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‘My Manchuria’:

Memoir, *Manga* and the Legacies of Japanese Wartime Childhoods[1]

Introduction

The history of the child at war in Japan comprises multiple strands that, at times, sit uneasily together. Beside the very visible public histories that frame the child as victim is a rich and growing academic literature that analyses the mobilization of children by the state in support of the war and children’s agency as they confronted danger, hunger and displacement, and that reveals children’s engagement with the war as complex and immediate. This article will explore some of the postwar consequences of that engagement, as the children of the war generation reposition themselves as witnesses to conflict and its aftermath. While many studies have explored the *public* contestation of war memory in Japan, the work of *manga* artist Morita Kenji draws out tensions closer to home; his interweaving of nostalgic and troubling personal memories, and his readers’ responses to these, highlight important legacies of war in family experience and story.[2]

The works examined below build a multi-stranded narrative of settler childhoods, through the Japanese occupation of north-east China to the end of the Asia-Pacific War in 1945. The first piece is a 1995 autobiographical essay written by Morita and published in a volume of memoirs by *manga* artists who had grown up in China; the second is his *manga* memoir *My Manchuria*, released in weekly episodes in the tabloid *Red Flag* between 1997 and 1999; the third comprises extracts from readers' letters on their own Manchurian childhoods that were incorporated between chapters when *My Manchuria* was published in book form in 2001.[3]

Morita's images of Manchuria have been published and displayed in museums in Japan and in "*manga* diplomacy" reconciliation initiatives in China. The graphic memoir *My Manchuria* has been thoughtfully discussed elsewhere, notably by Mo Tian as a collaborative history that complicates narratives of the quasi-colonial order.[4] However, while Mo's interest is in the mutual corroboration between personal stories and their contribution to wider histories, a more extensive reading of these three works reveals shifts in framing, internal contradictions, and an uncomfortable dialogue of memory between personal stories. A deeper exploration of these dissonant strands of narrative, centering on family and personal experience, reveals the child as witness to the corrosive effects of conflict on community and family, and not simply as a passive victim of war as impersonal force.

To explore this shift in perspective, this article will briefly locate the Morita family's experience in the wider context of civilian settlement and repatriation, outline the place of the child in Japanese wartime cultures, and consider the workings of memory and story in postwar families. The main sections read the autobiographical essay against the *manga* memoir and readers' letters, focusing on recurring themes of community, loss and responsibility to reveal the pressures that defeat and repatriation imposed on private memory work for the children of the war years and their families.

The Japanese Child in Wartime

Recent research on Japanese engagement in Manchuria underlines the extent of civilian migration and the vulnerability of children after Japan's defeat. Migration to China grew with Japan's expanding political, military and economic interests after victory in wars with China (1894-95) and Russia (1904-05). After Japanese forces occupied Manchuria in 1931, the Japanese government energetically promoted migration to the "puppet" state (Manshūkoku/ Manchukuo) with promises of economic opportunity and Sino-Japanese ethnic harmony; and diverse interests – predatory, pragmatic, progressive – drove Japanese engagement with the region.[5] By 1945, there were an estimated 1.55 million Japanese civilian settlers across Manchuria, in addition to bureaucrats, military personnel, and staff of the Japanese-owned South Manchurian Railway Company (Mantetsu). Settlers came from diverse backgrounds, and included many families with children.[6] The industrial city of Fengtian (now Shenyang), where the Morita family opened a small garment business in 1942, was home to a Japanese community that mostly worked in commerce, services and light industry, and that grew from 24,000 in 1931 to over 163,000 by 1941, in a Chinese population of just under 400,000.[7]

This migration unfolded alongside an assertive mobilization of the young as symbols and actors in support of war and expansion. As Sayaka Chatani demonstrates, the highly successful mobilization of rural youth was central to war work in Taiwan, Korea and Japan alike. Sharalyn Orbaugh and David Earhart emphasize the roles of education, picture books and public storytelling in 'domesticating' the war for younger children and building childhood innocence into adult understandings of war. Warlike play by children, as Sabine Frühstuck reveals, was treated as natural and invoked to legitimize the wars of adults; in the pictorial press, youthful soldiers figured as protectors of Japanese and other children and as grateful recipients of comfort packages and hospital visits; and images of pacified colonies and heroic sacrifice elided the terrors and suffering of war and occupation.[8]

Although children's responses to this work are harder to capture than the authorities' ambitions, Aaron Moore argues that younger children consciously distinguished between more and less

benevolent figures of wartime authority, and that older children became increasingly skeptical of adults and the war effort. Laura Halliday Piel notes the dissonance between glowing accounts of the war's progress and increasing restrictions on food supply; even younger children became aware of this as they foraged, smuggled or stole food to supplement their shrinking rations. Yet even as material conditions deteriorated, neither Moore's nor Piel's subjects openly challenged the promises encoded in propaganda aimed at children: that war was glorious and that traditional virtues would be rewarded.[9]

The literature on defeat and its consequences for Japanese settlers has focused primarily on the adults who returned and the children who did not. Estimates of Japanese civilian deaths immediately after the defeat in 1945 ranged from 67,000 to 245,000; many children were among the dead, or among the estimated 25,000-30,000 civilians left behind in China after others were repatriated.[10] Studies of rural settler communities have recorded illness, starvation, threats to settlers from "Manchurian" (Chinese) bandits or Soviet soldiers, a pervasive sense of abandonment by the Japanese state, and harrowing stories of forced group "suicides" orchestrated by community leaders in which children were often the first victims. Other work has mapped the stigma faced in Japan by repatriated adults and (occasionally) children, and explored the lives of Japanese children adopted by Chinese families in 1945 and the challenges that their fate later posed in Japan to understandings of identity and community.[11]

Postwar public histories underline the emotional weight that the figure of the child carried in the postwar. Children are both subject and audience of war histories in popular culture, from heroic stories that dramatize technologies of war, to stories of loss and trauma such as the multi-volume graphic novel *Barefoot Gen*, and the animated film *Grave of the Fireflies*. As Frühstück observes, these last works have – maybe inadvertently – reinforced narratives of Japanese victimhood in war. However, they owe their very existence to the role of the children of the war as witnesses, as well as victims; this is explored also in Aaron Moore's unpacking of the trope of the "lost child" in memoir and museum cultures.[12]

The literature on auto/biography and on memory suggests that we should attend to the family conversations that run behind these public histories. Paul John Eakin's work on "autobiographical living" draws on developmental psychology to affirm the importance of family storytelling in a child's sense of self and efficacy: children first learn from their parents how to make a "good" self-narrative, and become more autonomous in their storytelling as they grow towards adulthood.[13] Family story, therefore, is bound up with emotion, obligation and hierarchy; and family story after conflict is particularly fraught. Research on postwar Europe has underlined the burdens that the untold pasts of wartime victims, bystanders and perpetrators impose on their children, and the work of researchers such as Svetlana Alexievich shows us a generation of children's war memories in which routine self-making is overlaid by trauma and the ethical imperatives of remembering. Marianne Hirsch's notion of "postmemory" has highlighted the role of the children of Holocaust survivors as carriers and guardians of traumatic memory. Other studies charted the engagement with family pasts by children of non-Jewish German families, finding the grandchildren of the war generation more anxious than their parents to exonerate family members of complicity in wartime abuses.[14]

Exploring postmemory in Japan through several hundred letters written to the *Asahi* newspaper between 1986 and 2013, Akiko Hashimoto identified a pattern of "biographical repair", in which veterans' children accepted their fathers' framing of war experience as one of anguish and powerlessness, eliding questions of responsibility and treating war as an undeniable but abstract evil. This biographical repair may suggest that the Japanese children were less likely to have seen traces of what their parents' generation had done in a war conducted mostly outside the Japanese islands; or that they had become – decades after the war ended – more forgiving of their parents than their German contemporaries. The prominence of Japanese suffering in national war histories legitimized this inattention, as dissonant personal stories of war drew on distant events and circulated within smaller communities of shared experience.[15] That said, the children who had by

necessity become more self-reliant in wartime appeared less compliant in the postwar, and adults' postwar concerns over the moral health of youth suggest some degree of intergenerational friction.[16]

The works examined below reveal a cohort of children who experienced fear and loss after Japan's defeat and were directly exposed to evidence of harm inflicted within the settler community. While some letter writers were adolescents by the end of the war – and in some cases, were directly engaged in war work – as Piel and Moore have shown, even younger children (Morita was six years old in 1945) were witnesses to the aftermath of defeat and, later, potential authors of life story and testimony. Their stories are consistently Japanese in focus, and Chinese experiences feature only peripherally; that aside, they offer no unitary story of settler childhood, and separate accounts by the same author may vary. Morita's work shifts between different modes of storytelling, from lightly connected vignettes in the essay to developed narrative in the graphic memoir, and episodes that recur in the two works may carry a different message in each. A comparison of two stories by *manga* artist Chiba Tetsuya makes the point: in a 1995 essay, Chiba recalled constant hunger and poverty among settlers after the Japanese armies withdrew from Fengtian in 1945, and fears of Chinese reprisals that were mitigated for his family only by the goodwill of his father's Chinese co-workers. In a letter for the 2001 *manga* volumes, however, he offered a more comforting narrative of peril and safe return:

> We learned of the defeat in our company flat in Fengtian… we got up, and set out for the repatriation boats; a long journey had begun… we reached Huludao [port] in June… then reached [Japan] in July… [and] made the two-day journey home on a packed train. We hammered on the door in the middle of the night and scared my grandmother out of her wits. Then we cooked to celebrate our safe return. It was delicious – every summer, as we mark the end of the war, I remember this as if it were yesterday.[17]

The other letters are generally internally consistent; overall, they span the registers of memory from pure nostalgia to sharp criticism of the Japanese order in Manchuria; the most critical fix the blame for postwar trauma within the Japanese community, and not on some distant, undefined Other. At

the same time, they reveal the difficulty of discussing repatriation with parents and making usable stories out of family involvement in Japan's Manchuria project.

Morita's Manchuria in prose

Morita's essay, "My Repatriation from Manchuria", offers an episodic tale of his childhood and return to Japan. It points to the shadows cast by unexplained disappearances and deaths, and to the challenges inherent in creating a persuasive, comforting and shareable story of war's end. Morita opened with stories of loss. In 1981, the Japanese media began to carry reports of the Japanese children adopted by Chinese families in 1945, who had finally begun to return to Japan. Morita recalled:

> I saw their ages and faces and felt that could have been me … I had seen Chinese people come to buy my little brother for 500 yen; and here I was looking into the eyes of children who had themselves been sold. The difference between their fate and mine was paper-thin.[18]

He followed this with the story of a second, more personal loss:

> Moto was my father's apprentice, so was not yet an adult… he used to teach me things, like a big brother, and make me paper planes with his nimble fingers... During the repatriation, he went missing. When I think of Manchuria, this always troubles me. My parents asked for news from the repatriates' associations and the Chinese embassy but heard nothing. Over twenty years after the end of the war, we suddenly heard from a relative of Moto's in Japan that he had returned home, but died one month later, and that during the Cultural Revolution, he had embraced Mao Zedong – just like the Red Guards – and came back sounding like one of them. I can't understand how gentle Moto – even when lost in China – became a Communist.[19]

Morita did not describe the disappearance, though he remembered Moto trying to defend the family against predatory Soviet soldiers, and the story is marked by unanswered questions: how did Moto

live in China after his disappearance? How was he able to return to Japan, and why was he so profoundly changed?[20] This search for explanations and for a story with some redeeming features is quite common: in the same volume, *manga* artist Yamauchi Jōji opens with the story of his father, who worked for the Japanese police in Dalian and died in a Soviet prison camp in 1946. While Yamauchi's mother spoke most often of her husband's drinking and warned her son not to emulate him, Yamauchi himself recalled, "…Chinese people must have thought very highly of him – at the end of the war when they heard that he had died, they brought us gifts of pork and vegetables…"[21] In both cases, we see the writers balancing memory of poorly understood events against the desire to make sense of their own pasts and to affirm loyalty to others.

Some meanings of the past, however, were built on fragile foundations. Morita wrote affectionately of his neighborhood in Fengtian, his "second hometown"; yet this affectionate memory was marked by ambiguity. He recalled playing with a Chinese boy, Rō-kun, "little Rō", sharing sweets and candied fruit, but his description of his friend underlined the distance between them. As Morita remembered treasuring a child's army cap and a badge with the Axis flags on it – "I always wore these for photographs" – he placed his childhood self in the modern world of expanding Japan; but he framed Rō within an imagined, traditional Chinese culture: "[he] brandished a stick like the Monkey King's staff, as he chanted and pulled faces". Morita could remember the sound of the chanting, but never remembered learning what it meant. At the end of the war, their friendship was overtaken by the conflict: Rō's soldier father confiscated the Morita's house for his own use and Rō's family lived there briefly before finally disappearing. Like Frühstück's subjects, the child Morita wore quasi-military garb and befriended a colonized child; his story muted the context of occupation but acknowledged some of the uncertainties and risks that accompanied their tentative friendship. [22]

A more vivid, specific memory – in which Morita witnessed the execution of four Japanese soldiers – was easier to fix in meaning, but underlined the capacity of childhood experience both to

strengthen and to isolate the adult. Forbidden by his father to watch, he sneaked into the crowd around the execution ground; he recalled,

> Really, it was uncanny: the only thing that marked the line between life and death was a few degrees' change in the angle of their heads, a centimetre's movement in the squad's trigger fingers; and they had entered that other state called death. Then there was another silence. I had thought death would be a thing of tears and lament, terrifying bloodshed, a last dissolving of attachment to life... That shock to my six-year-old self still affects me, and my mantra in every crisis became, "However bad people are, as long as it doesn't kill you…"[23]

This vision of death encouraged resilience, while encouraging Morita as child and as adult to treat grave threats more lightly. It shaped his response when he was bullied at school and, later, when his mother was suffering from cancer: "'It's OK', I said, 'It's bad, but while there's life...' But my smiling mother died anyway."[24]

Even moments of beauty in the essay were stalked by ambivalence and loss. One of Morita's best-known images, repeated in the essay, *manga* and in exhibitions, shows the repatriates packed into open-topped railway cars, with only the tops of their heads visible, heading for the coast and for home. As the train steams towards a massive sun, low in the cloudy sky, Shigeru's father holds him up so that the boy can relieve himself over the side of the truck. The image reassures as it references the father's care for his son and banal bodily needs; Morita showed urine spraying back in the train's headwind onto the people behind, and recalled "…but no-one complained…". West describes the image as "humorous, beautiful and hopeful", and quotes art historian Ishiko Jun's observation that *manga* art "…moderates bitterness and induces laughter." Yet this image is embedded in the chaos of surrender, as Japanese, Soviet and Chinese armies vied for regional control and desperate Japanese settlers sold their children to Chinese families. Morita declined to condemn those parents, commenting, "Japan had been devastated by the atom bomb and occupied by the Americans; with the hellish repatriation journey, it is impossible to say what the right decision was." [25]

Recalling the repatriation more generally, Morita evoked Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's story, *The Spider's Thread,* in which the Buddha lowered a spider's thread into hell to rescue a criminal, Kandata, as reward for a single act of kindness. Struggling up the thread, Kandata looked down to see thousands of other sinners crawling up behind him. Terrified that the thread would not bear their weight, he screamed at them to let go. The thread, "which until then had shown no signs of breaking", snapped above his head, and all plunged back into hell. Morita observed, "...just as in *The Spider's Thread*, the Japanese clutching at the trains as they pulled out were thrown off one by one…" He did not suggest how many more lives the threads of repatriation could have borne but, whereas most repatriation stories demand our compassion for those who fell, this analogy questions the responsibilities of those who survived.[26] Throughout the essay, the framing of Manchuria as childhood home – with its accompanying glosses of community and security – exists in tension with stories of fragile communities, loss and death, and underlines the limits of parents in wartime and children in the postwar to comfort and defend each other.

Child as witness in the graphic memoir

The graphic memoir knits these episodes into a continuous narrative that Morita described as a composite of fiction and non-fiction, retrieved or received memory; our task here is not to judge the accuracy of the story that he chose to tell, but to consider its effects. Whereas the essay opens with stories of loss, the story of the *manga* is one of childhood community and the survival of family through danger. It shows Shigeru engaging confidently with his "second hometown", and offers imagined answers to the questions that the essay leaves unresolved. The opening frames embed a romanticized vision of Manchuria in the political framework of occupation, showing Shigeru – Morita's childhood self – dreaming of Manchurian sunsets, of dust-filled air packed with clouds that he imagined as ghostly hordes of "Yellow Turban" rebels. Zooming out, Morita showed Shigeru holding a *Norakuro* comic book – hugely popular children's stories of a stray dog who joined the Japanese army that delivered messages of war and empire to Japanese children – and then

maps of the north-east and Fengtian city, with lists of Japanese *manga* artists who had grown up there.[27] As Tamanoi observes, nostalgia may mask memories that evoke "guilt, shame or humiliation" and, as the memoir develops, those darker episodes become increasingly prominent.

We see Shigeru's Manchuria at first as a place of play, school, and family outings, peopled by his parents, baby brother Minoru and apprentice Moto, his Chinese friends, Lao Jun (J. Rō-kun) and Minglan; Shigeru's mother supported this friendship, despite tensions with other Japanese families. The visual language of the *manga* naturalized these competing communities: Morita drew Shigeru and his Chinese friends in soft, rounded lines, baby-faced and button-nosed, while rendering the hostile Japanese children, including a neighbor, Iwao Takezō, as infant grotesques. Morita rewrote the tenuous friendship with Lao Jun that appears in the essay, reversing the tropes of colonial children's literature that juxtaposed taller, authoritative Japanese boy with smaller Chinese girl. Minglan – who had not appeared in the essay – was both companion and adviser in the *manga*, urging Shigeru to abandon his ambition to be a *rōnin* – a wandering adventurer – and become an artist.[28]

As the war forcibly re-ordered the children's world, Minglan and Takezō's stories underlined the pull of more conventional allegiances. When adult men were summoned for military service, Shigeru's father charged the six-year-old with the care of his mother and brother; Takezō's father gave him a hand-grenade to protect the Iwao family; the boys joined the community farewell gatherings for fathers and brothers. Shigeru bonded with Takezō, lending him *Norakuro* books and helping him to write letters to his brother.[29] After the defeat, Lao Jun and Minglan's father appeared in army uniform and commandeered the family home and Shigeru learned that he had been led to them by Minglan's description of the house. Shortly afterwards, the father was found shot in the street and the Chinese children simply disappeared.[30] Takezō's mother – despairing of her family's survival – sold him to a Chinese couple. Takezō tried to kill the couple and himself with his hand-grenade, but it failed to detonate, and he was led away. Shigeru remembered Minglan as carefree friend; Takezō's friend Yūsuke pined for him and died on the journey back to Japan. The last

frames of Shigeru's story show both lost boys as present in spirit, drawn in ghostly outline, as the repatriates landed at Maizuru.[31] The child's story of adventure, peril and safe return demanded the symbolic homecoming of the Japanese children, but left the orphaned Minglan's fate unresolved. Her loss was survivable; Takezō's was not.

Morita wove the episodes of the execution, Moto's disappearance and the repatriation journey into this story, changing the emphasis and the effects of the stories as he did so. His retelling undercut the horror of the executions, and offered a redemptive coda to Moto's story, but left painful questions hanging over the repatriation journey and the actions of Japanese adults. As in the essay, the children were determined to see the executions: Shigeru climbed a tree and peered through a fence for a better view, and Takezō – alerted too late by friends – was frustrated to have missed the shooting. Morita followed the scene with pages of images from his later work that played death by firing squad for comedic effect;[32] this reworking pulled the punches that landed in the essay, and the soldiers' deaths became a source of creativity and grim humor.

Moto's disappearance was reimagined with an immediacy that was absent from the essay. A shift in visual language emphasized the drama of the moment when Moto was beaten and dragged away by Soviet soldiers when he tried to prevent them from stealing tools from the Moritas' business. Having earlier drawn Moto in the same baby-faced style as Shigeru and his friends, here Morita rendered him as an adult like the squarer, coarser Soviet soldiers, and replaced the clean black-and-white lines of the main panels with a wash of grey and black. He followed with a panel that showed the frightened child Shigeru ageing into a remembering, middle-aged Kenji and addressing the reader directly: "So many people had experiences like Shigeru, and carried them for years – so many years – even into adulthood."[33] Later, however, he resolved Moto's story: as Shigeru's father headed for Fengtian after the defeat, he was captured by Soviet troops and loaded on to a train bound for Siberia and forced labor. Escaping, he narrowly avoided recapture by Chinese Communist soldiers when one of them pointed him towards the south and freedom, without raising the alarm. The soldier, Morita senior observed, was the very image of Moto.[34] Whereas the essay

simply disappears Moto, and returns him to Japan to die, decades later, as a fervent Communist, this glimpse of a possible future Moto suggests a more sympathetic conclusion and shows his personal loyalty to the Moritas as unchanged.

Morita's retelling of the repatriation journey showed the harm visited upon settlers by other Japanese: whereas the war's end fostered solidarity among children, its effects on adults were corrosive. Immediately after the defeat, the *manga* narrative shifted from Fengtian to the far north, and from Shigeru's immediate experience to the story of Takezō's brother, who had been called up to work on frontier defences. Heading south with a band of Japanese civilian refugees, he saw two children killed to prevent their crying from revealing the refugees' presence to passing Chinese soldiers. One mother accidentally suffocated her baby, and begged the Japanese soldier escorting the group to pause so that she could bury the child; he refused. Later, the same soldier deliberately drowned a crying toddler and confronted the refugees, saying, "I know I will go to hell, but I am taking you to safety – I can only save you if you want to live." He later discovered that this was the soldier's own child. These deaths had not featured in the essay; in the *manga*, the sequence covers eighteen full pages and uses visual shocks – adding onomatopoeia, and demonic fangs to the soldier's face in the drowning sequence – to heighten the effect of the story.[35]

Elsewhere, he was less direct, placing difficult moments at the edge of frames or beside other more striking images, in the corner of the reader's eye. As he showed the train journey south, he returned to the image of the train steaming towards the horizon as Shigeru relieved himself, now tactfully redirecting the spray of urine away from his fellow repatriates. He captioned the image, "I will remember this - my father holding me by the waist as I pissed, under the world's most beautiful evening sun – for the rest of my life." As in the essay, the placing of the image suggests that Morita was reclaiming those images of care and space from darker associations. Two panels earlier, Morita had shown a mother lifting a toddler to urinate over one side of the car, as male refugees on the other offered bribes to Chinese soldiers for the safe passage of the train; first giving cash, and then handing over Japanese women to pacify the armed men. The following panel showed Shigeru's

bewilderment and his father's anguish, as train moved on and the "sacrificed women" disappeared towards the horizon.[36]

In his essay, Morita had invoked the image of the spider's thread to mark the question of responsibility for those who suffered or were lost during repatriation. In the *manga*, he explicitly and insistently identified Japanese authority figures – soldiers and adult men – as sources of harm to vulnerable settlers and showed them making choices that saved some at the expense of others. As Morita rewrote the story between essay and *manga*, he chose to repair some biographies, to some extent, but not others. He showed Mrs. Iwao's fears over the return to an occupied Japan, and her hope that Takezō's "vitality" would allow him to thrive in China, and concluded with a reminder that Chinese families brought up adopted Japanese children as their own.[37] Whereas, earlier, he had shown his own parents' influence in supporting his friendship with Lao Jun and Minglan, and in priming him for greater responsibility during his father's absence, he showed also the limits of their power to save Moto, or to intervene when community leaders decided to sacrifice the women. And while he showed that these decisions were taken in apparently desperate circumstances, he offered no further redemptive explanations.

Manchuria in family story

Thus, Morita's memories of Manchuria shifted between reassuring and traumatic stories. In an afterword to the graphic memoir, he emphasized the tensions between his own desire to hear those stories and his parents' reluctance to revisit the experience:

> To tell the truth, for years after we returned, Manchuria was not a happy subject in our house. My parents struggled to adapt to life back in Japan, hated what they saw as pointless grumbling and were particularly determined to avoid talk of our repatriation. But since they died, I keep thinking back to that grumbling. It's a selfish thing, but I would have liked to hear more of that talk.[38]

Morita did not explain the details of that "pointless grumbling". But the readers' letters show more of what was at stake in this talk, and some of the personal challenges involved in living with dissonant understandings of the past.

The twenty-seven published letters come from the children of former Mantetsu and government employees – the settler elite – as well as from poorer families. The stories that they tell depend on selections made first by writers and then by the editors and we should assume that each offers one among several possible versions of a writer's Manchuria story. They show a wide range of judgements on the Manchuria experience; their tone shifts with the tone of Morita's story, from nostalgic to more challenging memories. They contain a thicker strand of dissonant memories than those discussed by Hashimoto, but address more directly the challenges of discussing these memories.[39]

The nostalgic letters evoke everyday experiences: skating in winter, fishing trips in summer; the taste of roast sweet potatoes and the sound of mules braying; the excitement of school sumo contests, local festivals and chasing beetles across the grass at sunset.[40] They extend childhood communities into postwar life through connections to former teachers and alumni associations:

> Fengtian is my hometown: where I was born, went to kindergarten and elementary school… I first attended a Shikishima [elementary school] alumni meeting in 1998, and it was a wonderful day... we sang together and were warmed by joy and friendship.[41]

A few writers included Chinese in their remembered communities - Mori Riichi recalled, "I don't know about the adults' world, but for children there was no war, and no borders".[42] More commonly, though, local Chinese appeared distant and alien. Kobayashi Michiko, daughter of a Mantetsu employee, was urged to keep on good terms with Chinese children, but she spoke no Chinese, remembered the envious gaze of Chinese children as she walked past them to school, and attended schools and hospitals from which Chinese were excluded. Takao Midori was haunted by memories of Chinese girls of her own age: a young mother huddled under the acacia trees, weeping

for the dead baby that she cradled; and a girl working in a sesame-oil mill, bent double with a crippling cough. Japanese children were taught to accept Chinese poverty as natural: Takao's father told her that "Chinese were poor as they were a fourth-grade people, whereas Japanese were a first-grade people, so were wealthy".[43]

As the letters describe the end of the war, they described the dangers that came from Soviet soldiers and US air-raids, but also evoked the harm inflicted or threatened by the Japanese civil and military authorities, and the sense that Japanese settlers were abandoned by their own leaders. Tabatano Motoko remembered daily public cremations in Fengtian as settlers ate anything they could find to stay alive; her father had suffered a stroke and her mother carried her disabled son on her back to the repatriation trains.[44] Some, like Hashimoto's subjects, returned to familiar affirmations of the horror of war and love for peace, others probed challenging questions of responsibility and revealed the difficulties that settler children faced in negotiating stories of the war. Kobayashi Michiko recorded her distaste for celebrations of the war effort, and the insistence that, as she recalled, "we were all children of the emperor", and concluded,

> I talk about my experience whenever I can, and people say they can't believe it. …I feel I should say loud and clear that what I saw was no less than madness.[45]

Nishimura Keiya struggled with the contradiction between his father's love for China in the abstract and his complicity in Japanese occupation rule and, by extension, with his own involvement in that order:

> My father was responsible for surveys on land rights and customs. He had excellent Chinese, and loved China; he probably dreamed of creating a utopia. But you can't deny his historical role in building the puppet state. And although I was only three years old at the end of the war, I can't free myself from that sense of guilt.[46]

Takao Midori was forthright in implicating her father, and herself, in the occupation:

> My father worked for Mantetsu, which the government founded in 1906 to consolidate its control in Manchuria; when the puppet state was created, they invested 100 million *yen* to support it… I have asked myself again and again why I was born in Manchuria, and as I try to make sense of its darker aspects, what I feel most is regret as a perpetrator.[47]

Whereas Nishimura attempted some biographical repair for his father, Takao could find no redemption for either parent, finding both complicit in (or tolerant of) Japanese aggression against China and the sufferings of civilian settlers. She continued,

> It seems that we simply looked at our neighbors…, and then sent our armies to invade them… When I asked my mother, who is ninety-four now, about this, she hesitated, then answered…, "Because Japan won those wars", as if surprised to be asked after all this time… It was as if the sense of superiority that brought Japan victory had seeped into the bones of this ordinary housewife…
>
> Watching TV reports of the left-behind children visiting their families, I am haunted by conflicting feelings about our own return to Japan… I would like to ask my late father who decided – and how – who would go home, and when... [48]

Thus, while some letters imbued memories of Manchuria with nostalgia, for others, the traumatic end to the settler idyll, and subsequent understandings of that end, made softer memories appear illusory, rather than merely distant. Former boy soldier Yamagishi Shigeharu described memories of Manchuria floating before his mind's eye "like lantern slides" as images of "a Manchuria that we could not call a homeland; a homeland that existed only in our younger hearts".[49] This revealed ongoing friction between the settler child's personal stories and conventional narratives of lost homeland and Japanese suffering that retained the power – years after the war – to disrupt communities that many took for granted. Tabatano Motoko observed, "When I go to alumni events, I try not to think of [my past]. I go beautifully and expensively dressed but, however hard I try to escape them, I carry my experiences with me."[50]

Conclusions

The three works of Morita's Manchuria reveal gaps and overlaps between multiple stories of settler childhoods that affirm the weight of Manchuria in personal histories, the difficulties of building and sharing a usable account of Manchurian experience, and the ongoing pressures that the repatriate experience exerted on family story and generational or community solidarities. The rewriting of key episodes between essay and graphic memoir is not in itself surprising: memory is necessarily multiple, and the demands and affordances of the weekly graphic strip invite elaboration and dramatization of the shorter prose essay. Nonetheless, the story of the graphic memoir is not just longer or more detailed, but shows significant reframing of key episodes. A comparison of Morita's own works with the readers' letters shows resonances between his stories and others, while also pointing to obstacles in sharing those stories.

One central difference between the two works is the understanding of past events that Morita claims. Whereas in the essay he acknowledged gaps in understanding – of his Chinese friend, of Moto's life in China, of the meaning of the soldiers' deaths for his childhood and adult selves – in the graphic memoir he spoke more authoritatively, and positioned his childhood self as witness to the corrosive effects of defeat on the settler community. He recreated his tentative and largely uncomprehending friendship with Rō-kun as a richer, formative engagement with Lao Jun and Minglan, each offering a different connection with an imagined "Manchuria", and as a childhood community that was fractured by war and the actions of adults; Moto was "lost" in China but not lost to his old values and allegiances; the execution of the soldiers was not an unresolved psychic wound but a creative stimulus.

At the same time, Morita spoke more specifically in the *manga* memoir than in the essay of postwar suffering and its origins. The former "left-behind" children, whose anonymous appearance in media reports had prompted him to write the essay, became a single adopted child, Takezō, known to Shigeru; Morita showed Shigeru berating Mrs. Iwao for giving up her son, and adults more

generally for pursuing the war and bringing harm to children. Similarly, he reinvented the Japanese who lost their grip on the "spider's thread" of repatriation as the refugee children killed accidentally or deliberately by adults, and the women traded for the onward passage of the repatriation train. While these specific incidents may be fictionalized for use in the *manga* memoir, they echo reports of fact elsewhere and identify Japanese community leaders as the authors of harm to their own people. Within the *manga* memoir, he made some "repairs" to these stories, showing Mrs. Iwao reassuring Shigeru and herself that Takezō's "vitality" would allow him to live well after his adoption, and the Japanese soldier justifying the killing of his own child as necessary to the protection of other refugees. However, he offered no exculpatory explanation of the abandonment of settlers by the Japanese authorities in 1945, or of the sacrifice of the women on the train. Beside the vulnerable and lost children of the defeat, therefore, we see also the remembering child who witnessed their suffering and its authors.

We see echoes of these stories in the readers' letters, in the hardships suffered by settlers during repatriation, and in the embedded inequalities of the Manchurian order. The writers frame these as family stories: family decisions took them to Manchuria, shaped their everyday lives there and returned them safely to Japan; the darker stories that appear at the margins of their own record the fragmentation of other families. However, while auto/biography and child development literature identify the family as first audience for the child's story, stories of family life in Manchuria were not welcome in the postwar Morita home, and this is reflected also in the letters. Repatriates' stories contained knowledge from which parents would have preferred to protect their children, of fear, hardship, violence and betrayal, and their own impotence in the face of these. However, the letters also reveal elements of parental stories that children found themselves unable to repair – notably Nishimura Keiya's and Takao Midori's fathers – and a recognition that parents, children and their peers carried different stories of life in Manchuria, repaired from experience in different ways. The conventional narratives of victimhood and agentless suffering that Nishimura, Tabatano, Takao, Kobayashi and others found so unsatisfying, were entwined with familial, affective and social

obligations. Unpicking these stories was no abstract matter of political alignment, or of observation, evidence and interpretation; instead, it required that childhood memories, sense of self, and the reputation and authority of parents and quasi-parental figures be unraveled.

Notes

1. Acknowledgements.

2. Morita Shigeru (born Tokyo, 1939) adopted the penname “Kenji” in adulthood; he retained his original name, “Shigeru”, for the childhood self of the graphic memoir. All personal names follow the conventional Japanese order, with family name preceding given name. Where the Chinese placenames used by Morita differ from current usage, I have kept his version, with current names in brackets at first appearance.

3. Morita Kenji, “Boku no Man-biki (Manshū hikiage) monogatari” (The story of my repatriation from Manchuria), in Chūgoku hikiage mangaka no kai, *Boku no Manshū: mangaka-tachi no haisen taiken* (My Manchuria: *manga* artists’ experience of defeat) (Tokyo: Aki shobō, 1995); *Red Flag* (*Shinbun Akahata*) at http://www.jcp.or.jp/akahata/, the weekly tabloid edition of the Japan Communist Party title, combines lifestyle content with political articles. It claimed readership of around 1 million – compare this to a national *party* membership of around 270,000 and a vote share of around 8% in the 2017 and 2019 national elections https://www.jcp.or.jp/english/2020what_jcp.html [accessed May 10, 2022]; Morita Kenji, *Boku no Manshū*. (My Manchuria) 2 vols. (Tokyo: Bansei shobō, 2001), 259.

4. Ishikawa Yoshimi, "Healing Old Wounds with Manga Diplomacy. Japan’s Wartime Manga Displayed at China’s Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 8.1 (March 2010) online at https://apjjf.org/-Ishikawa-Yoshimi/3315/article.html [accessed May 10, 2022]; Lori Watt, *When empire comes home: repatriation and reintegration in post-war Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 141; West, “Sorrows of War”, 10-12; Mo Tian, “A Textual Reading of My Manchuria: Idealism, Conflict and Modernity.” In: Christine de Matos and Mark E. Caprio, (eds.) *Japan as the Occupier and the Occupied* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

5. Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904-1932* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Emer O'Dwyer, *Significant Soil: Settler Colonialism and Japan's*

Urban Empire in Manchuria (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015); Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the culture of wartime imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 241-306.

6. Watt, *When Empire Comes Home*, 39.

7. *Manchuria Yearbook, 1932-1933*, 14; Young, *Japan's Total Empire*, 253. Guowuyuan Tongjichu, *Manzhou diguo nianbao 2* (Xinjing [Changchun]: 1935), 54.

8. Sayaka Chatani, *Nation Empire: Ideology and Rural Youth Mobilization in Japan and its Colonies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press); Sharalyn Orbaugh, *Propaganda Performed: Kamishibai in Japan's Fifteen-Year War*. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), esp. 137-40; David Earhart, *Certain Victory: Images of World War II in the Japanese Media*. (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), esp. 190-99; Sabine Frühstück, *Playing War: Children and the paradoxes of modern militarism in Japan*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), esp. 23-40, 73-74, 110-18, 137.

9. Aaron Moore, "Reversing the Gaze: the construction of 'adulthood' in the wartime diaries of Japanese children and youth", in Frühstück, Sabine, and Anne Walthall. *Child's Play: Multi-Sensory Histories of Children and Childhood in Japan*. (University of California Press, 2017), 144-49; L. Halliday Piel, "Food Rationing and Children's Self-Reliance in Japan, 1942–1952," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 5.3 (2012); Orbaugh, *Propaganda Performed*, 150-156.

10. Rob Efird, "Distant Kin: Japan's 'War Orphans' and the Limits of Ethnicity," *Anthropological Quarterly* 83.4 (2010): 809-11; Mayumi Itoh, *Japanese War Orphans in Manchuria: Forgotten Victims of World War II* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), xi.

11. Watt, *When Empire Comes Home,* 111-25; Yukiko Koga, *Inheritance of Loss: China, Japan, and the Political Economy of Redemption after Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 79-84; Mariko Asano Tamanoi, *Memory maps: the state and Manchuria in post-war Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), esp. 64-80; Itoh, *Japanese War Orphans*; Chan

Yeeshan, *Abandoned Japanese in Postwar Manchuria: The Lives of War Orphans and Wives in Two Countries* (London: Routledge, 2011); Efird, "Distant Kin", 822-28.

12. Aaron William Moore, "Children We Have Lost: Diaries, Memoirs, and Museum Displays of Childhood and Youth in Wartime Japan," *Cultural and Social History* 17.5 (2020): 715–729.
13. Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: how we create identity in narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 26-27; Robyn Fivush, and Natalie Merrill, "An ecological systems approach to family narratives," *Memory Studies* 9.3 (2016): 305-31.
14. Svetlana Alexievich. *Last Witnesses: Unchildlike Stories* (Penguin, 2019); Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Harald Welzer, "Re-narrations: How pasts change in conversational remembering," *Memory Studies* 3.1 (2010): 5-17; Kerstin Mueller Dembling. "Opa Was a Nazi: Family, Memory, and Generational Difference in 2005 Films by Malte Ludin and Jens Schanze," *The German Quarterly* 84.4 (2011): 477–495.
15. Hashimoto Akiko. *The Long Defeat: cultural trauma, memory and identity in Japan*. (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2015), 26-29, 36-37; Tamanoi, *Memory maps*, 59-60.
16. Piel, "Food Rationing", 394; Frühstück, *Playing War*, 155.
17. Chiba Tetsuya, "Boku no Manshū hōrōki (My wanderings in Manchuria), in Chūgoku hikiage mangaka no kai, *Boku no Manshū*, 73-91; letter (Chiba) in Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 1, 66-67.
18. Morita Kenji, "Boku no Man-biki", 93. Morita refers to adoption as the "sale" of Japanese children, though he wrote in the afterword to the *manga* volumes of gratitude towards adoptive parents.
19. Morita, "Boku no Man-biki", 93-94.
20. Morita, "Boku no Man-biki", 94.
21. Yamauchi Jōji, "Waga furusato, Dairen," (Dalian, my hometown), in *Boku no Manshū: mangaka-tachi no haisen taiken*, 142.

22. Morita, “Boku no Man-biki”, 94-96, 98-100, 103-04, 106; Frühstück, *Playing War*, 110-13, 132-35.

23. Morita, “Boku no Man-biki”, 107-08.

24. Morita, “Boku no Man-biki”, 108.

25. Morita, “Boku no Man-biki”, 110-12; Philip West, “Mapping the Sorrows of War” *The Journal of Social Science* 60 COE Special Edition, 2007, 10-12.

26. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, “The Spider’s Thread” in Akutagawa, R., Rubin, Jay and Murakami, Haruki *Rashomon and seventeen other stories*. (London: Penguin, 2006); Morita, “Boku no Man-biki”, 110, 112.

27. Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 1, title page, 1-9; The ‘Yellow Turban’ peasant rebellion toppled the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 CE); Aaron Skabelund, “Leading Dogs and Children to War,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 7.1 (2014): 5–13; Frühstück, *Playing War*, 83-87; Tamanoi, *Memory Maps*, p.6.

28. Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 1, 11-32, 44-48, 109-10,

29. Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 1, 75-76, 122-27, 165-73, v.2, 26-30.

30. Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol.2, 127-28, 134-40, 195, 201-03, 232-33, 235-37, 242.

31. Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol.2, 199-205, 232-33, 235-37, 242.

32. Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 2, 167-72.

33. Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 2, 179-87.

34. Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 2, 220-22.

35. Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 2, 142-60, esp. 152-57.

36. Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 2, 227-29.

37. Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 2, 199-207, also 247.

38. Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 2, 258.

39. Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat*, 36-37

40. Letters (Mori, Nakata, Sasaki, Yamagishi, Ichiji) in Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 1, 97, 178; vol.2, 67, 163, 249.

41. Quotation from letter (Ichiji) in Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 2, 249; letters (Sone, Nakata), vol. 1, 98, 178.

42. Letters (Mori, Nishimura, Ishiko, Chiba, Onozawa) in Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 1, 97, 218; vol. 2, 22, 67, 113.

43. Letters (Kobayashi, Takao, Yamagishi) in Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 1, 156, 157-58; vol. 2, 163.

44. Letters (Nishimura, Ishiko, Yamada, Sanuki) in Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 1, 218, 98; vol. 2, 21, 211; letters (Mihara, Yokobayashi, Yamada, Tabatano) in Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 1, 97, 219-20; vol. 2, 112-13, 212.

45. Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat*, 40-44; letters (Hayashi, Mihara, Takao, Yokobayshi, Yamada, Ichiji) in Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 1, 40, 97, 157; vol. 2, 163, 212, 250; quotation (Kobayashi), 157.

46. Letter (Nishimura) in Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 1, 219.

47. Letter (Takao) in Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 1, 157.

48. Letter (Takao) in Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 1, 158.

49. Letter (Yamagishi) in Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 2, 164.

50. Letter (Tabatano) in Morita, *Boku no Manshū* vol. 2, 220.