen, December 2025).



Figure 27: Dancing Organization for Celebration of New Year (Zijun Shen, December 2025).



Figure 28: Meeting for Organizing the Chinese Spring New Year Festival (Zijun Shen, December 2025).

5. Performing arts and music

The preservation of Chinese performing arts and music identity plays a crucial role in maintaining the cultural heritage of Chinese orphans from Northeast China who have settled in Ikeda and the Daito Morofuku, Osaka, Japan. These preservation activities operate at both the individual and social levels, such as,

Individual level of preservation

At the individual level, the preservation of cultural identity through performing arts and music among Chinese orphans, is primarily expressed through self-directed cultural practices and digital sharing. Individuals actively document and share their performances on social media platforms, using videos and photographs to present their cultural heritage and personal identity. These activities commonly include performances of Northeastern Chinese folk arts, particularly Yangge dance, which is a traditional folk performance closely associated with rural life and collective memory in Northeast China. In addition to singing Chinese songs also plays a significant role in individual-level cultural preservation. The songs often feature lyrics that reflect personal life histories, memories of their homeland, historical narratives, or themes associated with collective experiences such as the legacy of the Chinese Communist Party. Through these musical expressions, individuals recall their past, reaffirm emotional connections to their place of origin, and articulate a shared cultural memory shaped by displacement and resettlement. (Hatano, 2025) These practices can be observed in Figures 29 and 30 below, which illustrate the sharing of Northeastern Yangge (dance) performances through videos and photographs, as well as an orphan

drinking beer and singing Chinese songs.



Figure 29: Orphan Drinking Beer and Singing Chinese Songs (Zijun Shen, August 2025).



Figure 30: Sharing Northeast Yangge (Dancing) Videos and Photos (Zijun Shen, December 2025).

Community level of preservation

At the social level, the preservation of cultural identity through performing arts and music among Chinese orphans, is primarily carried out through collective and organizational activities. Cultural organizations and community associations dedicated to postwar Chinese orphans often incorporate musical performances, such as the singing of Chinese literary or patriotic songs, prior to the opening of meetings, ceremonies, or cultural events. These songs function as a shared cultural medium that reinforces collective memory and group identity. In addition, traditional Chinese performing arts play a significant role in festival celebrations. Before major cultural or seasonal events, organizations arrange folk dance performances, including traditional Chinese dance, as part of communal celebrations. The performers are often descendants of Chinese orphans or

members of the local Chinese community, highlighting intergenerational participation in cultural transmission. Through these organized performances, music and dance serve not only as artistic expression but also as mechanisms for sustaining cultural heritage and strengthening social cohesion within the community. (Yang Huaxue, 2026) These practices can be observed in Figures 31 and 32 below, which illustrate the singing of Chinese literary songs within organizations and traditional Chinese dance performances.



Figure 31: Singing Chinese Literature Songs in Organizations (Zijun Shen, December 2025).



Figure 32: Chinese Dancing Performance (Zijun Shen, January 2026).

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the cultural identity of Chinese orphans from Northeast China (Zanryū koji) has been continuously shaped by historical processes, migration experiences, and state policies from the post-World War II period to the present. The origins of this group are rooted in the migration and settlement of Japanese civilians in Manchuria under imperial policies, which resulted in the separation and abandonment of many children following Japan's defeat. These children

grew up under the care of Chinese families, absorbing the language, culture, everyday practices, and collective memories of Northeast Chinese society. This upbringing produced hybrid identities that cannot be clearly confined within a single national framework. The process of migration back to Japan did not occur suddenly but unfolded over an extended period, structured by Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations and evolving state policy frameworks, particularly after 1972 and through the development of support policies during the 1980s to 2000s. This migration process revealed significant challenges related to linguistic adaptation, employment, and everyday life in Japanese society, while also highlighting the crucial role played by civil society organizations and community networks in facilitating long-term settlement and social integration. Case studies of Ikeda City and Daito Morofuku in Osaka, Prefecture illustrate the critical importance of community spaces in sustaining cultural identity. These communities function not merely as residential areas but also as sites of memory, emotional attachment, and the enactment of everyday cultural practices. Language use, foodways, traditions, religious beliefs, festivals, and performing arts serve as key mechanisms for the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage at both the individual and community levels, particularly within the context of an aging population. The findings indicate that the cultural identity of Chinese orphans from Northeast China who have settled in Ikeda and Daito Morofuku in Osaka constitutes five key cultural dimensions such as, language, food, religious beliefs and rituals, festivals, and performing arts and music. Each of these cultural dimensions has been preserved and transmitted through two interrelated levels of practice, the individual level and the community level. The continued existence of these cultural identities reflects a high degree of cultural density within the community, enabling these practices to negotiate and coexist harmoniously with the dominant cultural framework of Japanese society. Moreover, they demonstrate a long-term, sustainable model of cultural preservation that has endured across generations. The cultural identity of this group of Chinese orphans thus holds significant empirical value as a living example of heritage preservation within the context of cross-border migration, and represents an important body of knowledge that merits continued study, preservation and transmission to future generations.

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Consent for publication: Not applicable.

Competing interests The authors declare they have no potential conflicts of interest.

Use of AI language tools Artificial intelligence tools were used solely for English language editing and grammatical refinement. All concepts, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions are entirely the authors' own.

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