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Confucian Perspective on Death in the Refugees Struggling to Survive: An Implication from "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl."

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Abstract
This paper will explore how immigrants and refugees from East Asia who have moved abroad conserve the Confucian perspective on life and death and interpret their experiences accordingly. This article focuses on a memoir written by a Chinese Vietnamese woman living in Japan, whose title is "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl". Through the analysis of how the Confucian family morality and ethics are portrayed in the memoir, this paper will reveal that they were often strongly influenced by the Confucian perspective on the idea of the intergenerational succession of life, along with a positive evaluation of life and a pessimistic expectation of death.

Keywords: Confucianism, Family morality, Care for older adults, Perspective on life and death

I INTRODUCTION

The issue of Confucian family ethics has remained an inescapable topic when considering issues surrounding the care of older adults in East Asian countries and regions such as China, Korea, Vietnam(1), Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan, as well as in East Asian immigrant communities. However, most previous studies have tended to focus on the aspect of Confucianism as family morality and to view caregiving for older adults in the context of the conflict between Confucian family morality and modern individualism (Pyke 1999, Sung 2001). They tended to view the care of older adults by family members as an obligation required by Confucian family morality, and have pointed out the following problems that have arisen as a result of the decline of Confucian values and the growth of modern individualism: (1) The transitional nature of care for older adults (such as the formalization of family care and the imposition of "individuality" in modern care) has not led to improve quality of care, at least for older adults in East Asia. (2) The situation in which many members of the family, especially those in the lower generations, do not share Confucian family morals, increases the sense of burden felt by those actually engaged in care, and in addition, increases the pressure to speak out about the burden of family caregivers.

However, since "aging" is inconceivable without the death that follows, we cannot ignore the influence of the perspective on life and death on the care of older adults, even with regard to Confucianism. As Kaji (1990) points out, if the essence of Confucianism lies not in family morality but in its perspective on life and death, it is even more difficult to ignore (Kaji, 1990). The importance of Confucianism in the care of older adults, or more precisely in the quality of life of older adults, lies not in Confucian family morality, in which children and their spouses must care for their aging parents, but in how older adults and those who care for them understand death.

Thus, this paper will examine how Confucian perspective on life and death is reflected in the lives of immigrants, using "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl" (Tran & Fukiura, 1992), a memoir written by a Vietnamese woman living in Japan, as a case study(2). Although the care of older adults itself does not appear in the book, we believe that by deciphering their perspective on life and death in the refugees struggling to survive, we can draw an analogy to how the care of older adults, which lies between life and death, is done in the immigrant community.

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Ⅱ CONFUCIANISM AS A RELIGION

It is said that the Confucian perspective on life and death differs from those of Buddhism and Judaism that tends to view life in a positive light. Let us examine how this positive view of life gives rise to the Confucian perspective on life and death and family morality, with reference to Kaji (1990).

Confucianism affirms the pleasures of this life and expects such pleasures to continue after death. In the earlier stage of proto-Confucianism, shamans also performed reincarnation of the soul. Confucius systematized such a view of life and death as the "filial theory of life". Confucius sought an opportunity to realize the hopelessness of death, which is the opposite of the affirmation of life, in the death of one's immediate family, especially the death of one's parents. For those who affirm life, death is a truly grievous event, but they cannot realize their own death. It is only when faced with the death of an immediate family member that one can realize one's own death in an analogous way.

The deaths of immediate family members give rise to two interrelated notions. The first is the idea that the bodies of the deceased parents are succeeded by the body of the offspring. This is the idea of the "bodies given to us by our parents". The second is the idea that the deaths of immediate family members, which are similar to individuals' deaths, should therefore be mourned to the utmost extent. These two notions are related to the fact that caring for aging parents is considered as children's duties. Caring for parents is viewed in the processes of succeeding parents' bodies.

It is important to note that the identification of the parents' bodies with one's own body (which means that caring for the parents means caring for oneself) and the desire for one's own body to be succeeded by one's descendants (which means that one wants one's children to care for one's own body when one gets old) are not the essential reasons for caring for one's parents. The fundamental reason is solely based on the affirmation of life and the desire to overcome the fear of death by succeeding bodies. However, this recognition that it is the duty of children to care for aging parents also functions as a norm that defines the rights and duties of the members of the family. Originally, overcoming the fear of death did not include the motivation to have one's children care for one's aging parents, but as a result, a family morality that also contributes to the maintenance of patriarchy is persistently preserved.

This Confucian family morality has been severely criticized during the process of modernization in East Asia. It is often explained that modernization, especially Western modernization, encouraged pre-modern individuals to free themselves from feudalism and the family system and become self-reliant. But even here a different interpretation is possible if we take into account the Confucian perspective on life and death. Confucianism is life-affirming, and while it seeks to overcome the fear of death through intergenerational succession of bodies, it also has a strong pragmatic orientation toward enjoying life to the fullest before death. Caring for one's dying relatives is supported by an unconscious motivation to overcome the fear of death, but at the same time, there is also a concern that caring for one's immediate family will deprive one of the enjoyments of one's own life. What appears to be the independence of the individual in the modernization of East Asia can be interpreted as a contradiction inherent in the traditional Confucian perspective on life and death.

If so, the various contradictions surrounding the care of older adults in East Asia today can be understood not as conflicts between modernity and tradition, but as a contradiction inherent in the Confucian perspective on life and death, which can be understood in a new and different way. With this perspective in mind, this paper reads the memoir of an Indochina refugee living in Japan, "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl."

Generally, the memoirs of Indochina refugees are often read as stories of how the refugees overcame various difficulties and adapted to their new environment, and do not necessarily focus directly on aging or caring for immediate families. However, because of the harshness of the refugees' circumstances, it can be said that the character of themselves and their immediate family members as beings approaching death appears compressed in their daily lives as refugees. In addition, the story of immigrants and refugees is parallel to the story of aging in that it tends to be read as conflicts between modernity and tradition, in which modern individuals are established or traditional values are regenerated after the loss of a community that has supported traditional

values through dispersion. This is one of the motivations for reading this memoir in relation to the issue of caregiving in old age.

The title of the memoir, "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl," is a common book title in East Asia, but even within the short title, the age range and gender of the protagonist are included. In this respect, "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl" is a story told and described, consciously or unconsciously, with the assumption of a Confucian perspective on life and death, and with an implication of the nature of "aging."

Ⅲ "THE DECADE OF A VIETNAMESE REFUGEE GIRL" AND CONFUCIANISM

The memoir "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl" has often been read from the perspective of Japanese society, which accepts foreigners, in an attempt to clarify and improve the problems with the policies of accepting foreigners. The main concerns are what kind of support measures are needed to help them learn the Japanese language, which is a barrier to living in Japan, and what kind of systems Japanese society needs to put in place.

Tadamasa Fukiura, who was the executive director of the Association for Aid and Relief, Japan, at the time of publication, served as the "editor" of "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl" (Tran & Fukiura, 1992). In the "Preface" to the book, he describes the challenges of accepting refugees in Japan and the common difficulties experienced by refugees who have resettled in Japan (Tran & Fukiura, 1992: 7-11). In addition, in the text by Fukiura titled "Lan-chan Afterward," which appears at the end of the paperback edition, the following three points are mentioned as the reasons why Lan's autobiographical story was published: (1) to report to supporters involved in refugee assistance, (2) to let general readers know the reality of refugees through the portrait of one of them, and (3) to encourage young Indochinese refugees in Japan to read the book and aim for a path of self-reliance with great confidence and hope (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 220). What Fukiura emphasizes in his preface is the issue of how "Japanese" should accept "refugees" from abroad.

The perspective of what kind of society we should accept "refugees" was not always clear in the support for refugees and foreigners in Japanese society. If we were to venture an expression, we would say that Japan has been trying to support those who have been oppressed by traditional values as members of developed and capitalist countries or as "westernized moderns" who adhere to modern humanitarianism. However, Tran Ngoc Lan (hereafter Lan), author of "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl," presents a different perspective from these.

> There was a large Confucius Temple in Saigon near the museum. Japan and Vietnam are on the outer edge of the Chinese or Han culture sphere.
>
> The development of NIES (Newly Industrialized Economic Zones) is attracting a lot of attention, and I read in some book that Confucianism is the common denominator on which these regions are based. I don't know if this is true or not, but if you put Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan side by side, you can certainly see that this is true. What is wrong with Vietnam?
>
> In East Asia, there are also China, North Korea, and Vietnam, which are socialist countries that were originally under Confucian thought. In my opinion, it is difficult for socialism to bloom in the soil of Confucian culture. In order for socialism to win the respect of people around the world, it will have to show a few notable successes in terms of economic development, democratic practices, and respect for human rights.
>
> Japan and Vietnam are very similar in that they both have Confucian traditions as the basis for their lifestyles and values. When I talk about my time growing up in Vietnam, elderly Japanese people say that it reminds them of their own youth. Besides, we are both from the land of chopsticks" (Note: Japanese TV commercial in the 1980s).
>
> So, for me, not only the classrooms of Aioi Junior High School, but also Japan itself was a country that I could easily enter. On the other hand, refugees who went to the West, especially to countries that had never had deep relations with Vietnam or Indochina, must have had a hard time due to culture shock. (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 173)

What this quote shows is that what Lan expects from the host country, Japanese society, has

not developed modern values that respect the lifestyle and freedom of the refugees, and has enhanced Confucian lifestyle and values. In "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl", the expression "Japan is a country cold to refugees" is often used. The memoirs of Lan's eldest brother Tran Truyen Chi(3), who had worked in Japan earlier, are quoted in "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl". The elder brother's memoir quotes a letter Lan sent to him from a camp in Hong Kong, where she expressed her concern: "We will have a hard time in Japan. Japan is famous for being cold to refugees. We want to go to the U.S., or even Canada" (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 105). The coldness referred to there is the "coldness" of Japanese society, which is trying to identify itself as "westernized moderns" who subscribe to modern humanitarianism, but has failed to do so. The Confucian values that Japanese society shares with East Asian societies are perceived as virtues that compensates for this "coldness," although they do not often surface in the treatment of refugees and immigrants.

In reading the memoirs in the context of Lan's own and Japan's Confucian values, particularly their perspective on life and death, this paper will focus on two points: (1) the refugees struggling to survive, and (2) the intergenerational succession of body and life. In the next two sections that follow this section, we will focus on two stories from "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl": (1) the story of the affirmation of life and the realization of death as a refugee moving from Vietnam to Japan, and (2) the story of a girl who makes an effort, goes to medical school, and becomes a physician. From there, this paper will discuss how Lan and the people around her have continued to hold the Confucian perspective on life and death (affirmation of life and realization of death) and how they have imagined the intergenerational succession of life in accordance with this perspective. At first, we would like to introduce the outline of "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl" and its characters.

The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl" is an autobiographical narrative consisting of 12 chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 take place in Vietnam, Chapter 3 recounts the events at sea where she was cast adrift by boat, Chapter 4 recounts events in a refugee camp in Hong Kong, and Chapters 5 through 7 focus on her life in Japan. The remaining chapters, Chapters 8 through 12, do not follow a chronological order, but rather describe events in multiple places and at multiple times in relation to each other.

Lan was born in Cholon, a Chinese neighborhood in the southern Vietnamese city of Saigon, to parents who had migrated to Saigon from Hainan Island. Lan's father was born on Hainan Island in southern China and fled to Vietnam by boat in the early 1940s after the Japanese invasion of Hainan Island. He began his life in Cholon and brought the woman who would later become Lan's mother to Vietnam. When Lan was born, her parents owned a clothing store.

Lan was the youngest of seven siblings, and all of her brothers and sisters were born and raised in Cholon. When Lan was born in 1963, Vietnam was divided into the Republic of Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Cholon, where Lan was born and raised, was in Saigon, the capital of the Republic of Vietnam. Lan's eldest brother studied at the Department of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Kyushu Sangyo University in Fukuoka Prefecture from April 1971, before the fall of Saigon, and her second brother also studied in Japan at the same time.

In 1975, when Lan graduated from a Chinese elementary school in Cholon, the Republic of Vietnam collapsed, and Lan's family life changed dramatically. Having difficulties living in Vietnam, Lan, along with her brother and sister, left Vietnam on a boat about 12 or 13 meters long that carried a total of 38 people. After passing through a refugee camp in Hong Kong, they came to Japan. Her parents left Vietnam later than Lan, but arrived in Japan earlier via Malaysia, and the Tran family started a new life in Kiryu City, Gunma Prefecture, where her brother, who had come to Japan earlier as an international student, lived.

After arriving in Japan, Lan transferred to the third grade of junior high school, but her Japanese language skills were not good enough by the end of the school year, so she continued her studies as a junior high school student for one more year. During her third experience as a ninth grader in Vietnam and Japan, Lan relied on the support of her teachers and classmates to help her progress through her studies, and she entered a prefectural high school known for its advanced education. After studying for the entrance examinations, Lan decided that she wanted to become a doctor and enrolled in the medical school of St. Marianna University of Medicine. Lan's

experience as a refugee during the ten years between leaving Vietnam and becoming a physician in Japan can be described as a story of a refugee experienced the affirmation of life and the realization of death. In the next section, we will discuss how her experience of these ten years has been interpreted according to the Confucian perspective on life and death.

Ⅳ　REFUGEES STRUGGLINGS TO SURVIVE

As already noted, at the root of the Confucian perspective on life and death is an affirmation of life and a fear of death. In "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl," the affirmation of life is evident throughout the description of her harsh life as a refugee, as the following excerpts (A), (B), and (C) show.

After leaving Vietnam, Lan and her siblings were accepted into Hong Kong but had to stay in prison. Later, they were moved to a refugee camp, and then Lan began working in a radio factory. (A) is the scene where she learned that she had the opportunity to learn English.

> (A) Working at a radio factory would not help me in the future, so I jumped at the chance to learn at least English. I didn't want to forget my study habits. I went to St. Simon Night School every day for about four or five months. I had the fourth highest grades.
>
> It was during my stay in this prison (Note: Stanley Refugee Camp in Hong Kong) that I was able to contact my eldest brother Chi in Kiryu. In prison, I was completely free to write letters, but I was not allowed to go outside. But prison is surprisingly good. First of all, it is absolutely safe. No one is chasing you, no pirates, no shipwrecks. And you get three meals and a nap. I recommend everyone to go there once. The best part was that I washed my face and body jabberingly in clean water and was provided with new underwear and clothes. (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 101)

Lan stated as follows before describing her experience in taking the university entrance exam.

> (B) I experienced the days of suffering in Vietnam, the danger of escaping and coming to Japan, the hardships of the whole family to settle down, including learning Japanese, and the high school and college entrance exams. Of these, the university entrance examinations were the better part.
>
> I was able to get used to Japan, at least my life was not in danger, and if I failed, I could give up. It is not impossible to make a comeback. (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 128)

The following excerpt is the part where Lan states her reasons for wanting to go to medical school.

> (C) Since my house in Vietnam was confiscated, I have been indebted to many people. I don't know much about "human beings," but basically, I like them. (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 133)

In (A), Lan began studying English for her future while she was in a refugee camp in Hong Kong after escaping from Vietnam. In (B), Lan expresses her positive attitude toward learning despite her harsh circumstances and also expresses her affirmation of her own life when she says, "At least my life is not in danger." In (C), Lan expresses her affirmation of her own life as well as the lives of others by saying, "I like 'human beings.'" This affirmation of life is inextricably linked to the fear of death. A letter from her friend Q, who has been missing for some time, illustrates this point.

> (Letter from Q) [...] It's been two years since I came to the U.S. I've gotten used to life here and made friends. My English is okay. How are you doing? Student? Working? How about Japan? Do you keep in touch with the people in your class? If you have their addresses, let me know. I have so many things I want to talk about and ask. But I'll save it for next time, so get back to me as soon as possible. Take care.
>
> Q

> I couldn't help but get excited when I finished reading this all at once. My impatience to study for the entrance exam has disappeared somewhere and I don't care about the entrance exam anymore. I am still alive. It is enough that I am alive. Seeing my friends is something I can do because I am still alive, and isn't that the greatest joy? If I think about those who are sinking into the sea, how happy and luxurious I am now. I couldn't help but think that I must do my best to live up to that person's share. (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 198)

Q was one of the two survivors of the 135 people on the boat that he and his brother took to escape Vietnam. This suggests that the lives of Lan, her family, and the other refugees were a condensation of life and death. These are especially evident in scenes such as (D), (E), and (F), before Lan leaves Vietnam, and in scenes such as (G), when the family is reunited in Japan.

> (D) Since it was the "Mid-Autumn Festival," my mother and sister made "sticky rice dumplings" and "mooncakes" as usual, and we all quietly ate them together as our last memories of this house. Everyone knew that we would soon have to leave the house, and I couldn't hold back my tears at the thought that this was the last "rice cake" we would eat at home before the life like a sinner that was about to begin. (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 48-49)

> (E) When we left the Saigon retreat, my father and mother just said, "Be careful on your way," and that was it. There was no dramatic goodbye scene like in the movies, where father and daughter hugged each other and cried. We were already desperate. But in this case, "be careful" was not a mere greeting, but a command to "clear any danger." (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 57)

> (F) If either of us had started crying, it would have been hopeless. So we were both prepared for it, and it was a tragic feeling, but there was nothing we could do unless we parted without hesitation. Besides, we didn't know who might be watching us. Of course, we could be caught, or one of the father and son's boats could sink, or we could be attacked by pirates. There are many dangers, and there is always the possibility that we may have to say goodbye for the rest of our lives. But there was also a sense of "life is just like this." I guess I am the Vietnamese version of the "new man."
>
> Of course, I felt sad and so on. But I was anxious and nervous about having to immediately take on great danger, and I was burning with anger toward the group that had forced this fate on me. (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 59)

> (G) Even though [the room] was small, the night of the reunion went great until morning, so I'm sure the people in the room next door must have been annoyed by the noise. I felt sorry (sorry) for them. My father and mother just said, "Good, good," and that was it. On the other hand, when I saw my father, I felt that he had become very thin and emaciated. He must have gone through a lot of hardships that I still don't know about. My mother was crying. I was, to tell the truth, so happy to have come to Japan. To be honest, it was mostly curiosity. Of course, I was thrilled to see my parents and siblings again, but we had already exchanged letters when we were in Hong Kong, so I knew that I would be able to see him once I came to Japan.
>
> I think my sister felt somewhat differently. I think she felt that she had fulfilled her responsibility, so to speak. (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 110)

(D) is the scene of the family eating sticky rice dumplings on the Mid-Autumn Festival in 1978, just before they left Cholon. Lan anticipated life after that as "life like a sinner," and even now she does not want to remember this day. She writes that The Mid-Autumn Festival, or "Tet Trung Tu" in Vietnamese, is "a day to honor ancestors and cherish children" (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 47). This implies that life and death were inextricably linked during this period in Lan's existence. (E) (F) and (G) similarly depict the realization that the fear of death was right around the corner. The period between the fall of Saigon in 1975 and Lan's family's arrival in Japan in 1979 was a time when the affirmation of life and the fear of death were compressed.

V　INTERGENERATIONAL SUCCESSION OF LIFE

Confucianism, which affirms life, attempts to overcome the fear of death through the concept of "intergenerational succession of body and life." The concept of "intergenerational succession of body and life" is also what motivated Lan to become a physician. In her memoir, Lan describes her motivation to become a medical doctor as follows.

> I thought to myself, "I have hope. I have overcome the dangers and I have a future. I don't know which country will accept me, but I will not be killed, I will not die. I risked my life to cross the sea, so from now on I can endure anything. I will endure at the risk of my life, study hard, and become a doctor like that man." He was not Chinese, he was Caucasian. I think he was British. (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 133)

This statement confirms Lan's motivation for wanting to become a physician, which is to dedicate her surviving life to saving the lives of others, as well as her strong admiration for the physicians who were working hard to help people in the Hong Kong camps. Immediately after the above statement, Lan continues as follows.

> My older brother, Chan, who was close to my age died in Vietnam after we escaped from Vietnam. It was a real shock. But to be honest, there is no direct connection between that and my decision to pursue a career in medicine. However, it did give me a strong sense of hope. It solidified my desire to protect and cherish the lives of those who have a chance of survival.
>
> (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 133)

Lan was informed of her brother Chan's death in a refugee camp in Hong Kong (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 101). Although Lan writes that her brother's death was not her direct motivation for wanting to enter medicine, it is undeniable that she barely overcomes the unacceptable death of an immediate family member by choosing the idea of "intergenerational succession of body" and "intergenerational succession of life" without realizing it. The death of Lan's older brother Chan is mentioned many times in the memoir, and for Lan and her family, mourning her brother's death is also a way of feeling the intergenerational succession of life within themselves. Upon learning of Chan's death, Lan's eldest brother Chi, who was in Japan earlier, expresses even stronger wishes for the safety of his four siblings, including Lan, who have been unaccounted for.

> The letter from my parents was postmarked Kuala Terengganu. I looked it up and found it was on the east coast of Malaysia. I was relieved to find out that they were on the island of Bidong, off the coast of Malaysia, and that they had made it out safely. The letter told me that my parents had arrived safely on the island, but to my surprise, my youngest brother, Chan, had passed away. I was filled with a feeling of "No way, I can't believe it," since there had been no warning. But I couldn't afford to be sad and mournful at the same time. We had not heard from the other four (Lan and the others) who were supposed to have left Vietnam about two months before.
>
> We feared pirates. We also looked into typhoons. They may have been caught in a storm at sea and capsized, or they may have starved to death. I couldn't help but pray that if they failed to escape, they would at least be captured by the authorities and live on in prison. Soon I received a letter from Mai, and my whole body relaxed. I was filled with gratitude to Mai for having come to Hong Kong with my younger siblings in tow. I wrote back immediately with a word of praise. After leaving the prison, I was relieved to hear their voices on the phone as well.
>
> (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 104-105)

The intergenerational succession of body and life is spoken of using very common expressions such as "I want to dedicate my surviving life to saving the lives of others" or "I want to live as hard as I can for my deceased relatives" for East Asian people. Therefore, it is difficult to notice the notion of "intergenerational succession of body and life" lurking in what is written. At her graduation ceremony, Lan said, "I am most proud of the fact that I was able to spend my three years of high school with no tardiness, no absences, and no early dismissals. I would like to thank

my parents for my healthy body" is one such common expression (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 201). Against this backdrop, the previously mentioned Tet Trung Thu (Mid-Autumn Festival) as a day to honor ancestors and cherish children clearly suggests that they are passing on what they have succeeded from their ancestors to their descendants. Lan does not want to remember that day because it was a day that made her realize, especially as the exodus from Vietnam loomed, the death of her immediate family (her ancestors) and the fact that their surviving descendants (including her) were living by passing on the lives of their immediate family members.

By introducing the song "Vinh Biet Sai Gon (Saigon: Eternal Farewell)," Lan expresses how their ten years as refugees, which were compressed with affirmations of life and fears of death, were received by them according to the Confucian perspective on life and death based on the "intergenerational succession of the body and life." (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 59-60)

> Saigon, goodbye.
> Saigon, you're fading into my life.
> Saigon, the good days are over.
> All that remains for me now are beautiful times gone by and waning smiles.
> And tears that sadly flowed out...
> Saigon, is the city bathed in sunlight again?
> My dear love, is the rain inundating the city you return to?
> Autumn afternoon, are the fallen leaves scattered in the park?
> I will never forget the sight of you in the past.
> I am a sheep separated from the flock in the wilderness.
> A lifetime of just trying to lose track of time every day.
> Why must I, a twenty-something,
> Spend so many sad days?
>
> (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 60)

Saigon is a place that represents those who were close to her, her deceased brother Chan, and her former classmates who have disappeared. The memoir of her brother Trang, who had left Vietnam with Lan, was quoted in "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl," as saying that he learned of the song on a Vietnamese-language radio broadcast of VOA (Voice of America) on the night of April 30, 1978, three years after the fall of Saigon (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 60-61). Lan also said that she liked the song because it expressed the feelings of those who left as "boat people," and that she still remembers most of it. "Even now, more than ten years later, the song sometimes brings tears to her eyes," she says, "but it is only recently that I am reminded of it" (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 59). For Lan, her 10 years as a refugee were time of carrying on the lives of those who had passed away.

Ⅵ　DISCUSSION: CONFUCIAN PERSPECTIVE ON DEATH AND THE MODERN INDIVIDUAL

Through reading "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl," we understand that the experiences of Lan and the other refugees were inseparable from the Confucian perspective on life and death. Of course, this Confucian perspective on life and death regulated their reality in the form of family morality and ethics, and Lan's efforts to become a doctor were partially aimed at escaping such restrictions and becoming independent as an individual. However, it is not certain that such independence arose out of the conflicts between traditional Confucian ethics and modernity. In this section, we will first identify the Confucian family morality and ethics in "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl" and Lan's opposition to them and then point out the possibility that such conflicts could be interpreted not as conflicts between traditional Confucian ethics and modernity, but as a contradiction inherent in the Confucian perspective on life and death. In doing so, we will try to provide a basis on which the discussion in this paper can be used to interpret the contradictions surrounding the care of older adults.

In "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl," there are many instances in which Lan and her family's behavior is regulated by family morality, as well as Confucian perspective on life and death. The most obvious example of patriarchal family morality is the scene in which the eldest

brother blackmails Lan and her family when they insist that they do not want to settle in Japan.

> If they (Mai, Lan, and the others) had left Vietnam a little earlier, Japan would not have allowed them to settle down, and you never know what life will bring. However, they want to go to the U.S., or even Canada. If they (Mai, Lan, and the others) had been around, I would have wanted to beat all four of them up. I was desperate because I had the responsibility as the eldest son, and all the members of my company were supporting me. My parents would be coming to Japan soon, and I just wanted to unite the family.
>
> When I told them to come to Japan anyway, they said, "We will have a hard time in Japan. Japan is famous for being cold to refugees. I had no choice but to use a trump card in the end: "If you won't listen to my brother, you can't come to Japan. If you can't listen to my brother, we won't consider you as members of the Tran family. Do as you please. Finally, all four of them reluctantly decided to settle down in Japan. (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 104-106)

Lan does not write anything in particular about this strong-arming of the eldest brother. However, regarding Confucian family ethics, she writes the following about her schooling in Saigon before she left Vietnam.

> I used to study Confucius a lot [at an overseas Chinese school], but I didn't like it. But I didn't like it. I didn't like it because it is a male chauvinistic way of thinking after all. In Japanese, there are doctors and female doctors, actors and actresses, masters and wives. There are foolish wives and no foolish husbands. In Vietnamese, all doctors are Bac si (博士). I think the evil of Confucianism, in which men are superior, still remains in Japan.
>
> However, I like the basic spirit of Confucianism. In Japan, the bad parts are removed and only the good parts are practiced, so at Aioi Junior High School (established by Kiryu City, Gunma Prefecture), I once again wondered if Confucius was so good. (Tran & Fukiura 1992: 35-36)

This passage contains several contradictions. Does she mean that she appreciates the basic spirit of Confucianism but does not appreciate the disdain for women contained in the norms of everyday life? If this were a part of Japanese junior high school studies, it would be the first part of "The Analects." It includes the following famous passages: "Is it not indeed a pleasure to acquire knowledge and constantly to exercise oneself therein? And is it not delightful to have men of kindred spirit come to one from afar?" (學而時習之、不亦說乎。有朋自遠方來、不亦樂乎) (Confucius 1937: 1). This description suggests how deeply Confucianism is involved in Lan's decisions and actions. She was able to become a doctor because: she did not experience culture shock living in Japan because both Japanese society and that of the overseas Chinese in Vietnam were based on Confucianism; she followed her brother's orders and came to Japan, which opened up prospects for her future; she followed the Confucian precepts that emphasized learning. For Lan, Confucianism is embodied and cannot be criticized, even if it cannot be appreciated for its disdain for women.

If so, the independence as a woman that Lan advocates does not necessarily mean that she stands on the side of modernity, but rather is a consequence of her affirmation of life. Thus, Lan's experience as a refugee can be said to be signified by Lan and those around her in conflicts and contradiction between the Confucian affirmation of life and the overcoming of the fear of death through the idea of the intergenerational succession of life. The following quotation is from the last section of "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl," in which Lan reflects on the previous ten years upon her graduation from university.

> I will be training at St. Luke's International Hospital for a while after graduation. It was difficult to decide, but I plan to go on to pediatrics. It will be a new start and I will be relying on many people again, but I will do my best not to be ashamed of being a graduate of St. Marianna University School of Medicine. Even after I graduate from the university, I am sure that I will still continue to be under your support in this way. It may be that this will continue

to be the case for the rest of my life.

My parents are now over 70 years old. For them, living in a foreign country after they turned 60 years old was, and continues to be, a stressful and difficult experience that I cannot imagine. Even so, my family is happy now. My eldest brother Chi (graduate of Kyushu Sangyo University and working at Kokura Clutch) has been transferred to the Detroit plant and will not be coming back to Japan for a while, but he often writes letters and calls my parents and siblings to take care of them. Her second brother Tri (graduate of Gunma University, working for BASF, Germany's largest chemical company, in Japan) is married to a Japanese and has a happy family. Cap (graduate of Tsukuba University, working at IBM Japan Research Laboratory) and Trang (graduate of Tsukuba University, working at IBM Japan Research Laboratory) seem to be full-fledged businessmen, although they work in different departments (hardware and software). Mai (graduate of Kiryu Medical Center Nursing School, wife of the owner of Takayanagi Stationery Store) is a mother of two children in Kiryu after marrying into a Japanese family.

If I were greedy, Chi's children also started living in the U.S. this spring, so the lack of grandchildren nearby and the fact that three of their children are not married must be a concern for their aging parents. However, many of our friends and compatriots in Vietnam have been lost to the sea and are still suffering in their homeland, Vietnam, as well as in many other parts of the world.

I am sure that we have been happy enough in the past ten years to be envied by these people. By fate or by a thread of destiny, I arrived in Japan and finally became a Japanese citizen.

The kindness you have shown to our family over the past ten years is indescribable, and our gratitude is also indescribable.

Lan is very happy now. Thank you very, very much, everyone in Japan.

(Tran & Fukiura 1992: 211)

This part of the story clearly shows Lan's determination as a woman and a pediatrician to carry on life in a family that is underpinned by Confucian perspective on life and death (and family norms). After ten years of hardship as refugees, their parents have aged, their children are independent, and the next generation of children has been born and raised. In this sense, this thank-you message to those who have helped her is another way of saying that life and death are side by side, between her aging parents and her children, who are trying to enjoy their lives.

Ⅶ CONCLUSION

This paper examined how immigrants and refugees from East Asia who have moved abroad conserve the Confucian perspective on life and death and interpret their experiences, as evidenced in "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl," a memoir written by a Vietnamese woman living in Japan. The experiences of refugees and migrants have often been interpreted in the context of liberating them from dictatorial regimes and feudal values and promoting them to be modern, empowered individuals. However, as can be observed in "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl," the refugees and migrants in question themselves did not necessarily interpret their experiences from the modernization perspective. Even though some decisions and actions may appear to be modernized and individualistic behaviors, our detailed examinations revealed that they were often strongly influenced by the Confucian perspective on the idea of the intergenerational succession of life, along with a positive evaluation of life and a pessimistic expectation of death.

What implications does this Confucian interpretation of "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl" have for the care of older adults in East Asian immigrant communities? Caregiving for older adults in immigrant communities of East Asian origin has often been viewed in the conflicts between Confucian family ethics and modern values. However, as this paper attempts, an alternative interpretation is also possible if we distinguish the Confucian perspective on life and death from the Confucian family ethics, which obligate family members to provide caregiving for older adults. This is because what at first glance appear to be modern individualistic decisions and actions can be interpreted as a manifestation of pro-life Confucian realism. If this is the case, then

what is perceived today as a serious issue around caregiving for older adults can be seen not as intergenerational conflicts between the declining Confucian values and the modern individualism, but as a contradiction between willingness to care for aging family members, motivated by an unconscious desire to overcome mortality, and anxiety that the care of older adults will deprive the caregiver of his or her own joie de vivre. What appears to be the self-reliance of the individual in the modernization of East Asia can be interpreted as a contradiction inherent in the traditional Confucian perspective on life and death.

If the Confucian perspective on life and death significantly affects the perspective which immigrants interpret aging and caregiving, then aging is a major factor that deprives individuals of the enjoyment of life. Aging is a metaphor for dying, and therefore, Confucianists desire to avoid as much as possible losing physical and cognitive functions, or even if they do lose those functions, they do not want to acknowledge the fact.

This is true not only for older adults, but also for the families who care for them. Immediate family members of older adults are afraid that caregiving will deprive them of their own pleasures of life, yet this is in itself inextricably linked to the fear of inevitable dying and aging. As a means of overcoming such fears of mortality and aging, the idea of the intergenerational succession of body and life from ancestor to descendant is invented, which motivates caregiving for one's immediate family members, who are symbolically one's own body and life. The assumption that immigrants want to depart from Confucian values and achieve self-reliance as a civilized individual has given rise to modernized arguments: 1) The uniqueness of older adults themselves should be respected, 2) Family care is no longer functioning as the family members of older adults, especially the younger generations, do not share the Confucian family ethics. Under these circumstances, family members engaged in the care of older adults are under unspeakable pressure, and the burden of such care should be relieved. However, as we consider issues around the care of older adults in East Asian immigrant communities, rather than ascribing everything to conflicts between modern individualism and traditional values, it is necessary to understand that the Confucian perspective on life and death is unexpectedly embedded in the interpretation of decisions and actions of immigrant communities. Confucianism says that "it is the gravest transgression of filial piety for a child to die before his or her parents." This is not only a moral code that defines the obligations of children to their parents, but also a straightforward expression of the Confucian perspective on life and death. There is no doubt that Confucian values have a negative aspect which has resulted in the patriarchal system and feudalism. However, there is also another aspect which cannot be ignored in understanding the aging of the people. We should reexamine how "aging" has been defined in the Confucian context of "succession of life" not only in East Asian countries, but also the so-called "diasporic communities" around the world.

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NOTE
(1) The regional divisions such as East Asia and Southeast Asia are politically constructed categories. While it is often taken for granted that Vietnam is a country in Southeast Asia as one of the members of ASEAN, there are also cases where it is considered to be a country in East Asia, based on its Confucian tradition and the fact that Chinese characters were used until 1945. The reason why we have defined Vietnam as a country in East Asia in this essay is not only because the theme of this essay is the Confucian view of life and death, but also because we want to raise objections to the context of cultural politics that defines Vietnam as a country in Southeast Asia.
(2) Lan's writings are written in Japanese and were published in book form by Chuokoron-sha in 1990, followed by a paperback edition published by Chuko Bunko in 1992. This essay refers to the paperback edition of "The Decade of a Vietnamese Refugee Girl" (Tran & Fukiura 1992). The authors of this essay have already analyzed this memoir from the perspective of minor literature

(Hayashi & Miyabara, 2022).

(3) Since the person's name is written in Japanese in the memoir, the name when written in the Latin alphabet may differ from the actual spelling.

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