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Young Global Researchers Project

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Young Global Researchers Project – Phase Three

Foreword

The main aim of the Young Global Researchers Project is to build an online platform for facilitating research, writing and discussion forums linking universities and communities in Japan with their counterparts in other Asian countries and beyond. It is an authentic community engagement initiative that encourages students and educators to collaborate in learning more about key societal issues, and the actions needed to address them, through interactions with individuals and organizations in their local areas. This is achieved through solid research, primary source engagement, and the voicing of the participants' individual experiences, and those of others, through the written word and other forms of media. Furthermore, the lead researchers on the project focus on identifying the different styles of research employed in the various cultural settings the project is active in, with analysis of the data collected hopefully leading to insights on how to prepare a more effective and universal approach to research for undergraduate level university students, in particular.

The third phase of the project, Loss of Innocence: Research into the effects of conflict or disaster on child or youth victims, was launched in late May, 2026. Its purpose is to document the personal stories of people who lived through conflicts and disasters as teenagers. Each young researcher conducted a face-to-face interview with someone from their own community – such as a family member, neighbor, or acquaintance – who survived either a conflict or a disaster. The result is a collection of articles that preserve memories that might otherwise be lost and share the voices of those who witnessed these moments while still young. In this way, readers can understand what happened from the perspective of someone who experienced it firsthand, and how it shaped their lives as they moved into adulthood. The articles are organized under the themes of Conflicts and Disasters.

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Conflicts

Loss of Innocence: The Khmer Rouge Regime

Mrs. Sok Theam

Researcher: Sen Sonita

Teacher of English, Cheasim Chamreounroth High School, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

The Khmer Rouge, literally translated as Red Khmer, is the common term used for the Communist Party of Kampuchea. From the late 1960s Cambodia became characterized by periods of instability and conflict following the war between Vietnam and the United States. A coup took place in 1970, with the forces of Lon Nol, which were backed by the United States, against the head of the government, the former King Norodom Sihanouk. This started a civil war between the Lon Nol forces and those backing King Sihanouk, including the Khmer Rouge. On 17 April 1975 the Khmer Rouge arrived in Phnom Penh city and declared the end of the civil war. They also renamed the country, the State of Democratic Kampuchea. People gathered in the streets cheering and welcoming the soldiers, however, the situation immediately became violent as the residents of Phnom Penh were forced out of the city and moved to the countryside.

Pol Pot, "Brother No.1" of the Khmer Rouge, wanted to build an agrarian-based, classless society based on communist ideology, saying that Democratic Kampuchea would begin again at Year Zero. A centrally controlled government led by a close circle of party members took over all decision-making powers. All institutions, including, religious, financial, educational, and the family unit, were abolished and private ownership, independent livelihoods, and unapproved sexual relations were outlawed. The population was put to work farming and building infrastructure to support the goals of the Khmer Rouge. This period was characterized by wholesale deprivation of food and basic necessities, the most basic of civil and human rights, rest and medical treatment, and family and human relationships.

From the arrival of the Khmer Rouge in Phnom Penh and throughout their rule anyone identified as being wealthy, educated, or connected to capitalism or previous regimes were systematically killed. Members of ethnic and religious minority groups were also subjected to the harshest persecution. Most of the population had to endure forced transfer and labor, arbitrary detention, as well as many cases of forced marriage. The violence was delivered on a massive scale, and included brutal beatings, mutilation, torture, sexual violence and widespread executions. Much of the population lived in fear of death and in a constant state of suffering. At the same time this was happening, the Khmer Rouge was waging a war against neighboring Vietnam and many young people were drafted into their ranks as child soldiers, servants and spies. In this terrible period in Cambodia's history, it is estimated that around 1.7 million people died from starvation, torture, execution and forced labor before the Vietnamese army marched into Phnom Penh on 7 January 1979 and put an end to the nightmare.

Interviewee's Background

Mrs. Sok Theam is 60 years old. She was born in Kandal Province and currently lives in Kratie Province, Cambodia. She has only one daughter and two grandsons. At present, she does housework, raises poultry, and takes care of her grandchildren. Mrs. Sok THEAM survived the Khmer Rouge regime. At that time, she was only 9 years old.

Below is the interview with Mrs. Sok Theam**.**



Ms. Sok THEAM (the woman on the left)

Interview

Q: Can you remember much about your everyday life before the conflict?

Yes. Before the conflict, I lived together in a family with 5 members: one father and four children. I am the third child.

Q: What was your home like then, your house and local area?

Well, it was a wooden house. My father was the head of the family, and worked as a farmer growing rice and tending crops, while we, the children, helped when we were free from our studies.

Q: Do you remember a particular friend or friends from that time?

I had about 15 friends at school, and many cousins who lived in nearby houses.

Q: As a child at that time, how much did you understand about what was happening around you?

At first, I thought everyone was being sent to work, but I didn't understand why or who was giving the orders and no one could explain it.

Q: How does the adult around you explain what was going on?

Later, I saw someone who I had never known recording people's names according to their families, grouping them as "capitalists" or "local residents." If anyone made a mistake, their whole family would be arrested, investigated, and killed. I overheard people secretly saying that my father had been accused of destroying the rice seedlings. In reality, it was caused by the fish that had been released into the field to breed, but I didn't know what was really happening. That was why they had not yet called my father to be executed.

Q: How did the conflict affect your family members?

During that time, none of my immediate relatives had been killed. However, I could no longer live together with my father and my three other siblings. I had no right to meet any of my family members. One day, I received news that my father was seriously ill. I was worried and wanted to see him to know about his condition, so I secretly went to meet him without letting anyone know. But I did not get to see him, because he had already been transferred to another unit. Before leaving, my father had left a message with his friend from the old unit, saying: "If any of my children come looking for me, and at that time I am no longer alive, please give one set of my clothes to my children." When I heard these words, I lost all hope of ever seeing my father again. I was terrified and deeply worried. I didn't even know how many members of my family I had already lost, because there was no news at all about my three other siblings.

Q: Was there one adult in particular who helped you most?

At that time, no one could help anyone else. Everyone had to do the work they were assigned. Because I was still young, I didn't feel tired easily. Plowing the rice fields, building dikes, cutting grass, and twisting ropes were tasks that actually made me feel happy.

Q: Did your relationships with friends or brothers and sisters change during the period?

One day, in April, before the Khmer New Year, there was a gathering for everyone to listen to the new work assignments. All the work teams had to assemble together. It was at that moment that I saw the face of my second older sister, who was working as a vegetable picker in the women's unit. My sister's skin had become very dark and she looked extremely thin so much so that she was almost unrecognizable. I could not ask how my sister was doing, chat with her, or share any news, because I was afraid that others would find out we were sisters.

Q: When did you feel most afraid, and what helped you cope with the fear?

One day, the organization assigned me to pull weeds. While working, I complained, saying that pulling weeds in the rice seedlings was painful to the eyes. After I spoke, the team leader pointed at my face and warned me to stop saying such things. That was the moment I felt the most frightened. I was terrified that they would suddenly come and take me away to be killed.

Q: Was there anything you did to help you feel safer?

To keep myself safe, I had to work hard according to the assignments given to me. I could not be lazy or complain about anything at all. Because as long as I made no mistakes, I felt that I was safe, at least for the time being.

Q: How did the conflict affect your school life?

At that time, I was forced to stop my studies and could not continue learning because the organization had eliminated all schools and pagodas.

Q: Did you still find ways to play or have fun?

There was no time to play at all. During the day, I had to work. At night, the organization assigned me to teach the alphabet and basic literacy which I had learned before the conflict to other children in my group. This was because at that time, there was a slogan that said:

"Those who know more teach those who know less. Those who know less teach those who know nothing."

Q: Are there any games, songs, or stories you associate with that time?

There were songs created by the organization, but sorry, I do not remember them.

Q: In what ways do you think your experiences at that time shaped you as you grew up? And do you think there are any values or strengths you developed as you grew up that can be connected to that period?

My childhood had no opportunity for proper schooling, no time to play or entertain, and I also received no warmth from my family. I was forced to live independently on my own, taking care of myself whether I was sick or healthy, whether the weather was hot or cold. I became a strong and resilient person, someone who knew how to survive by myself, hardworking, never lazy, and honest. These qualities became deeply ingrained habits in my mind from that time until now.

Q: Are there memories from that time that still remind you very strongly?

I was still young, I didn't think too much and didn't really feel tired. I still remember that my greatest enjoyment at that time was competing with other work teams to build dikes, without feeling exhausted at all.

Q: How do you feel when people talk about that conflict today?

Time has passed, I am now feeling somewhat numb about it and am no longer as shocked or emotionally affected as before.

Reflections

Mrs. Sok Theam's experience is a deeply personal and heartbreaking glimpse into the brutality of life under the Khmer Rouge regime. Her story is not just about survival, but about the systematic destruction of family bonds, trust, and human dignity. What stands out most is how fear became a constant companion — not only the fear of death, but the fear of simply being seen as connected to one's own family.

At the same time, her story shows quiet resilience. Though no adult could openly help her, her youth gave her some physical strength to endure the hard labor. Tasks like plowing fields and twisting ropes even brought her small moments of happiness — perhaps because they allowed her mind some temporary escape from the terror around her.

Mrs. Sok Theam's testimony reminds us of the immense human cost of the Khmer Rouge period. Families were torn apart, children were forced to grow up too fast, and ordinary people lived in constant terror. Her words carry both pain and strength. Reading them, I feel grateful for the peace we have today, but also responsible to remember these stories so that such darkness is never repeated.

Her courage in sharing this painful memory deserves deep respect. It is through voices like hers that we truly understand the value of family, freedom, and humanity.

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Researcher



Hello everyone! My name is **Sen Sonita**. I am 29 years old. I work as a teacher of English at Cheasim Chamreounroth High school in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. With 10 years of experience in teaching English to Elementary students, I am truly passionate about helping my students build confidence in speaking and using English in their daily lives. I strongly believe that English is a powerful key that opens many doors to new opportunities and different cultures. In my free time, I enjoy embroidering on fabric, traveling, admiring unique architecture and building designs and trying new delicious foods. I also love reading books and listening to music. I am excited to connect with new friends and share knowledge through this platform! Thank you very much for inviting me to be a part of this research.

Loss of Innocence: The Khmer Rouge Regime

Mr. Sreang Pha

Researcher: Sen Sonita

Teacher of English, Cheasim Chamreounroth High School, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

The Khmer Rouge, literally translated as Red Khmer, is the common term used for the Communist Party of Kampuchea. From the late 1960s Cambodia became characterized by periods of instability and conflict following the war between Vietnam and the United States. A coup took place in 1970, with the forces of Lon Nol, which were backed by the United States, against the head of the government, the former King Norodom Sihanouk. This started a civil war between the Lon Nol forces and those backing King Sihanouk, including the Khmer Rouge. On 17 April 1975 the Khmer Rouge arrived in Phnom Penh city and declared the end of the civil war. They also renamed the country, the State of Democratic Kampuchea. People gathered in the streets cheering and welcoming the soldiers, however, the situation immediately became violent as the residents of Phnom Penh were forced out of the city and moved to the countryside.

Pol Pot, “Brother No.1” of the Khmer Rouge, wanted to build an agrarian-based, classless society based on communist ideology, saying that Democratic Kampuchea would begin again at Year Zero. A centrally controlled government led by a close circle of party members took over all decision-making powers. All institutions, including, religious, financial, educational, and the family unit, were abolished and private ownership, independent livelihoods, and unapproved sexual relations were outlawed. The population was put to work farming and building infrastructure to support the goals of the Khmer Rouge. This period was characterized by wholesale deprivation of food and basic necessities, the most basic of civil and human rights, rest and medical treatment, and family and human relationships.

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Interviewee's Background

Mr. Sreang Pha is 65 years old. He was born in Kandal Province and currently lives in Kratie Province, Cambodia. After the fall of the Pol Pot regime, he got married and had three children. All of his children now have their own families and live separately.

Nowadays, he lives with his eldest daughter. Not wanting to stay idle at home, he spends his free time working as a motorbike taxi driver. Sometimes, he also takes foreign tourists around Kratie Province for a tourism company.

He survived the Khmer Rouge regime, during which he was only 14 years old.

Below is the interview with Mr. Sreang Pha.



Mr. Sreang Pha (on the right)

Interview

Q: Can you remember much about your everyday life before the conflict?

Not much. I do remember, before the conflict, while I was in Grade 8 (primary school), I suddenly asked my mother for permission to be ordained as a novice monk because I wanted to study Buddhist discipline at Wat Koh Thom Ka. At that time, I had firmly resolved that I would never disrobe again, as I wished to live a quiet and peaceful life as a monk, devoting myself to meditation practice (kammatthana), studying the Dharma, and learning the Pali and Sanskrit languages.

Q: What was your home like then, your house and local area?

Oh! I've almost completely forgotten it. I imagine that it was a wooden house. My father, my mother, my siblings and my grandfather also stayed in our house at that time.

Q: Do you remember a particular friend or friends from that time?

Well, I was someone who didn't like to talk much, so I did not have any particularly memorable friends. Before the time of Pol Pot, I also barely remember my family life or living together with my relatives, because I had focused entirely on my study and my life as a young monk.

Q: As a child at that time, how much did you understand about what was happening around you?

When Pol Pot came to power, he evacuated the population, forced people to work, disrobed the Buddhist monks, and destroyed the pagodas and temples. I knew that they had come to destroy family structures, abolish the old social hierarchy, and enforce absolute equality among everyone. They collected all property and put it under communal ownership. People had to work together, eat together, and sleep together. There were no rich and no poor people; everyone had to live in complete equality.

Q: How did the adults around you explain what was going on?

No elderly person could explain what was really happening. One family — consisting of a mother, father, grandfather, older siblings, and younger siblings — was forcibly separated and sent to work in different places according to the assignments given by the Angkar (the Organization). At that time, I was captured and forced to become a soldier in a special unit, with no right to refuse or resist.

Q: How did the conflict affect your family members?

During that time, after being assigned as a soldier in the special unit, I met my grandfather only once. At that time, my grandfather was already around 100 years old. He gave me this final advice:

> Grandchild, remember this: In wartime, do not look down on or disrespect other people's lives. Do not steal something from others. Do not be greedy. And whenever you face any dangers or misfortune, think of your grandfather — grandfather will help and protect you.

After saying goodbye to my grandfather, I left him and went to the battlefield, where I was ordered by the Angkar to shoot and kill others that someone said were Angkar's Enemies who I never knew.

Before the conflict, I had always lived a peaceful and gentle life, never harming anyone. But suddenly, my entire life changed drastically. I had to fight for my own survival and was forced to shoot at another group of people whom I did not know — people who were now called "enemies."

Not long after, I received news that my grandfather had passed away because he was very old and frail, with no one to take care of him.

Later, I also heard that my father had been injured in the leg after stepping on a plow while working in the rice field. He was left abandoned and ignored, lying in one place without any treatment. At that time, I begged for permission to visit my father at least once. When I arrived, I pleaded with others to help, take care of and treat my father. Afterward, I heard that my father had recovered, but one of my cousins had been killed.

Q: Did your relationships with friends or brothers and sisters change during the period?

For me, family relationships were almost nonexistent during that time. I met my sick father only once. As for my mother, I met her only once when Angkar called for a general meeting. I felt extremely heartbroken

when I saw my mother. She looked at me but could not recognize me, because I had grown from a child into a teenager. My appearance and face had changed somewhat, and since we had been separated for a long time, she could no longer remember me clearly. I was truly heartbroken. As mother and son, she should have been able to see me grow up every single day.

Q: When did you feel most afraid, and what helped you cope with the fear?

Fear had almost completely left me, because I was assigned to a special combat unit — soldiers who had to fight the enemy in open fields with no trenches or places to hide. Every time I went out to the battlefield, bullets and bombs rained down like a heavy storm. I never had any hope that I would return alive to the camp.

Before each battle, people would prepare a big meal for the soldiers to eat until we were full, as if they knew that these soldiers would probably never eat again. Some soldiers finished their meal, got on the trucks, and were killed before they even had a chance to get off the trucks.

Every time I survived a battle, I would tell myself, "I have lived one more time". After the battle, I had to walk around collecting the bodies of my fallen comrades. Some had been blown apart by bombs, leaving only pieces of arms and legs.

Q: Was there anything you did to help you feel safer?

It is honesty and sincerity. I respected the lives of others without contempt or belittling them. I had no intention of taking anyone's life. Everything I did is only to preserve my own life and survive, nothing more.

Q: How did the conflict affect your school life?

As I mentioned above, I could not continue my religious studies at the pagoda because of the conflict. My intention of living as a monk for the rest of my life had failed. But my strong desire to learn led me to study the French language and some basic medical knowledge from the camp doctor. During that time, I was able to treat wounds and minor illnesses. I once requested to work as a medic in the camp instead of going out to fight, but the Angkar did not allow it.

Q: Did you still find ways to play or have fun?

On the battlefield, I never felt any happiness or had any time for having fun or entertainment.

Q: Are there any games, songs, or stories you associate with that time?

There were many songs that I heard during that period, but I can not remember any of them now.

Q: In what ways do you think your experiences at that time shaped you as you grew up?

The Khmer Rouge period completely changed me. I went from a quiet young monk who wanted only a peaceful life of studying and meditation, to a young soldier fighting on the battlefield. It made me much tougher, more patient, and able to endure great pain and hardship. It also taught me how precious and fragile life is. Even today, I remain a man of few words and deeply value peace and simplicity.

Q: Do you think there are any values or strengths you develop as you grew up that can be connected to that period?

Yes. The most important value I gained is the belief in doing good deeds and helping others, as my grandfather taught me. I also developed strong mental resilience and patience — especially when I was badly wounded and had to endure painful treatment without losing my leg. These experiences taught me to be grateful for every day I am still alive.

Q: Are there memories from that time that still remind you very strongly of it?

I could never forget the incident that almost cost me one of my legs. Every time I look at my left leg, it reminds me of what happened. One day on the battlefield, my comrade was shot multiple times by the enemy and screamed for help. I ran out from my position to rescue my friend while under heavy fire. Before I could reach him, three bullets struck me in quick succession. The third bullet went straight through my knee, shattering the bone from one side to the other. By the time I reached my comrade, the man had already stopped breathing. I was forced to leave my friend's body behind and dragged myself back with one leg, while other comrades provided covering fire. When I finally reached the camp, the doctor decided to amputate my injured leg. I quickly refused and begged the doctor to save it and treat it instead. During the treatment, I did not trust the doctor and was afraid that he would put me to sleep and have my leg cut off. I asked the doctor to only give me a spinal anesthesia so I could stay awake and watch the procedure. The doctor then removed the broken pieces of bone and cleaned out the fragments. After the surgery, the pain was excruciating. Unable to bear it, I asked for more anesthesia. After receiving the injection, I lost consciousness for seven full days. From that moment on, I could no longer walk normally and had a limp. The unit commander no longer sent me into combat and reassigned me to guard the ammunition warehouse instead.



Mr. Sreang Pha's leg with the scars left from the bullet wound

Q: How do you feel when people talk about that conflict today?

Mr. Sreang Pha: Every time I recall the Pol Pot era, I still say the same thing repeatedly: "I never thought I would still be alive today."

Reflections

In the brutal conflict of Cambodia during the Pol Pot regime, countless innocent people — ordinary men and women with no desire for violence — were thrust into a nightmare of survival. For many, life became a daily struggle against fear, loss, and uncertainty. They were not driven by ideology or hatred, but simply by the instinct to stay alive amid the chaos.

Mr. Sreang Pha's story stands as a poignant example of this harsh reality. Like so many others, he never intended to take anyone's life. Every action he took was solely to protect his own existence and survive one more day. As a soldier, he witnessed firsthand how the shadow of death erased jealousy and selfishness in the face of constant danger, mutual help among comrades became the only way to preserve life.

Through experiences like Mr. Sreang Pha's, we see the universal truth faced by innocent people during Cambodia's conflict: war does not discriminate. It destroys dreams, separates families, and leaves lasting scars on both body and soul. Even today, the simple act of looking at his wounded leg brings back vivid memories, yet he often reflects with quiet gratitude: "I never thought I would still be alive today."

His story reminds us of the heavy human cost of war — the resilience of survivors, the value of honesty and respect for life, and the unbreakable bonds formed in times of extreme hardship. It serves as a powerful testament to the enduring spirit of ordinary Cambodians who, caught in forces beyond their control, simply fought to survive and protect what mattered most.

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Researcher



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architecture and building designs and trying new delicious foods. I also love reading books and listening to music. I am excited to connect with new friends and share knowledge through this platform! Thank you very much for inviting me to be a part of this research.

Loss of Innocence: The Battle of Okinawa

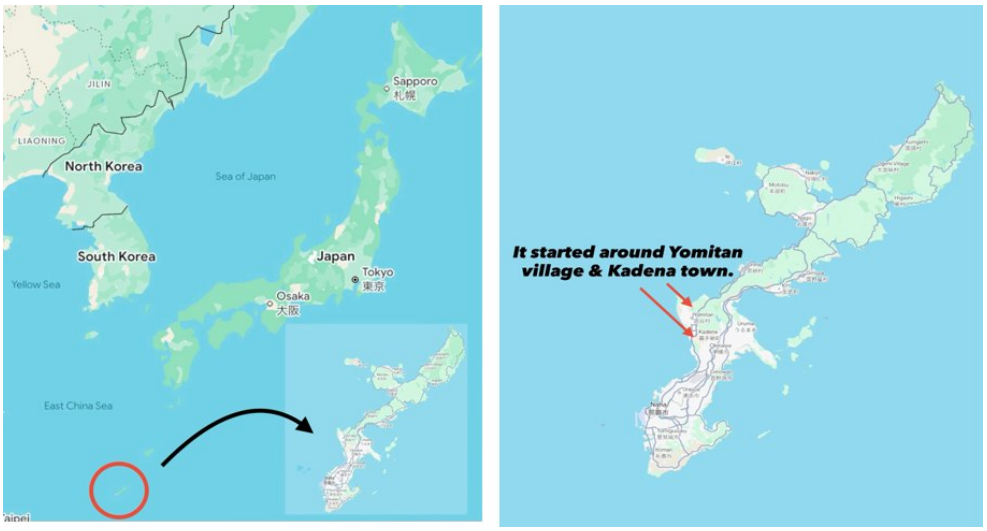
Mr. Shihou Toma

Researchers: Miku Fukuhara & Yuna Tamai

Okinawa Christian University, Okinawa, Japan

In Japan, as those who experienced World War II firsthand grow older, opportunities to hear directly from them are decreasing each year. The Battle of Okinawa in 1945 left enormous damage and deep scars on the local community. This battle was the largest ground battle fought in Japan during the final stage of the war, and not only soldiers but also many civilians were involved. As a result, memories of the war still remain deeply rooted in the lives, education, and peace studies of the local Okinawan population today. However, as the generation that directly experienced the war continues to decline, how to pass these memories on to future generations has become a major issue.

The Battle of Okinawa began in late March 1945 and lasted for approximately three months. U.S. forces landed on Okinawa to secure a base for advancing to mainland Japan, and intense fighting took place between them and the Japanese military. The battle started around Yomitan Village and Kadena Town in the center of the island and gradually spread to the south. Many residents were forced to evacuate, suffering from food shortages, heavy bombardment, and disease. Some people lived in natural caves called *gama*, using them as shelters. However, even these caves, which were thought to be safe, were sometimes attacked. Civilians experienced many tragedies, such as forced group suicides and students being forced to help – or even fight – in the war. Many people were afraid of being killed by the U.S. military. Some families killed each other or committed group suicide. In many cases, it was the father's role to kill his family members.



This map (left) shows the location of Okinawa in Japan. The map (right) shows key locations where the battle started in Okinawa.

In addition, residents felt a strong fear not only of the battles but also of the Japanese military. There are several reasons for this. First, they felt pressure to follow orders. Second, they were afraid of being seen as spies. Third, they believed that they should not become prisoners of war. Also, while living in caves, there

were situations where people had to make very difficult and dangerous decisions. For example, because of the baby's crying, their location could be found by the enemy, so they had to kill the baby or be forced to leave the shelter of the cave.

Under these conditions, people suffered from great mental stress. Okinawa was used to slow down the enemy in order to protect mainland Japan, which led to many sacrifices. Because of this, Okinawa is sometimes called a "sacrificial stone" for national defense. These situations suggest that the Japanese military may have cared more about defending the mainland than the lives of local people in Okinawa. In fact, about one in four Okinawan people died, and this tragedy still affects Okinawan society today. For example, unexploded bombs from the war are still found. In addition, about 70% of U.S. military bases in Japan are located in Okinawa.

After the war, many war-related sites and memorials remained in Okinawa. Places such as the Peace Memorial Park, the Himeyuri Monument, and the Former Japanese Navy Underground Headquarters are still visited by many students and tourists as sites for peace education. Students visiting Okinawa on school trips learn about the Battle of Okinawa through these places. They also have opportunities to listen to talks by war survivors, allowing them to understand experiences and emotions that cannot be fully conveyed through textbooks alone. Such peace education plays an important role in understanding the tragedy of war and the value of life.

However, in recent years, there are fewer chances to hear directly from people who experienced the war because they are getting older and many are passing away. Therefore, it is becoming more important to record and keep their stories through interviews. The experiences of these people include things that cannot be fully understood only through books or videos. For example, we can better understand their fear during evacuation, the sadness of losing family members, and the difficulties of life after the war by listening to their own words.

We believe that interviewing survivors of the Battle of Okinawa is important for passing the history on to the next generation and for thinking about peace. Through this research, we hope readers will learn about the history of the Battle of Okinawa and the impact of war on people's lives. We also hope that learning about the thoughts and experiences of those who lived through the war will encourage people to reflect on the importance of peace. Therefore, we conducted an interview with Shihou Toma, who experienced the Battle of Okinawa.

Interviewee's Background

Mr. Shihou Toma is from Awase in Okinawa City in the central area of Okinawa. He was five years old at the time of the war, and his family consisted of his grandmother, mother, father, and two older brothers. As he was very young at the time, he remembers only a limited number of experiences. However, he kindly agreed to this interview because of his strong desire to share the tragedy of the Battle of Okinawa with younger generations.



Mr. Shihou Toma (center)

Interview

Q: Can you explain what was happening in Awase before and during the war?

Before the war started, our daily life was centered around sweet potatoes. In Awase we ate sweet potatoes for almost every meal. We could only eat rice on special occasions, like New Year's or the Obon festival. Life was really hard, and most people lived in poverty. Before the battle started, the Japanese military was spread throughout Okinawa and used local elementary schools as military bases and living quarters. They set up living quarters in Jinjo Koto Elementary Schools [*similar to modern-day elementary and junior high schools*]. Soldiers stayed in the schools, while higher-ranking officers often lived in the homes of wealthy local families. The homeowners had to use small rooms in the back of the house while the officers used the larger rooms. People believed it was their duty to support the soldiers because they thought the military was protecting Okinawa. When food was served, local families served the best food to the soldiers and ate simpler meals themselves.

Q: Where did you evacuate to during the war, and what was life like for you?

During the war I stayed in Awase with my mother, my siblings, and my grandmother. The people of Awase dug shelters in the hills behind Yogi as places to hide during the war. One day, U.S. soldiers came to our shelter and told everyone to come out. My grandmother said that she was old and that it would not matter if she died, but she could not let the children be killed. She went outside first. She couldn't speak English; she used gestures to ask the soldiers if they were going to kill us. An interpreter with the U.S. military said, "We do not kill civilians. You are safe, so please come out." After hearing that, we all came out of the shelter and were gathered together in one place.Then the U.S. military told us that they needed the area for operations against mainland Japan and that we had to leave. We were moved to a place called Kinaka, where Gushikawa High School stands today. I was only five years old at the time, but I still remember that.

Q: As a child at that time, how much did you understand about what was happening around you?

When I was five or six years old, I did not really understand the war. I was simply trying to survive. It was only later, when I started elementary school, that I began to understand what had happened. I heard adults talking about the war and began to understand how frightening it was. Adults didn't talk much about the war to children. Maybe it was because the war was so frightening or because they didn't want to make children worry.

Q: What was school life like after the war? Do you remember what kinds of things you were taught in school?

The older generation received what is called "Imperial Education." But we belong to the wartime generation, and we were among the first to receive a new kind of education after the war. People who were born before around 1935 received the old Japanese education. In that system, English was not taught because it was considered the language of an enemy country, so it was not even included in textbooks. But people in my generation were taught English in school.



Interview with Mr. Shihou Toma

Q: How do you think the war changed Okinawa and the lives of the people who experienced it?

When I was young, all I could see was the negative side of the war. It was frightening, and those memories stayed with me for a long time. But as I got older, I started to think about it a little differently. After the war, American culture came into Okinawa, and many new ideas and ways of life were introduced. In a way, that became part of Okinawa's mixed culture. Okinawa accepted many things from different cultures, and I think that is one reason why Okinawa is the way it is today. Of course, I am not saying the war was a good thing. It brought a lot of suffering and sadness. But at the same time, it is also true that Okinawa changed a great deal after the war. The generations before us lived through very difficult times. They experienced war, poverty, and hunger. But because of their hardships and sacrifices, we are able to live the lives we have today.

I experienced both the poor times and the prosperous times that came later. In that sense, maybe I am a lucky generation. We know what it was like when people had very little, and I can also see how much life

has improved. Today, people still have their own worries, but compared to those days, I think we live in a very peaceful time. So, I don't think we should take this peaceful life for granted. The generations before us suffered a lot, and I think we should remember their sacrifices and pass these stories on to the next generation.

Q: What would you want younger generations to learn from your experience?

Back in the Meiji Era [*1868~1912*], Japan began interacting with other countries. People went abroad to learn new things and brought back foreign ideas, technology, and culture. That is one reason Japan was able to develop and move forward. I would like young people today to go out and see more of the world. It is good to study in mainland Japan, but I hope they will also go overseas. When you spend time in another country, you can look at your own home from a different perspective, and you begin to notice the differences between cultures.

People of my generation lived through war and many old customs, so in some ways our view of the world could be quite limited. You could say you need to expand your horizons. If you never leave your own surroundings, it is difficult to understand what the rest of the world is like. So, what I want to say to young people is simple: spread your wings and go out into the world. Look beyond Okinawa, look beyond Japan, and gain as many experiences as you can. At the same time, don't forget that peace is not something we should take for granted. I hope you will remember the suffering caused by war and continue to pass those lessons on to future generations.

Reflections

Through this interview, we were able to learn more about the reality of war and the suffering people experienced by listening directly to someone who went through the Battle of Okinawa. We came to realize that there are many things we cannot understand only from books or videos. In addition, we had a good opportunity to think not only about the tragedy of war, but also about the strength of people who helped each other and lived through such difficult situations, and the importance of peace.

Although war happened in the past, its effects still remain in people's hearts today. Through this interview, we felt that the history of war is closely connected to our local community. What impressed us the most was Mr. Toma's message to young people: "Go out and see more of the world." We think this message shows a strong wish that people understand each other better so that war never happens again. It also encourages young people to think for themselves, make good decisions, and understand information correctly.

Also, many war survivors do not want to remember what happened at that time. Even so, they still share their stories with us. We believe this shows their strong hope that we will pass on the importance of peace to the future. We should respect their feelings, continue to learn about war, and share what we learn with the next generation. We will not forget what we learned from this experience, and we want to keep thinking about the history of Okinawa and the importance of peace.

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Researchers



Hello everyone! My name is **Miku Fukuhara**. I was born and raised in Okinawa, Japan. I am a student at Okinawa Christian University, majoring in English Communication. Last year, I studied abroad in Australia for 6 months. It was a valuable experience because I improved my English and learned about different cultures. Since then, I have become even more interested in communicating with people from different backgrounds. I enjoy traveling, watching movies, and visiting cafés with my friends. I hope to travel to many more countries in the future and continue learning about different cultures.



Hello. My name is **Yuna Tamai**, and I am a student at Okinawa Christian University. I was born and raised in Okinawa, Japan.My hobbies are taking walks while listening to music and playing with my cats. Last year, I stayed in New Zealand for one year on a working holiday. Living in another country helped me see how special Okinawa is. It also made me realize that I should learn more about Okinawa's history and culture. I hope to use what I learn to help pass on Okinawa's history and culture to future generations.

Loss of Innocence: The Tsushima-Maru Incident

Mr. Hisashi Teruya

Researchers: Kokoa Yamashiro & Yu Yonamine

Okinawa University, Okinawa, Japan

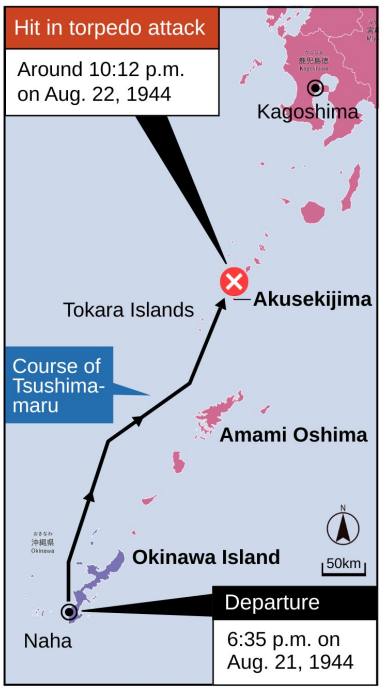
The Second World War took place from 1939 to 1945 and it is known for being one of the most devastating conflicts in history. This was due to the total involvement of national powers with all the strength they had; not just military personnel, but also civilians using economic power, and the latest science and technology. Many civilians fell victim to air raids, massacres, and other atrocities. The Pacific War was fought between Japan and the Allied Powers, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands from December 8, 1941 to August 15, 1945. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and the landing on the Malay Peninsula triggered this conflict. It lasted until Japan's acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration following the U.S. atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Okinawa is the only place in Japan where civilians were involved in a ground battle, called the "Battle of Okinawa."



Photo of Tsushima-Maru

In the summer of 1944, it was clear that Okinawa was going to be a battlefield, so the evacuation of women, children, and elderly people to places such as mainland Japan and Taiwan began. On August 21, the Tsushima-maru departed from Naha Port carrying schoolchildren and other evacuees to Nagasaki. Previously, this 30-year-old cargo ship was used to bring Japanese soldiers from Shanghai, China, to Okinawa. After soldiers arrived in Okinawa for the last time, it was then used to transport the evacuees. 1,788 people including many schoolchildren from Naha City were on board. The Tsushima-maru sailed as part of the Convoy Namo-103, which consisted of three cargo ships – the Tsushima-maru, Kazuura-maru, and Gyoku-maru – escorted by the destroyer Hasu and the gunboat Uji. At around 10 p.m. on August 22, the day after departure, the Tsushima-maru was attacked by torpedoes from the U.S. Navy submarine USS Bowfin near Akuseki Island in Kagoshima. It took only about ten minutes for the Tsushima-maru to sink completely. As a result, many people were trapped inside and lost their lives. People who escaped into the sea drifted on rafts and pieces of wood, but many eventually died because of rough waves, hunger,

thirst, and exhaustion. Out of 1,788 passengers on board, about 1,484 lost their lives which means only 17% survived. Of those 1,484 who perished, 1,040 were aged 0 to 15 which means about 70% of the victims were children. Of about 843 *gakudo sokai* (pupils' evacuation) evacuees, only 59 (about 7%) survived. However, the number of *ippan sokai* (general evacuation) evacuees is not known. Some survivors were rescued and taken to Kagoshima while others drifted at sea for several days before reaching Amami Oshima about 150 kilometers from the sinking, where they were rescued and cared for by local people.



The Course of Tsushima-maru from Okinawa to Nagasaki.
Note. Map created by the authors using a base map from Map Kawaii, and icon adapted from by llustAC. The route of the Tsushima-maru was adapted from: https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20240822/p2a/00m/0na/028000c

There are some key points to understand about the Tsushima-maru incident. First, it was an indiscriminate attack on civilians to block the Japanese Army's supply route completely. The U.S. military was conducting unrestricted submarine warfare from the beginning of the Pacific War. It meant "submarines shall attack all naval vessels without warning and merchant ships – whether military or civilian – deemed to be associated with the enemy nation." So, the Tsushima-maru was attacked even though it was transporting mainly civilians. At the time, attacking indiscriminately was considered a violation of the law. However, submarines were a "new weapon" then, and were considered "an exempt weapon" to be used freely. During the war, both sides conducted unrestricted submarine warfare. The U.S. military reported that they were not aware that evacuating children were on board. However, they had cracked the Japanese Navy's codes, and knew the Tsushima-maru's route, so it was tracked by the USS Bowfin (SS-287). During the war, at least 31 ships related to Okinawa were sunk, and two more ships are still being investigated. Most were sunk by torpedo attacks or air raids. Among them, the Tsushima-maru suffered the largest number of deaths.

Second, the survivors have been suffering from trauma and a "gag order" for their whole lives. The Tsushima-maru accident happened right before their very eyes, and they lost their family and friends. Many survivors reported that they have experienced many flashbacks which made them suffer even more. Some people drifted at sea for as long as six days, creating a great trauma. After being helped at Kyushu,

the Japanese Military Police silenced them, and they could not even tell their family about the incident. If they spoke, they were threatened with the death penalty. The Japanese Military hid the fact that the Tsushima-maru sank because they wanted to prevent loss of civilians' morale, unrest, and resistance to evacuation. Immediately after World War II, 59 children who survived went back to Okinawa and faced a harsh reality: they had lost their families, and their hometown had been completely burned to the ground. In addition, the families who had lost their children blamed the survivors for the loss of their family. To make things worse, the government's strict policy of covering up the truth about the incident made the survivors suffer more and led to the loss of valuable documents that captured the situation at the time.

Interviewee's Background

We interviewed **Hisashi Teruya** who is one of the survivors of the Tsushima-maru incident. He was only four years old when the incident occurred. He evacuated with his mother on *ippan sokai* (general evacuation) and sister who was on *gakudo sokai* (pupils' evacuation), boarding with other children on the front of the ship. In *gakudo sokai*, children were evacuated from each school or regional unit with their teachers, and they lived at elementary schools or farmers' homes after arriving at each destination, and it was well organized. On the other hand, general evacuees traveled individually and went to their relatives' homes, normally in the countryside. Therefore, it is reported that many evacuees were forced to move around.

USS Bowfin's attack on Tsushima-maru killed Mr. Teruya's mother and sister. Also, his father who had been deployed to China was interned in Siberia and was made to do hard labor in a severe environment after the war, and eventually died of starvation. So, he lost his entire family in the war and became a war orphan. After diving into the dark and rough ocean from 10 meters high and drifting for about 16 hours, he was rescued by a teenager on a fishing boat. Then he moved around his relatives' homes in Kagoshima, Osaka, and Miyazaki. He spent much of his life not telling anyone about his experience; however, he started working as a storyteller at Tsushima-maru Memorial Museum when he was 70 years old.



Mr. Teruya with his mother, Shige, and sister, Mitsuko



Mr. Teruya at 3 and his sister before the incident

Interview



Mr. Teruya during his interview

Q: How much do you remember of that period?

Honestly, I have only a few memories because I was just four years old then. What I remember the most is when the ship was attacked and I jumped into the sea with my mother. It was sometime after 10 p.m., when the surroundings were silent, and my mother said she was going to look for my older sister. Before she left, she told me not to let go of a barrel we were holding onto. However, that moment was the last time I ever saw her. At that time, I was only four. I could not understand how she would leave such a young child behind and go into the dark, limitless sea. It did not make sense to me then. However, now

that I'm an adult, I understand she did what she had to do as a parent. I believe it was a mother's instinct.

Q: It doesn't have to be a whole event but do you have scenes or images you can recall?

I remember the images in my mind. [Before the ship sank], a typhoon had been near Daito Island, and I still have this sensation where the waves pushed me up and down violently. When the waves raised me high up, I could see far away, and when the waves brought me down, I felt as if I was closer to the bottom of the sea.

Q: Do you think you still have some trauma from the tragedy you experienced in your childhood?

After experiencing the Tsushima-maru tragedy, I became afraid of the sea and I hardly ever went to the sea. When I was young, I once slept near the beach during a camping trip, and the sound of the waves crashing on the beach woke me up with the feeling that something was pulling my legs. Because of that, I never went swimming, even in pools. At the time, I was not aware of it, but now, I believe those experiences remained with me as signs of trauma.

Q: Children were caught up in a war and they lost their families even though they didn't know the situation. I think you might have friends who had their whole family's lives taken in the war. During your school life, were there occasions where you talked about it?

There were not many. Of course we should have shared various stories such as incidents during the war, Tsushima-maru, and about their own families. But, we were all casual with each other, so we didn't worry too much about others and didn't mention anything about our deep grief. I think that we used to talk about childish topics and acted like kids, just like students today. Actually, on the contrary we concentrated on being competitive. We were looking for weak points in our friends and hit them just for fun. For example, there was a "dialect card" (*hogen fuda*) [where you had to wear it as a penalty for talking in the Okinawan language]. This was a game of our childhood. If you were made to wear a dialect card, you looked for another classmate to force it on instead. You stepped on someone's foot, and then he screamed in Okinawan language instantly, so you could get rid of the dialect card. Doing so, we used to think about how we could drag someone down. For us, being children, all we did was just be competitive and playful. Even now, we can talk about it with classmates and laugh with each other.

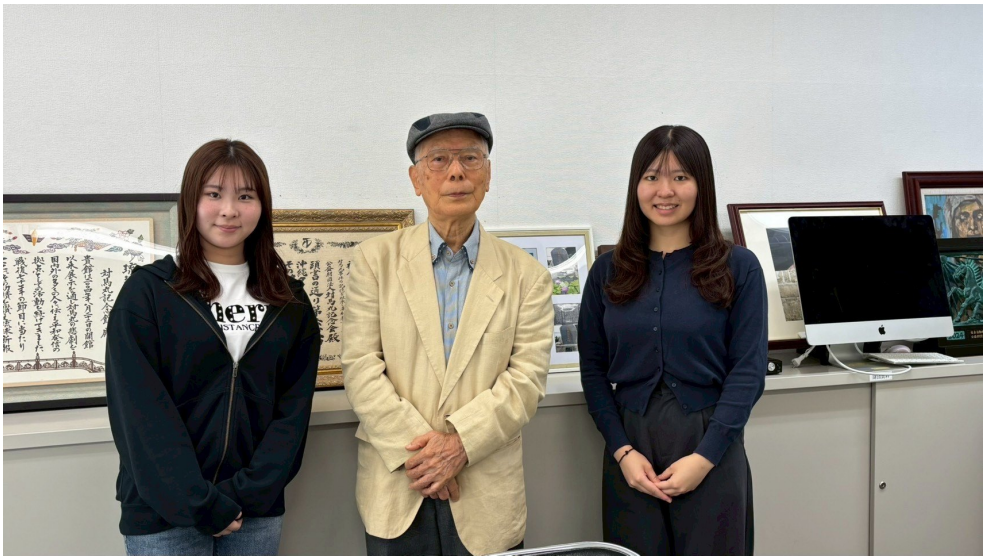
Q: Why did you become a storyteller of your Tsushima-maru experiences?

After returning to Okinawa, wherever I went, people in the community and even relatives would say, "This child survived the Tsushima-maru." And I hated being talked about. Even after I was over 70, I never voluntarily spoke about the Tsushima-maru. The experience stayed with me like an allergy that I had to deal with. When I retired at 60, I was asked if I would become a storyteller and speak about the Tsushima-maru, but I refused at the time. However, I saw many older storytellers retiring, and I felt that I needed to help while I still could. It was difficult for me to speak in detail about my own experiences, so instead I decided to use historical materials and documents to explain the situation during WWII, and help people understand what had happened.

Q: What do you think about peace education in the future?

Today, the Tsushima-maru is regarded as a part of peace education. However, when I look at the current situations involving Russia, Ukraine, the United States, and Iran, I sometimes wonder whether the world is truly at peace. Even so, I believe that we cannot talk about the future without knowing the past. I think

it is important to teach children how irrational and tragic wars are, and they must never happen again. That is why I have continued working as a storyteller for the past fifteen years.



From left: Kokoa, Mr. Teruya, and Yu

Reflections

Before the interview, we had expected Mr. Teruya to speak more emotionally, knowing what he had gone through; however, he shared his experience in a calm and objective way. At the same time, we realized that the experience still has a huge effect on him; he is still afraid of the sea and hasn't been able to go near water for many years. Upon interviewing Mr. Teruya, we asked Ms. Horikiri, a staff member at the Tsushima-maru Memorial Museum, about the storytellers' background. She told us that most storytellers view the incident objectively and tell the facts like Mr. Teruya. It is said that trauma appears differently in each person, and in Mr. Teruya's case it is somewhat hidden. Even with his trauma, we were impressed with his sense of responsibility to share his story. Recalling his horrible experience was something he didn't want to do, but his wish for peace and to promote peace to future generations made him become a storyteller because "we cannot talk about the future without knowing the past."

This project made us realize how little we knew about Okinawan history, despite having lived in Okinawa for 20 years and having received peace education every year at school. We know that there are a lot of things that we must think about and share with future generations. More than 80 years have passed since the Battle of Okinawa, and we feel a deep fear as the memories of the war fade away day by day. We believe that it is deeply meaningful to preserve the words of those who have traumatic wartime experiences and we would like to continue to learn from the past, pay attention to the world, and think and act with a view toward lasting peace in the future.

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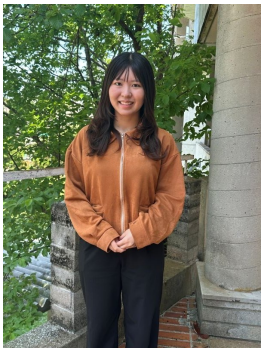
Researchers



Hello! My name is **Kokoa Yamashiro**, and I am a fourth-year student of International Communication at Okinawa University in Okinawa, Japan. I study languages, intercultural communication, and global social issues. I got interested in other countries at the age of eight, which inspired me to start learning English. I am also interested in learning Spanish and French because I enjoy discovering different languages and cultures. My hobby is traveling. I enjoy visiting new places and experiencing local food, cultures, and languages both in Japan and abroad. I especially love my home, Okinawa. Every summer, I enjoy visiting Okinawa's remote islands. In the future, I hope to make a positive contribution to society by helping others. I believe that every new experience helps me grow, so I always try to challenge myself and continue learning. Thank you for reading our article!



Hello! I am **Yu Yonamine**, a third-year student of International Communication, also at Okinawa University. Lately, I'm into spending time with my friends, and recording those memories with a camera or in a diary. I major in Japanese and English language education in order to become a teacher. I am also interested in Peace Study. I believe that connecting the world through learning a language helps make a more peaceful future. That is why I want to teach language to children. I joined the "Peace Now! Okinawa 2025" peace study program for college students and as the only member from Okinawa I thought about how to share my ideas. We researched and discussed peace for the first time. In the future, I'd like to share my experiences and knowledge; especially of my home of Okinawa's history.

Loss of Innocence: The Nepal Civil War

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Researcher: Bimal Khatri

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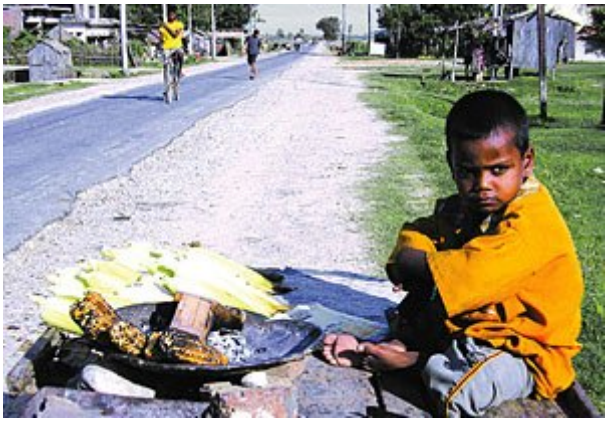
The Nepal Civil War, also known as the Sankat Kaal, was an armed conflict fought between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and the Government of Nepal from 13 February 1996 to 21 November 2006. The conflict began when the Maoists launched an armed insurgency, claiming that Nepal's political system had failed to address widespread poverty, social inequality, and discrimination based on caste, ethnicity, and geography. Many rural communities, particularly those in western Nepal, experienced limited access to education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic opportunities. The Maoists argued that these long-standing inequalities required fundamental political and social change through revolution.

Over the next ten years, the conflict spread to almost every district of Nepal. Government security forces, including the Nepal Police, the Royal Nepal Army, and the Armed Police Force, fought against Maoist combatants in many parts of the country. Districts such as Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan, Kalikot and Jajarkot became some of the most heavily affected areas because they were among the earliest centres of Maoist activity.

The civil war had a profound impact on ordinary people. According to official estimates, more than 17,000 people lost their lives, thousands were injured or disappeared, and many families were displaced from their homes. Schools were frequently closed, public services were disrupted, and economic activities declined in many rural areas. Children and young people were especially affected. Many were unable to continue their education because schools were occupied, destroyed, or forced to close. Others left their villages due to insecurity, while some became separated from their families or experienced the constant fear of violence. Even those who were not directly involved in the fighting often grew up surrounded by uncertainty, loss, and psychological stress.



Kailash Gupta who sells corn on the roadside in Nepalganj is only six, his mother died in a Maoist landmine blast in which his sister Tara was injured.



Students from Krishna Secondary School in Lalitpur on being released in July 2004 by Maoists after three days of forced-marches and indoctrination.

The conflict officially ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement on 21 November 2006. The peace process brought an end to large-scale armed violence and opened the way for political reforms, democratic elections, and the drafting of a new constitution. Although Nepal has made significant progress since then, many individuals and communities continue to carry the emotional and social memories of the conflict. Recording these personal experiences is important because they provide perspectives that cannot be fully understood through history books or official reports alone.



Prime Minister Girja Prasad Koirala Koirala and CPN Maoist Chairman Prachanda shake hands and exchange the papers after they put their signatures in the Comprehensive Peace Accord (2006).

This report presents the personal testimony of Mr. Maheshor Bahadur K.C., who experienced the Nepal Civil War as a young teenager. Unlike many stories that focus on political leaders or military operations, his experiences reflect the challenges faced by ordinary people and families living through the conflict. His recollections show the fear, loss, disruption of education, and difficulties experienced by communities during the war. His testimony also highlights how the effects of the conflict continued to influence people's lives and memories long after the war ended, showing the importance of reconciliation, peace, and opportunities for future generations.

Interviewee's Background

Mr. Maheshor Bahadur K.C. was born in Pyuthan Municipality, Ward No. 4, Pyuthan District, Nepal. He currently lives in Pyuthan with his wife and runs his own transportation van business. He has two children, an older daughter and a younger son, who are both currently studying abroad.

Mr. K.C. and his family were directly affected by the Nepal Civil War. His uncle was killed during the conflict, and his family experienced the fear and difficulties caused by the war. His own educational opportunities were also affected during this period. Because of these experiences, he understands the importance of education and strongly wants his children to have better educational opportunities and a better future.

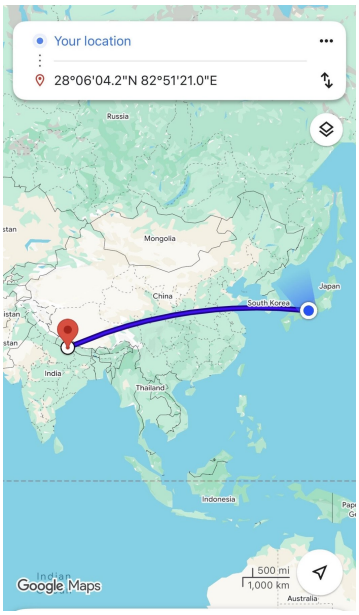
Today, he continues to work and support his family in Pyuthan.



The Online Interview with Mr.Maheshor Bahadur K.C.



Mr. Maheshor Bahadur K.C



Location on Google Maps

Interview

Q: What do you remember about life before the war?

Before the conflict, life in our village was peaceful. Most families depended on agriculture, children regularly attended school, and neighbors helped one another. However, there were also social inequalities. Women and people from lower-caste communities did not always have equal rights or opportunities, and many people felt they could not freely express their opinions. Even with these challenges, there was no armed violence, and people lived without fear. Everything changed when the civil war began.

Q: How did the conflict affect your education?

When the conflict began, many schools, colleges, and universities were closed because of the Maoist insurgency. As a result, I was unable to complete my studies, and my younger brother also lost the opportunity to receive a proper education. Many experienced teachers left our area, and the quality of education declined significantly. Even today, we continue to feel the effects because our limited education reduced our employment opportunities. During that time, many people from our village left Nepal to look for work in countries such as India because there were very few opportunities at home.

Q: How did the conflict affect festivals, celebrations, or other community activities?

During the conflict, festivals were not celebrated like before. People were afraid because there was insecurity in the village, so we could not gather and celebrate freely. Sometimes people stayed at home because they were worried about what might happen.

Q: How did the conflict affect your family?

The conflict had a devastating impact on my family. One of the most painful memories is that my uncle was killed by Maoist fighters during the war. His death brought great sorrow to our family and left a lasting emotional wound that we still remember today. We lived in constant fear, never knowing when violence might reach our home or who would be affected next. Like many other families, we worried about

the safety of our loved ones every day. The conflict not only took the life of a family member but also destroyed our sense of security and peace.

Q: How did your family stay strong during such a difficult time?

It was very difficult for my family, but we had to stay strong because there was no other choice. We supported each other and tried to continue our lives despite the fear and uncertainty around us.

Q: Was there a particular moment during the conflict that you have never forgotten?

One moment I can never forget was when fighting between the Nepal Police and Maoist fighters happened near our home at night. My family was very frightened, so we hid under the bed for safety. From there, we could see only the red flashes of bullets in the darkness. I was very young at that time, and that experience of hearing the gunfire so close to our home is something I still remember clearly.

Q: How did the conflict affect your community?

The conflict completely changed our community. People became divided between those who supported the government and those who supported the Maoists, creating mistrust even among families, friends, and neighbors. Many young people left the village, schools and public services were disrupted, and people became afraid to travel freely. Even going from one village to another could be dangerous.

Q: What was life like for children and young people during the conflict?

Life was very difficult for children and young people. Children over the age of ten were especially vulnerable because they could be influenced or suspected by either side. Maoists and government forces sometimes suspected children of being informers. Young girls also faced the risk of sexual violence. Instead of going to school and enjoying their childhood, many children lived with fear and uncertainty.

Q: Did the conflict change the way people thought about their future?

Yes. During the conflict, people were mainly thinking about safety and getting through each day. It was difficult to think about a better future when there was fear around us.

Q: How did you feel when the conflict ended?

I felt relieved and hopeful. We were happy that there would be no more gunfire and, most importantly, no more killing. We could finally live more freely and think about our future.

Q: Looking back, how has the conflict affected your family life today?

The conflict still affects my family today. During the war, my younger brother left for India because of the insecurity and lack of safety at home. Although the conflict has ended, he has not been able to return permanently. There are still very few employment opportunities in our area, and because his education was interrupted, it is difficult for him to find suitable work. In this way, the effects of the conflict have continued to influence our family even many years after the war ended.

Q: How do you feel when people talk about that conflict today?

When people talk about the conflict today, I remember the fear, loss, and difficulties that my family and community experienced. It is painful to remember the people we lost and the opportunities that were taken away from us, especially in education and freedom. The conflict affected our daily lives and made it difficult for many people to live normally or plan for their future. Even though many years have passed,

those memories remain with me, and they remind me of how deeply the conflict affected ordinary people and their families..

Q: In what ways do you think your experiences at that time shaped you as you grew up?

The conflict taught me the true meaning of peace, harmony, and education. I also realized that education is very important for building a better future. These experiences have stayed with me as I have grown older, and I want my children to have the opportunities that I could not have.

Q: What do you think changed in Nepal after the conflict ended?

After the conflict ended, people gradually began to feel safer. There was no longer the same fear of gunfire and explosions, and people could return to their work and businesses. People also gained more opportunities to participate openly in politics and elections. For me, being able to live and move around without the same fear was an important change.

Q: What do you want young people to remember from your experience?

I want them to remember that war brings suffering to ordinary people. They should choose peace and harmony and use education to build a better future.

Q: What do you think people lose during a war besides their lives?

People lose many things, such as family, education, jobs, freedom, and peace of mind. Families can become separated, and people can lose trust in their neighbors. Children also lose their normal childhood because they grow up with fear.

Q: What is the most important message you want people outside Nepal to understand about the Nepal Civil War?

My message is that war does not bring lasting benefits to ordinary people. Nepal was able to end the conflict through peace talks and move toward a peaceful political process. I hope other countries facing conflict can also find peaceful ways to resolve their problems and protect their people.

Reflections

The Nepal Civil War affected ordinary people in ways that cannot be fully understood through numbers or political history alone. Families lost loved ones, children lost opportunities for education, and many young people had to leave their homes because of insecurity. Mr. Maheshor Bahadur K.C's experience shows how these effects could continue long after the conflict ended.

What stayed with me most was the impact on education. Because schools were disrupted, Mr. K.C. could not complete his education, and his younger brother also lost important educational opportunities. His brother later went to India because of insecurity and the lack of opportunities at home and has still not been able to return permanently. This showed me that the effects of conflict can continue through people's education, employment, and family lives even after peace has been restored.

The interview also changed the way I understand peace. Before this project, I mostly thought of peace as the end of fighting. After listening to Mr. K.C., I understand that real peace also means being able to study, work, travel safely, live with your family, and trust the people around you. His experiences taught

me the importance of peace, harmony, and education, and why younger generations should learn from the past rather than repeat it.

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Researcher



Hello everyone! My name is **Bimal Khatri.** I am 24 years old and a second-year student in the Department of Global Studies at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies in Japan. I am originally from Pyuthan, Nepal. I came to Japan to learn about Japanese language and culture and to broaden my understanding of global issues.

I am particularly interested in global peace, conflict, peacebuilding, education, and international relations. I believe that understanding the experiences of people affected by conflict is important for building a more peaceful world. Through my studies and community activities, I have become especially interested in how education and dialogue can contribute to peace and create better opportunities for future generations.

In my free time, I enjoy playing football and cricket, learning about different cultures, and meeting people from different backgrounds. I am very happy to have the opportunity to participate in this research, listen to different experiences, and share knowledge with others. Thank you very much for inviting me to be a part of this research.

Loss of Innocence: The Vietnam Resistance War Against America

Mr. Tran Kim Huy

Researchers: Tran Nguyen Hoang Anh & Le Thuy My Y

The University of Danang, University of Science and Education, Danang, Vietnam

War always leaves severe consequences on people and society, especially in countries that have to endure prolonged conflicts. In 20th-century Vietnamese history, the Resistance War Against America (1954 – 1975) is a period of particularly vital significance, not only determining the cause of national reunification but also profoundly impacting multiple generations of Vietnamese people. Over more than two decades, the war altered the economic and social landscape as well as the lives of millions of citizens, especially children and adolescents.

Following the 1954 Geneva Accords, Vietnam was temporarily divided into two zones at the 17th parallel. The North entered a period of building socialism and became the vast rear base for the entire country, while the South was under the Republic of Vietnam government with the backing of the United States. According to the Accords, the two zones were to hold general elections to reunify the country in 1956, but this plan was never realized. Consequently, the political situation became increasingly tense, marking the beginning of the resistance war against America. During the 1954 – 1960 period, the United States gradually replaced France, increasing military aid and supporting the Ngo Dinh Diem administration. In the face of policies suppressing revolutionary forces, the struggle movement of the Southern people developed robustly, highlighted by the Dong Khoi (Concerted Uprising) movement in 1960. In the same year, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam was established, creating a crucial turning point in the struggle to liberate the South.

From 1961 to 1968, the US successively deployed the "*Special War*" and "*Local War*" strategies, bringing expeditionary forces and numerous modern means of war directly into the conflict. Despite facing a military force with overwhelming superiority in weapons and equipment, the Vietnamese army and people still achieved many significant victories. In particular, the 1968 Tet Offensive and Uprising created a major political and diplomatic turning point, forcing the US to accept negotiations at the Paris Conference. After 1969, the US shifted to the "*Vietnamization*" strategy, gradually withdrawing troops but continuing to provide aid and conduct military operations in the South. On January 27, 1973, the Paris Peace Accords were signed, and the US committed to withdrawing all its troops from Vietnam. However, hostilities continued until the Spring of 1975 when the Vietnamese army and people launched the General Offensive across the South with the Central Highlands, Hue, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh Campaigns. On April 30, 1975, the Independence Palace was liberated, and the Saigon administration declared unconditional surrender, marking the complete victory of the Resistance War Against America and the reunification of the country.

Within the overall context of the war, Da Nang and its surrounding areas were among the most heavily affected regions. After the US officially sent expeditionary troops to the South in 1965, Da Nang became the landing site for the first US Marine units and was rapidly built into a large-scale military, naval, and air base. With its strategic location on the North-South transport axis, along with the Tien Sa seaport

system, Da Nang airport, and a modern logistics network, the city served as a crucial command and supply center for the military operations of the US and the Saigon administration in the Central region. Consequently, Da Nang and neighboring areas such as Hoa Vang, Dien Ban, Duy Xuyen, or Dai Loc frequently became fierce battlefields with large-scale engagements, sweep operations, and bombing raids. Many residential areas were devastated, and infrastructure was severely damaged, while the lives of the people were upended by displacement, food shortages, insecurity, and the disruption of both production and education. The war caused not only material losses but also left profound impacts on the spiritual and psychological lives of the local communities.

Interviewee's Background

Mr. Tran Kim Huy, born in 1955 (71 years old), was born and raised in a village in Hoa Lien Commune, Hoa Vang District (now part of Da Nang City). He comes from a family with a strong revolutionary tradition; both his parents participated in the revolution, serving as messengers and liaisons during the resistance war. It was this family environment that instilled in him a spirit of patriotism and a sense of responsibility toward his homeland from an early age.

At the age of 17, he officially engaged in revolutionary activities on the battlefields of Quang Da and Quang Tin provinces, under the command of Front 44, Military Region 5. He participated in combat and served the revolution until the country was completely liberated on April 30, 1975. Currently, in his retirement, he remains actively involved in social activities. He is a member of the Veterans Association of Lien Chieu Ward, Da Nang City, and frequently participates in movements and activities within his local residential area.

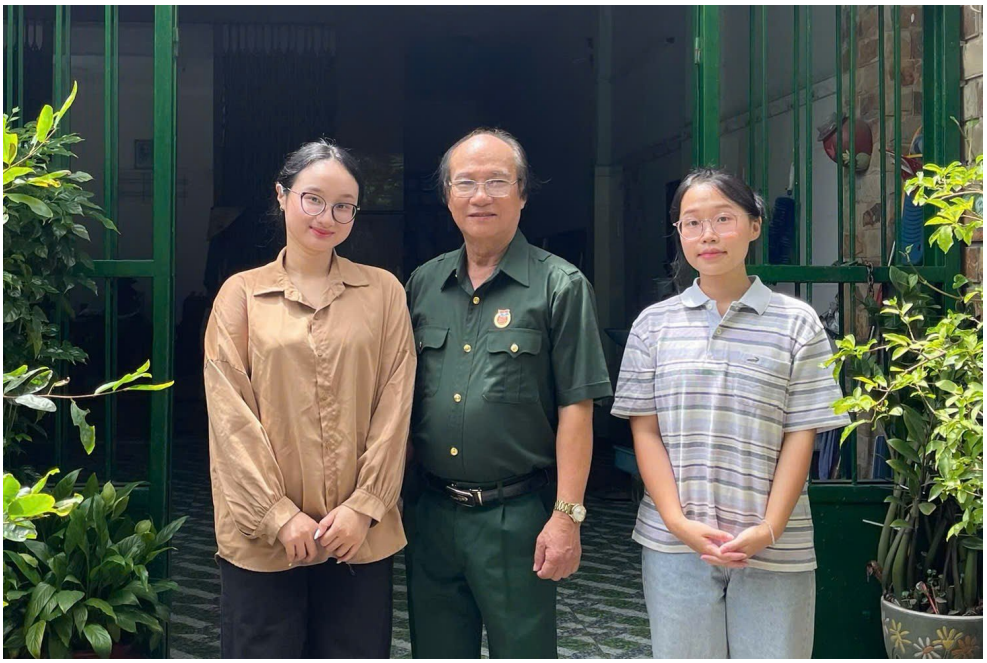

Figure 1. Mr. Tran Kim Huy (centre) with the researchers

Interview

Q: As a child at that time, how much did you understand about what was happening around you?

I was born while the country was still in the midst of the resistance war against the United States. Every day, we heard the sound of bombs and gunfire, and every day someone was killed. At that time, my family worked as farmers while also serving as couriers for the revolutionary movement, so we rarely interacted with other people.

Q: What was the area where you lived like back then?

Most of the houses were simple thatched or tiled homes. If bombs fell on them, the whole family could be killed. That was why people in the surrounding villages died almost every night because of the bombings.

Q: Did your family often warn you about what was happening at that time?

All the time. We were constantly told to be careful, stay alert, and never talk about revolutionary activities with strangers. As my siblings and I grew older and became more aware of what was happening, our parents carefully taught us what to do if we joined the revolutionary movement and how to respond safely if we were questioned by the enemy. Because of that, we lived very cautiously and kept to ourselves. We hardly spoke to anyone, not even our neighbours or friends.

Q: Since your family worked as couriers for the revolutionary movement, were you under surveillance by the South Vietnamese government?

Four of my paternal uncles were recognised as war martyrs, and the remains of two of them have never been found. Revolutionary service ran deep in our family. Because of that, we were constantly monitored and watched by the South Vietnamese authorities. A family involved in the revolution could never live in peace. There was one time when I was serving in the mountains, and the authorities discovered that someone in our family had joined the revolutionary forces. As a result, my father was arrested, imprisoned, and brutally tortured and beaten. He was only released after six months. It was truly a terrifying time.

Q: Did the war have a major impact on your education?

Yes, it did. I attended the village school, but because of the war, my education was repeatedly interrupted. I only studied until around Grade 6 or Grade 7 before I had to stop. When I was in Grade 6, my two younger siblings, Hoang and Trang, were in Grade 3. One day, while they were on their way to school, they were stopped by the South Vietnamese authorities, who would not let them attend class. Instead, they questioned them about where I had gone because they were investigating people suspected of supporting the Communist movement.

They detained my younger sister and even forced her to open her mouth in an attempt to make her reveal information. However, she remained strong and refused to say anything. If she had disclosed any information, my entire family would have been arrested and imprisoned, and the punishment would have been severe. My father was afraid that she might eventually give in under pressure and put the whole family in danger, so he decided that she should stop going to school and stay at home.

Q: What made you decide to join the revolutionary movement?

I grew up during the war and was raised in a family with a strong revolutionary tradition. Seeing my homeland devastated by the conflict, I felt that I had a responsibility to contribute my own efforts to protecting the country.

Q: What were your years of fighting like?

I fought on several battlefields in Quang Da and Quang Tin under Front 44 of Military Region 5 until the country was reunified in 1975. After that, I continued serving in the military until 1981. From the moment I entered the battlefield, I was determined to fight with all my strength and was prepared to sacrifice my life if necessary.

Q: Are there any memories from that period that remain especially vivid? Were you ever afraid?

Yes, many of them. One of the strongest memories is the loss of my comrades. In some battles, thirty soldiers would set out together, but only about fifteen returned. I felt hatred more strongly than fear. Every time a comrade fell, all I could do was endure the pain and keep fighting with my rifle. One memory that has stayed with me is the Battle of Thuong Duc in 1974. The battle lasted for many days under extremely harsh conditions. I still vividly remember seeing seriously wounded comrades. We had to enter local people's homes and take the bamboo sleeping mats from their family altars to use as stretchers to carry the wounded out of the battlefield.

Many of those who were killed could only be wrapped in hammocks or raincoats and buried temporarily where they had fallen because there was no way to bring their bodies home for burial. Even today, many families have still not found the remains of their loved ones. That is one of the deepest wounds left by the war, not only for the soldiers who fought, but also for countless Vietnamese families.

> *Historical context: The Battle of Thuong Duc began in late July 1974, with the main offensive launched at 5:00 a.m. on July 29. After ten days of intense fighting, the Thuong Duc district headquarters was liberated on August 7, 1974, although fierce combat in the area continued until the end of the year. As a strategic forward defensive position protecting Da Nang, both sides committed their most elite units to the battle. The People's Liberation Forces confronted the Airborne Brigade, one of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces' most highly trained units, for several months in the rugged mountainous terrain. The battle is widely regarded as one of the bloodiest and most hard-fought engagements in Military Region 5 during the final stage of the war, which explains the heavy casualties suffered by both sides, consistent with the interviewee's recollections.*

Q: How did your life change after the war?

I left the military in 1981 and then started a family. In 2005, I retired and became involved in community activities in my local area. Whenever I meet my former comrades, we always talk about the past and remember those who never returned from the battlefield. Living in peace today is something I truly cherish. I consider myself fortunate to have survived, while many of my comrades remain forever in their twenties.



Figure 2. Mr. Tran Kim Huy with his comrade (left) and a portrait of himself (right) taken after the liberation of Da Nang. On the back of the portrait is the handwritten inscription: "In commemoration of the Liberation of Đà Nẵng, 1975."

Q: After everything you have been through, do you still struggle with psychological trauma?

My philosophy in life is that once something has passed, I let it stay in the past, especially the painful and heartbreaking memories from the battlefield. Today, I simply feel grateful that the country is at peace and that the State and the Vietnamese people continue to remember and honour the comrades and revolutionary soldiers who sacrificed so much. That is enough for me.

Q: If you could leave a message for today's younger generation, what would you like to say?

I only hope that young people today will remember history and appreciate what they have. Peace did not come by itself; it was bought with the blood and tears of countless people from earlier generations. In the past, we carried rifles to defend our country. Today, I hope young people will protect the nation through knowledge, unity, and a strong sense of responsibility toward their communities. Never allow the tragedies and suffering of war to happen again.

Editor's note: The Historical Context passage (presented in grey italics) is editorial annotations added to help international readers better understand the historical background. It is separate from the interviewee's direct testimony.

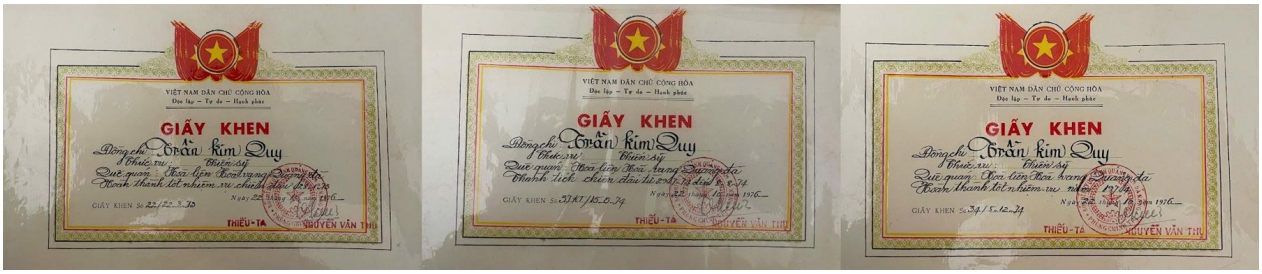

Figure 3. Several certificates of commendation recognizing Mr. Tran Kim Huy achievements and service during the resistance war against the United States, arranged from top to bottom: Certificate of Commendation for Outstanding Performance in Combat (January 28, 1973); Certificate of Commendation for Combat Achievements (July 29 to August 8, 1974); and Certificate of Commendation for Outstanding Performance in Duty (1974).

Reflections

The resistance war against the United States (1954 - 1975) left profound and lasting consequences for generations of Vietnamese people. Many children grew up amid bombings and gunfire, witnessed the separation and loss of loved ones, and were forced to shoulder responsibilities far beyond their age. These experiences compelled many young people to mature much earlier than they otherwise would have, while also fostering a strong sense of responsibility, patriotism, and a deep desire for peace.

Through the testimony of Mr. Tran Kim Huy, these impacts become more vivid, personal, and tangible than ever. We came to understand that the cost of war cannot be measured solely by the number of casualties or the extent of material destruction. War also robs children of their childhood, leaves dreams unfulfilled, and forces an entire generation to grow up before their time. Despite carrying painful memories throughout their lives, many survivors have maintained their optimism, gratitude, and unwavering belief in the value of peace. Mr. Tran Kim Huy's message to today's younger generation "*...protect the country through knowledge, unity, and responsibility...*" is not only the heartfelt advice of a war veteran but also a lesson of profound significance for modern society.

This interview has deepened our appreciation for the peaceful life we enjoy today. Every witness's story represents a piece of history, helping younger generations understand that peace is not something to be taken for granted, but a precious achievement won through the blood, tears, and youth sacrificed by those who came before us. It is this understanding that can inspire gratitude, strengthen a sense of responsibility, and nurture the aspiration to build a future free from war.

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Researchers



Hello everyone! My name is **Le Thuy My Y**. I'm 21 years old and currently a final year student majoring in Culture and Tourism at the University of Science and Education – The University of Danang. I live in Da Nang, a beautiful coastal city in central Vietnam. As someone who is passionate about Vietnamese history and culture, I have always been interested in learning about the traditional values of my country. Through this project, I hope to share the story of Vietnam's struggle for independence with people from around the world. I am very happy and honoured to be part of this meaningful project.



Hi everyone! My name is **Tran Nguyen Hoang Anh**. I'm 21 years old and currently in my final year of the Culture and Tourism program at the University of Science and Education, the University of Danang. Growing up in Da Nang has given me many opportunities to experience the rich cultural heritage of central Vietnam, which has inspired my passion for exploring and preserving traditional values. I believe that culture is not only a reflection of the past but also a bridge that connects people from different backgrounds. That is why I'm excited to join this project, where I can contribute my knowledge, learn from others, and help introduce the beauty of Vietnamese culture to an international audience. Thank you, and I'm delighted to be here with all of you.

Loss of Innocence: The Zimbabwe War of Liberation

Miss Jennifer Matumbu

Researcher: Mahohoma Pamela

Early Childhood Development Teacher, Zimbabwe

Talking about loss of innocence can remind us of someone being disturbed physically, psychologically, or mentally by natural or human-caused disasters. Through experiencing such violence, human beings suffer a lot, as their normal way of life (cultural life), their social interactions either nationally or globally, as well as their economic life become totally changed, either positively or negatively. According to research, people of all age groups can be affected by disasters, which may result in loss of innocence. However, the focus of this research targets loss of innocence in one certain group, which is the youth.

Although the definition of youth may vary from nation to nation, globally it is the period of transformation where one grows from childhood to adulthood, probably from the age of thirteen to eighteen. It is an important phase of human life which, depending on experiences, can shape one's life as a whole, either positively or negatively. In other words, youth is a period of learning, where either trust or mistrust develops depending on experiences.

A youth life protected from disastrous experiences may result in a better tomorrow and a positive mind. This is far different from a youth life exposed to violence and disasters, as this may result in trauma, depression, misunderstandings, mistrustfulness, anxiety, and behavioral disturbances which, without early identification and solutions, can overtake one throughout life. This piece of research targets loss of innocence within youth life in Zimbabwe during the Zimbabwean liberation war of 1964 to 1979, which is also called the Chimureng.

Before the colonial era, this country of Zimbabwe was a peaceful land. Leadership was traditional only, from village heads to kraal heads, then chiefs and kings. This leadership was also hereditary and was considered a family matter. Cases were heard from the bottom up to the king. Economically, the people of this country relied on agriculture, mining, crafts, and both national and international barter trade. Respect was an issue of concern. Children were considered part of the society, and it was every elderly person's duty to raise and groom all children in the society positively. There was no formal education, but young people used to learn by watching elders do tasks.

International barter trade attracted foreigners from the western hemisphere, and they became curious to invade Zimbabwe in order to get minerals. The deal started with the missionaries, who came preaching the word of God while at the same time surveying the land and paving the way for colonisation. So the colonisation itself started with the pioneer column, which was a group of British people led by Cecil John Rhodes. Carts pulled by horses were their transport. They entered this country through South Africa. As they enriched themselves in Zimbabwe, they gave places their own names, from Fort Victoria to Fort Salisbury, and it was there that they raised the Union Jack and named this country Rhodesi. By then, Rhodes had become the president, and thus the introduction of presidential rule in Zimbabwe. It was a dictatorship, all in favor of the whites.

Disrespecting the descendants of this country, the pioneer column started to do their business, such as mining and agriculture, taking advantage of the black people's labor. They took land and resettled the majority of this country into the so-called reserves, where they started to tax them for everything, their animals and even their own land. This continued to happen for several years, until the majority of the Rhodesian people became furious with the conditions and started to revolt against the white rule. There was also forced labour without payment and no education for black children.

So, it all started with the first Chimurenga, led by the blacks against the white rule. In this attempt, the blacks lost due to poor war equipment as well as less experience. Even though the loss never took away the black majority's hope, they planned for the second Chimurenga, which became the war of liberation. This war took place over the period from July 1964 to December 1979 and involved the Rhodesian security forces, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), led by the black majority against the white forces.

The next part of this research will analyze the interview data from Miss Jennifer Matumbu to identify patterns of trauma, resilience, and redefined social roles, contributing to an empirical understanding of “loss of innocence” in anti-colonial conflict.

Interviewee’s Background

Pamela Mahohoma interviewed **Miss Jennifer Matumbu** on July 3rd, 2026. Miss Matumbu was born during the colonial era and is now 64 years old. She joined the war of liberation when she was only 14 years of age, and she encountered many difficulties, as stated in the interview.

Interview

Q: Do you still remember the social life of your family before the war?

Elders were responsible for raising children positively and according to the culture. Also, most families were polygamous.

Q: Who was your childhood friend?

Faith Mutonono.

Q: Did you still find ways to play or have fun?

Yes, but with limited freedom, as all children were playing while alert to the war.

Q: What exactly happened on the day you joined the war?

It was around 10:00 a.m.. My parents were busy working in the field, and I was at home, assigned to take care of my siblings. At that moment I was preparing tea for the family, and I heard my sisters planning to join the war with their friends. As a child, I noticed the plan and knew that this was without our parents' consent, and I told my sisters that I was going to report them to their father. My sister Evelyn and her colleagues took me far away through the bushes to join the war, as they suspected that I would report them. We walked the whole day without a proper meal or safe water.

Q: What are the other problems you encountered along the way?

There was poor hygiene and the risk of dangerous wild animals, as well as a lack of protective clothing against different weather conditions. Some village people rejected us out of fear of torture from the white forces.

Most people in Mozambique never accepted us; they were afraid of the white forces. In most places we reached in Mozambique, they shouted "gogomani gogomani tekedzani chitaka," meaning "go back to your country, you started what you are not able to finish." Some of us requested to return to Zimbabwe. Adding to this, we were affected by diseases such as rheumatism, fevers, and other skin diseases, and a certain type of worm called *matekenya* entered our bodies. Those worms were big, and as a result they caused wounds and weakened our bodies.

Q: So when you joined the war, did you manage to find friends there?

I met my friend Faith Mutonono in Mozambique. We were happy to be together in the war of liberation.

Q: Are there songs you associate with that time?

Yes, we used to sing motivational songs as war fighters. Among the songs there was this one, "Jennifer Jenie mwana akashinga" (a courageous child). With this song, my colleagues were referring to me as a courageous child sacrificing for her own country.

Q: Who helped you most during the war?

My sister Evelyn Matumbu.

Q: When did you feel most afraid, and what helped you cope with that fear?

Once, I was taken by the river Mukosi while trying to cross, and I was rescued by the company. Also, at the battle at Chomuruvati, many people died, including some of my colleagues. I feared death at that time, even though it was my sacrifice to go to war.

Q: Was there anything you did to help you feel safer? Explain.

Being honest, faithful, and obedient helped me save my life during the war. Also, respect, sacrifice, and belonging were key.

Q: How many years did you spend in the war?

I spent 4 years in the war.

Q: Are there memories from that time which still remain very strong for you?

Yes, loss of life was the worst thing I encountered, especially at the Nyadzonya and Svibawawa battles. People have died, and until now, if I remember the events, I feel the pain. However, on the other side of the story, there is a positive and inspiring matter of love and unity that I encountered during the war. We loved each other as the black majority.

Q: How do you feel when people talk about that conflict today?

I feel strong, because what we came across was difficult, but we made it by the grace of God.

Q: What would you want younger generations to learn from your experience?

I would like to encourage the young generation to be reliable, strong, honest, faithful, caring, and obedient in every situation. Also, respect, sacrifice, and teamwork lead to progress. From my life experience, I learned that there are no permanent situations. Hard times will always pass.

Reflections

The first part of this section discusses the life of Zimbabwean youth during the pre-colonial era (before 1890), which was peaceful and more cultural. There was apprenticeship learning across the country. Political life was under cultural and traditional power. There was emotional and social stability among people in their societies. This system of life then shifted dramatically, both socially and emotionally, to the colonial era, which was the white government (1890–1979). During that time, the black majority faced the hardest time of their lives. They were suppressed by the white forces, and the rise of unnecessary taxes, among the other reasons mentioned above, forced the black majority to trigger a war against the British military forces.

Youth life was more affected by the war's effects, physically, socially, and emotionally. Loss of life and torture were encountered. Some of the boys and girls were forced to join the war unwillingly, although a few joined as a sacrifice to liberate Zimbabwe. From the interview above, one could identify that the journey through the liberation of Zimbabwe was a tough sacrifice. Love, sacrifice, respect, and caring saved Zimbabwean soldiers throughout the war period, up to independence in December 1980. Finally, the post-independence era brought peace and political power to the black majority. It was through hardship that independence came. The pains and difficulties encountered contributed to building stronger people who are more resilient to hard situations. The writer therefore recommends this as a must-read for the youth of this current time, as it may help them relate it to their own challenges and find solutions and answers.

The hope is to encourage and motivate youths from different backgrounds and situations to be courageous and strong enough to face their challenges and overcome them.

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Researcher



Hi! My name is **Mahohoma Pamela** and I am 31 years old. I was born and raised in Zimbabwe in the rural areas of Chivi South in Masvingo province. I became a double orphan at an early age when my grandmother Melania Foromera took over the burden of raising me. My education was entirely funded by the Zienzele Foundation. My career plan was to be a nurse, but nature has its own way of raising people, and l ended up as an Early Childhood Development teacher. I trained at Great Zimbabwe University in Masvingo and finished my studies in 2025.

I am a mother of one boy named Tashinga Makovore. I love my work, and l enjoy being with children and by all means empowering them with appropriate life skills. During my spare time l do gardening to enhance my life and also read books for adventure. I am happy to participate in this YGRP as it opens an opportunity to change lives through this exposure. My hope is to encourage and motivate youths from different backgrounds and situations to be courageous and strong enough to face their challenges and overcome them.

Disasters

Loss of Innocence: The Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake

Ms. Masae Hemmi

Researcher: Shota Hemmi

Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, Kyoto, Japan

Japan is said to be a country of earthquakes, as approximately 20% of the world's earthquakes greater than magnitude 6 are recorded around our country. The earth's surface is covered by more than ten large pieces of rock called tectonic plates. These plates move, causing earthquakes. Around Japan, four of those plates meet, which is quite rare and makes the area one of the most complex places in the world. An earthquake could happen anytime, anywhere in the country, and historically the nation has faced the risk of huge quakes.

31 years ago, in 1995, at 5:46 on an ordinary morning on the 17th of January, the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake occurred in the northern part of Awaji Shima. It was the first major quake to hit a large city in Japan after World War II, and its magnitude was 7.3. Kobe city, in Hyogo prefecture, was the worst hit area, while Awaji Shima and the Hanshin area were also immensely damaged. Immediately after the event, fires broke out in various places in the city, affecting 100,000 homes. In Hyogo, a total of 6,437 people were killed or remain unaccounted for, and it was not only the loss of life but also the damage to infrastructure that was enormous. The quake caused motorways to collapse, damaged roads and bridges, and brought water and power outages, telephone line disconnections, and more, resulting in total losses amounting to 10 trillion yen.

There were so many obstacles to reconstructing the city centre that it required a huge amount of energy and time to revitalize the areas. Many people felt stress from living in shelters. Children, elderly people, and those with disabilities were especially affected, while others struggled with unstable jobs. The slow recovery of water, electricity, and other services, as well as traffic congestion, also reduced city function and people's standard of living. Some companies moved out of Kobe, some factories produced less because of the damage, and the collapsed highways and roads caused transportation problems, which brought about various losses to the economy of not only Kobe but also Japan. The long recovery affected industry, cities, and people's daily lives. Additionally, the year 1995 is called the 'First Year of Volunteering' in Japan. This life-changing event showed that the government could not save everyone. Since many government workers were also victims and roads were blocked by rubble, the authorities could not reach people quickly, so residents played a significant role at the time. About 80% of those rescued from collapsed houses were saved by locals, and millions of people from all around Japan came to the disaster area to help victims. After the quake, the concept of volunteering spread throughout the country, and many people learned to protect themselves and help those around them during disasters.

Interviewee's Background

Mrs. Masae Hemmi was born and raised in Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture and is now living in Osaka. She has two sons and one daughter. Currently she does housework and takes care of her children. At the time she was only 11 years old.

The photo below was taken on the day of the interview with Mrs. Masae Hemmi.



Mrs. Masae Hemmi (the woman on the right)

Interview

Q: Who were you living with before the disaster?

I lived in Kobe city with my father, mother, and brother, who was three years younger than me.

Q. What are some simple things you can remember about your daily life before the disaster?

I lived with my family, one rabbit, and two java sparrows. My father worked in the electrical industry, and my mother worked part time. At the time, I was in the sixth grade, and my brother was in the third grade, and we both attended an elementary school near our home. The week after the earthquake, I was supposed to go to a ski camp with my sixth-grade class. My classmates were busy getting ready for the trip, but my mother had felt unwell, so I had not been able to prepare anything. I was thinking that I needed to get everything ready as soon as possible.

Q: Was there any prediction or sign of the disaster before it happened?

I am not sure if it was the sign of the earthquake, but I remember my mother saying 'the sky looks strange' while we were walking near our house on the day before the disaster. I do not recall what it looked like.

Q: Did you make any preparations for the disaster before it happened?

No, I had not made any preparations. At the time, earthquakes were not reported as often as they are today, and because I had not experienced one in Kobe, I never imagined that one would happen.

Q: What were you doing when it happened?

I was sleeping in the same room as my mother and younger brother. I woke up in the morning, and just as I looked at the clock to check the time, the ground started shaking. The violent shaking felt as if it would never end. My mother was desperately trying to stop the birdcage on the table from falling as everything around us was shaking.

Q: How did your lifestyle change right after the disaster?

Fortunately, our house was not damaged, and my school was temporarily closed, so I was staying at home. The water, gas, and electricity services were completely stopped. We found out that one faucet in a park some distance from our house was still working, so my mother and I walked there every morning. I remember washing my face with icy water during the freezing winter.

On the day of the earthquake, we still had some leftover hot pot from the night before. We added the remaining rice to it and ate it. Although we went to the supermarket, there was almost nothing left. We bought whatever food that was still available. After that, I do not remember how we managed our meals.

Immediately after the disaster, my father and mother had to return to work. During the daytime, I was staying at home with my younger brother, but aftershocks occurred frequently and we were so frightened by the shaking that we stayed under the *kotatsu* (a low Japanese-style table with a heater under it and heavy blanket over it) all day. My father usually commuted by car, yet neither cars nor trains were available for a while. Instead, he had to ride his bicycle over the mountains and spent lots of time getting to work.

After experiencing such a major earthquake, I started to feel a kind of warning sign before the shaking began as I became able to sense when an earthquake was about to strike. I also visited the town where my father was born, though it had been destroyed and turned into burnt ruins.

Q: How did you find out whether your relatives and friends were safe?

My family was together, and since I was only an elementary school student at the time, I did not contact or check on our relatives. I assume my parents had done that. I think some of my relatives fled to evacuation shelters, and I remember talking with friends of mine on the phone.

Q: Was there anything you did to feel safer?

It was to stay under the kotatsu from head to toe.

Q: How did the adults around you explain what was going on?

My parents and teacher explained what was happening, but I cannot recall most of that.

Q: How has life been personally since the event for you and your family?

Before the disaster, whenever the weekend came, my family often made bentos and went on a hike to Rokko-San or enjoyed cycling. However, my father worked in the electrical industry, and perhaps because of the reconstruction of the city, his workload became extremely demanding. He left for work at 5 or 6

every morning and came home around 11 at night, not only on weekdays, but also on weekends. In the following year, he was killed in an accident on his way from work. My mother said that 'if the earthquake had not happened, he would still be alive today'. After his passing, life as a family of three began and my mother started going to work all day. I think the burden on her increased. She also suffered from several serious illnesses.

Q: How did the disaster affect your school life?

The elementary school reopened after being closed for a while. The ski camp that had been scheduled for a week after the disaster was cancelled. After the quake, I received a letter from an elementary school student in Hokkaido who experienced the 1993 Hokkaido Nansei-Oki Earthquake. I corresponded with the same girl for about 20 years.

In the following year, my father passed away and those experiences inspired me to become a nurse. My younger brother became a police officer. The disaster did not change my school life itself, but I think it affected my attitude toward school.

Q: What comes to mind when people talk about the earthquake today?

The fragmented memories like the ones I have described in my answers come back to me. My father would not be dead if the disaster had not happened, so that reminds me of him and the time.

Q: How do you sum up your experience of the disaster that you were involved in?

Since our home was in Kita-Ku, Kobe city, it did not collapse and the damage was relatively little. However, I will never forget the fear I felt during the shaking. I also came to understand how the grief of losing a family member can leave long lasting emotional wounds. After my father's death, my younger brother and I have struggled with flashbacks to the experience. It was not until I was in my late thirties that they finally began to subside. I felt that such a scar from childhood can last much longer than those we face in adulthood. Even now, I sometimes dream about earthquakes, and I still live with a constant fear that another one could happen. To cope with that fear, I keep emergency supplies and stay prepared, which I never did before the event. In the future, I would like to move to a place where earthquakes are less frequent.

One morning, the lives of thousands of people changed – both directly and indirectly – and threw them into tragic circumstances. Without a doubt, the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake was unimaginably devastating. It required enormous amounts of energy, time, and manpower to reconstruct the city, which had been reduced to ruin.

Reflections

As Mrs. Masae Hemmi mentioned, she is one of those whose lives were deeply affected by the disaster. The passing of her father is one example of how exhausting the long-lasting reconstruction process was. Imagine surviving a historical disaster, only to lose your loved ones later because of its long-lasting effects. It still may not be easy for her to look back on the past and share her experiences in the interview.

Earthquakes are unpredictable. Typhoons can often be predicted, but earthquakes cannot. We do not know when they will occur, so keeping emergency supplies is one thing we can do to prepare. In a disaster-prone country like Japan, there is always a risk of such an event, and Tsunamis are also a serious concern because they can be triggered by powerful earthquakes. Even after the Great Hanshin-

Awaji Earthquake, Japan experienced other major disasters, such as the Great East-Japan Earthquake and the Kumamoto Earthquake. The Nankai Trough Earthquake is another major earthquake that is predicted to occur in the near future.

What we see in the news tends to be presented as numbers and statistics, but behind those figures there are lives, losses, and suffering of innocent people. Their experiences and voices must be remembered and passed down from generation to generation. The reality of disaster can be difficult to fully understand and easy to forget over time, but it is something we must never allow ourselves to forget.

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Researcher



Hello my name is **Shota Hemmi**. I am 18 year-old and am currently studying at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies in Japan in the Department of Global Studies. I love talking with people who have curiosity about the world around them. I enjoy thinking about something ridiculous, travelling, listening to music, and trying something new. I appreciate your effort reading through my report, and hope you have learned something valuable.

Loss of Innocence: Matai’an Creek Barrier Lake Flood

Ms. Panay

Researcher: Shin-Hung Chen

Fu Jen Catholic University, New Taipei City, Taiwan

On September 23rd, 2025, the barrier lake on Matai’an Creek (Fata'an in the Amis language) overflowed, causing severe flooding in Guangfu Township, Hualien County, Taiwan. The disaster killed 19 people, injured more than one hundred residents, and left five people missing. Floodwaters carrying large amounts of mud and debris rushed into nearby communities, damaging homes, roads, schools, and other public facilities.

Taiwan is located in the western North Pacific, a region frequently affected by tropical cyclones. Around 25 tropical cyclones form across the western North Pacific each year, and an average of about three affect Taiwan. Although earthquakes and typhoons are familiar natural hazards for people in Taiwan, the Matai’an disaster showed how typhoons, heavy rainfall, landslides, and local geographical conditions can combine to create a much more serious crisis.

The barrier lake formed in the upper reaches of Matai’an Creek after heavy rainfall brought by Typhoon Wipha triggered major landslides on July 21st, 2025. The landslides blocked the river and created an unstable natural dam. During the following weeks, more rainfall continued to raise the lake’s water level. The situation became increasingly dangerous after Typhoon Podul brought further heavy rain in August.

As Typhoon Ragasa approached Taiwan in September, the risk of the barrier lake overflowing became a growing concern. On the afternoon of September 23rd, the lake overflowed, releasing floodwaters, mud, and debris into downstream areas of Guangfu Township.



Before the Disaster. Source: National Science and Technology Center for Disaster Reduction (NCDR), Taiwan.



After the Disaster. Source: National Science and Technology Center for Disaster Reduction (NCDR), Taiwan.

The flood reached residential areas within a very short time. Familiar homes were suddenly filled with water, mud, and damaged objects, leaving many residents with little time to respond. International and Taiwanese media reports noted that many of the people who died were found on the ground floors of their homes. This showed how quickly ordinary living spaces could become dangerous during the disaster.

The disaster received wide attention in Taiwan and abroad and raised important questions about disaster monitoring, evacuation planning, risk communication, and cooperation between different levels of government. Although the causes and responsibilities must be carefully reviewed, no investigation can undo the loss experienced by the affected families.

Interviewee's Background

Panay (the name provided by the interviewee) is an Amis university student from Guangfu Township, Hualien County, Taiwan. When the Matai'an Creek barrier lake overflow occurred in September 2025, she was seventeen years old and had only recently begun university.

After learning that her hometown had been flooded, Panay returned to Guangfu. Although her family members survived, their home and community suffered serious damage. She temporarily put aside her university studies and became involved in local recovery work, including helping at a temporary command center and coordinating volunteers. She also spent time with younger members of her family who had been affected by the disaster.

Interview

Editor's note: This interview was conducted in Mandarin Chinese and translated into English. The following text is an edited Q&A rather than a verbatim transcript. The questions have been reordered by topic, and some closely related follow-up questions and answers have been combined. Verbal fillers and exact repetitions have been reduced, while meaningful hesitation, uncertainty, and self-correction have been retained. No new facts, emotions, or causal claims have been added to the interviewee's responses. At the interviewee's request, some family roles, location details, and other potentially identifying information have been generalized. The dashboard-camera footage mentioned in the interview was not provided to or viewed by the researcher.

Q: What were you doing when the Matai'an Creek barrier lake overflowed on September 23, 2025? What had your everyday life been like in the days before the disaster?

In the days before it happened, I remember that I was still very happy. I even went singing. I had only started university one or two weeks earlier. My department was holding a welcome event for first-year students on the evening of the disaster. When I first learned what had happened, I was in class. Not long afterward, videos began appearing in our group chats showing that something had happened back home.

Q: How did you understand what was happening when you first saw those videos?

At first, it did not feel real. I was shocked when I saw the videos, but I had not yet understood that this was actually happening to my home. I did not really believe it. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I did not want to believe it was true.

Q: You mentioned receiving information through your Amis age-grade group. Did older relatives or community members also explain what was happening?

Yes. My family also has a group chat, but everything happened too quickly for them to explain the situation at first. My sister and the children with her were able to get into a vehicle with my eldest uncle and leave. However, my grandmother and two of my aunts could not get out in time. The water came too quickly, so they could only go upstairs and take shelter there.

It was more than an hour before I learned that they had not escaped. One of my aunts contacted me. Through a video call, she showed me the water that had risen around them. She told me that my grandmother and another aunt had originally been in the older house. Because the house was shaking, they climbed across the sheet-metal structure between the houses and reached an upstairs room in the other house. I still do not know where my grandmother found the strength to climb across.

They told me that they were safe for the moment. They would wait for the water to go down and then see whether anyone could come to rescue them. They told me not to worry.

Q: When did you feel most afraid and helpless?

The most frightening moment was when I learned that they had not escaped. There was nothing I could do. We did not know when the water would go down or who would be able to rescue them. Only my aunt's husband had prepared a first-aid kit. I kept wondering when their drinking water would run out. I was also especially worried about my grandmother. I kept thinking, "What is she going to do?"

Q: You were still at university when you learned that your family was trapped. Who supported you most at that moment?

I called my cousin, who was also in class at another university. She cried in the hallway of her school, and I cried in the hallway of mine. We kept asking each other, "What are we going to do? Grandma is still upstairs." We supported each other and gave each other some warmth. I did not dare bring my emotions to the adults in my family. I felt that they were already more tired and under more pressure than I was. I did not dare cry in front of them. I thought that the least I could do was take care of myself. At that moment, my cousin and I could only lean on each other.

Q: What were you thinking as you travelled back to Guangfu?

I kept trying to find things that would distract me. At the same time, I was trying to accept the fact that my home had really become like that. I do not remember thinking about much else. My strongest thought was simply that I wanted to get back as quickly as possible.

Q: What happened when you finally saw that your family was safe?

When I saw them, I knew that if I cried, they would cry too, so I held it in. We did not say anything special. We just kept saying, "As long as everyone is safe. That is what matters."

Q: After confirming that your family was safe, you immediately became involved in the disaster response. What was your first task?

On the first day after I returned, I was assigned to help organize and clear space inside an elementary school because we needed to turn part of it into a temporary command center. Once most of the space had been prepared, I began helping with reception and record-keeping at the entrance of the school. I recorded who lived in the area, which organizations had arrived, and what supplies they had donated. After two or three days, we also began patrolling the area. If we heard that more water might be coming, we had to warn elderly residents who were still in their homes. Many elderly residents still wanted to stay at home.

Q: When did volunteers begin to arrive?

Volunteers began arriving within the first week, but everything was still very chaotic at that time.

Q: How did your role change as more volunteers began to arrive?

Around the fourth day after I returned, my role began to change. When volunteers arrived, I had to tell them where help was needed and where they should go. So what had started as reception and record-keeping gradually became volunteer coordination.

Q: When were you finally able to enter your home and begin clearing the mud?

It was about a week before we could begin clearing mud from the house. Before that, I could only look at our home from a distance because it was farther inside the affected area. To get home, I had to pass a junior high school. The school's wall had completely collapsed. It had been washed away by the water. My feelings were already very complicated when I saw that.

Q: What did you think when you finally entered your home?

I was trying to accept what had happened. When I saw the house, I kept thinking, "How could it have become like this? Is this really my home?" I still could not quite believe it and did not want to believe it. At the same time, I had to accept that it was real. It was a very complicated feeling.



Post-disaster cleanup in the affected area (photo provided by the interviewee and used with permission).

Q: Was there a part of your home where you especially liked to spend time? What did it look like after the disaster?

Probably the courtyard. We used to barbecue there, sit around a fire, and gather outside to talk. After the flood, the whole area was covered in mud. At first, we could see only the roof and the mud. You could no longer see the shape of a home. Everything had been disturbed. A table might be on top, other objects might be underneath, and mud filled all the spaces between them.

It was not that I could not recognize anything. I knew where I was, and I knew what some of the objects were. I just did not know how to describe it. I had only one thought: "Is this really my home? How did my home become like this?" The refrigerator had been pushed against the wall, the roof was damaged, and everything was in disorder. We measured the mud inside the house. It was 1.83 metres high. It had covered almost everything.

Q: You experienced a very rapid transition – from returning home, to confirming that your family was safe, to working at the command center and coordinating volunteers. How did that experience affect you?

That whole period felt very unreal, almost like a dream. It felt as though I was being forced to grow up. I was at an awkward age. Could I still call myself a child? I was already capable of helping. But could I call myself an adult? I was not yet able to make important decisions. It felt as though I had to depend on myself and force myself to grow up.

Q: How did the Amis age-grade system affect your sense of responsibility during the disaster response?

Because we have the age-grade system, I felt that I could not simply stand to one side and watch. I felt that I should go and help. I should do something. However, I was not yet old enough to make decisions. I

could only follow the instructions given by the older members. At the same time, I could no longer respond like a child and say, "This is too difficult. I do not want to do it. I cannot do it."

The younger children in my family were still in elementary school. They were staying with my grandmother in temporary accommodation nearby. Even when I was exhausted, I felt that I could not simply stay there, sleep, and say that I did not want to go out and help. It was not that I did not want to help. I was simply very tired.

Q: Did the presence of younger children in your family make you feel that you had to behave like an adult?

Yes. My nieces and nephews made me feel that I should act like an adult.

Q: As their aunt, how did you deal with the pressure you were experiencing?

When I saw them, I did not dare cry. I felt that I could not cry. I kept suppressing my emotions, so there was never really a time when I processed them. I simply kept forcing myself to continue. There was no particular moment when I felt that I had finally dealt with what I was feeling.

Q: Were you eventually able to release some of that pressure?

Later, as the house gradually began to recover and slowly started to look like a home again, the pressure seemed to disappear naturally. But the wound is still there. It just does not hurt as much anymore.

Q: What changes did you observe in your nieces and nephews after the disaster? How did they understand what had happened?

I knew that they understood. They understood that the house had become like that, that they could not go to school, and that their belongings were gone. They also spoke to me about these things. While staying in temporary accommodation, they were very quiet. They did not make trouble. I felt that they had become more mature and better behaved. They seemed more careful not to make the adults angry and more willing to remain quietly where they were.

Q: Did the adults try to soften the situation when explaining it to them?

Not really, because they had experienced it themselves. I watched the dashboard-camera footage. It showed them getting into the vehicle after realizing that the water was coming. When the vehicle could not move, they quickly picked up buckets and began scooping out the water. Otherwise, the vehicle could not move.

Q: During the long period of clearing and rebuilding, did people find any ways to relax or make the work less difficult?

This may sound like a stereotype, but drinking was one of the ways. We drank almost every day – well, perhaps not almost every day. It was more that wherever you went, there always seemed to be someone holding a drink. We had a blue crate with alcohol inside it. Whether someone wanted to take one was up to them.

Q: Your family still held a barbecue during the Mid-Autumn Festival. How did that happen?

By that time, most of the house had been cleared, and the courtyard was clean enough to use again. Barbecuing during festivals has always been an unspoken tradition in our family. I remember that another cousin of mine and I saw how many volunteers had come to help us and how hard they were

working. We originally went to the supermarket to buy a case of drinks for them. While we were there, we thought that perhaps we should still have a Mid-Autumn Festival barbecue. He said, "Life still has to go on." We bought a portable gas stove and some meat. Then we returned home and gathered together to barbecue.

Q: Were you happy that evening?

I was quite happy. It felt very much like our ordinary family life, but at the same time, it did not feel ordinary at all. I felt that as long as everyone was still there, our home was still there too. Although our house had already become like that, at least everyone was still there. The way we interacted with one another still felt the same as before. The environment was different, and everyone looked more tired, but the atmosphere between us was still the same.

Q: Did that evening make you believe that your home could eventually be rebuilt?

No, because I had always believed that we would rebuild it. I always believed that. It was only a matter of time.

Q: Was there anything else that made that Mid-Autumn Festival especially meaningful?

We invited some of the volunteers who had been especially dedicated to join the barbecue and enjoy the evening with us. It was a way of thanking them for being willing to help us. We did not know them, and they did not know us, but they were still willing to come and help clear our home.

Q: Because one of your family members was involved in local disaster-preparedness work, you became involved in the disaster response soon after returning home. During the following two months, how did you adjust between being a member of an affected family, a university student, and a participant in the community response?

The first identity I gave up was being a student. There was not much difference between being part of an affected family and participating in the community response because everyone around us was also affected. Everyone was a disaster victim. I temporarily put aside my identity as a student. Everyone was also under a great deal of pressure. My family sometimes argued or spoke loudly. During that time, I would think, "All right, we just have to tolerate one another. What else can we do?"

Q: What happened to your university studies during those two months?

My studies were essentially suspended because I was not attending classes. Even if someone had asked me to sit in a classroom, I would not have had the concentration to study. I did not have any energy left to take care of that part of my life. It felt as though school was the only thing I could give up at that time.

Q: Looking back on those two months – from feeling helpless and supporting your cousin, to participating in the disaster response and coordinating volunteers – what has this experience left with you? Has it changed how you imagine your future?

That period still feels like a dream. I never imagined that something like this could happen. When I think about it now, I still feel very sad. But it has also made me value my everyday life more. Perhaps one day another flood could happen in the place where I live. What could I do then? All I can do is cherish my everyday life, cherish the present, and feel even more deeply attached to that place.

Reflections

Before learning about the Matai'an Creek barrier lake overflow, I thought natural disasters in Taiwan mainly meant earthquakes and typhoons. I had never heard of a barrier lake overflow before. Although I learned about the disaster through news reports, it was not until I listened to Panay's personal story that I truly understood how serious it was.

One detail that has stayed with me is her description of the floodwaters washing away a school wall and the 1.83 metres of mud inside her family home. During the interview, I was reminded of anthropologist Mary Douglas's idea of "matter out of place." The mud was no longer just part of nature. It entered a place where it did not belong and turned a warm family home into an unfamiliar and damaged space.

Through Panay's story, I also came to understand this year's YGRP theme, "Loss of Innocence," in a much deeper way. At only seventeen years old, she had to put aside her own fear and support her younger nieces and nephews. While her own home was still covered in mud, she was already helping organize volunteers and relief work. The disaster forced her to grow up much earlier than she expected.

At the same time, I was deeply moved by the "shovel superheroes" – volunteers from across Taiwan who came to help complete strangers. Their actions showed the strength of community support and reminded me that people can come together even in the most difficult times. Although Taiwan's disaster prevention and evacuation systems can still be improved, the resilience of the Amis community and the kindness of these volunteers gave people hope.

This interview taught me that recovering from a disaster is not only about rebuilding houses. It is also about rebuilding relationships, a sense of home, and hope. I believe Taiwan can continue to learn from experiences like this and improve its disaster response so that young people and affected families do not have to face future disasters alone.

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Researcher



Hello everyone! My name is **Shin-Hung Chen**, and I am 22 years old. I live in New Taipei City, Taiwan, and I am currently studying at Fu Jen Catholic University, where I am double majoring in Religious Studies and Sociology.

I believe that the social sciences are essential to understanding human beings and the societies we live in. As I approach graduation, I am also considering whether to continue my studies at the master's level and further explore the questions that interest me.

Outside of my studies, I am very passionate about films and novels. In my free time, I also enjoy writing short reflections and personal essays. I hope that through research, reading, and writing, I can continue to better understand people, society, and the different ways we experience the world.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to take part in YGRP and to share my work here. Perhaps we may have the chance to meet again in another place or through another project in the future.