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The Maze of Shanghai Memory in Kazuo Ishiguro's When We Were Orphans

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Biwu Shang,
"The Maze of Shanghai Memory in Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*"
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Abstract: In his article "The Maze of Shanghai Memory in Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*" Biwu Shang analyzes the memory writing of the novel by combining current memory studies with narratology. The paper pursues three major goals. First, it delves into the maze of Shanghai memory embedded in this novel, which is typically formulated by two contrasting aspects: Christopher Banks's naïve and beautiful childhood memory of Shanghai, and his unhappy adulthood memory of it. Second, it explores how memory plays a dual function of deception and decoration. That is to say, Christopher deliberately uses his memory to create positive images of female characters and to build up negative images of male characters, which makes both of them look deceptively true. Third, it proceeds to discuss the central issue of "orphanhood" suggested by the title of novel, specifically considering how the notion "orphan" is reconfigured by both Christopher's memory and Ishiguro's conception of "unprotectedness."

Biwu SHANG

The Maze of Shanghai Memory in Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*

It has been said that the publication of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel is always "an event, an occasion to rush to the bookstore to buy a copy and then to set aside all distractions in order to read it" (Matthew and Groes, "Your Words" 1). Undoubtedly, Ishiguro's novel, *When We Were Orphans*, is one of those celebrated events. Written in the guise of detective fiction, the novel is essentially a work about Shanghai memory. Given this overarching claim, my paper pursues three major goals. First, it delves into the maze of Shanghai memory embedded in this novel, formulated by two contrasting aspects: Christopher Banks's naïve and beautiful childhood memory of Shanghai, and his unhappy adulthood memory of it. Second, it examines memory's dual function of deception and decoration, exploring how Christopher deliberately uses his memory to create positive images of female characters and to build up negative images of male characters, which makes both of them look deceptively true. Third, it proceeds to discuss the central issue of "orphanhood" suggested by the title of the novel. By considering the relevance of both memory and Ishiguro's conception of "unprotectedness," this paper attempts to investigate the extent to which the novel redefines the notion of "orphan."

Sebastian Groes and Barry Lewis observe that Ishiguro's work "combines his unusual perspective and fine intellectual acuity to portray a wide variety of places, characters and concerns, particularly exploring the effects of class, ethnicity, nationhood, place and mortality, as well as the issues surrounding artistic representation itself" ("Introduction" 1). Groes and Lewis are astute commentators and it would be unwise to argue against them. With regard to Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*, Groes and Lewis's observation has been reiterated by Wai-chew Sim, who painstakingly lists the novel's salient features as "its rewriting of Dickens, its troping of Great Power collaboration, its use of the childhood topos and the twist that it gives to the detective narrative form" (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 67). Largely centering on these key features, critics have made an in-depth exploration of this novel in the last decade. For instance, relating the novel's detective form to its ideology, H el ene Machinal claims that readers of this fiction "are immersed in a world redolent of the tales of Sherlock Homes and the classic detective stories," and tries to reveal "the ideological implications of the whole genre of the turn-of-the-century detective story" (*When We Were Orphans* 79). Alyn Webley examines the psychological state of Christopher Banks, arguing that "his disturbance is a direct result of the social and economic contradictions he and his family experienced whilst living in Shanghai in the early part of the twentieth century" ("Shanghaied' into Service" 184). Lisa Fluet postulates that the novel conveys "antisocial lessons upon class, and about laboring in common," and the female characters of the novel "represent a lost chance for a loving relationship, in fact work to prefigure and enable the antisocial pragmatics of class as a relationship" ("Immaterial Labors" 273). With reference to the story's historical background of the Sino-Japanese war in the 1930s, Alexander M. Bain sees *When We Were Orphans* as a novel that explores "the consciousness of an 'international community' haunted by its recent failures to protect and by the prospect of a future in which unlimited obligations to intervene prompt endless self-examination about 'values' and 'interests'" ("International Settlements" 242). Regrettably, these scholars seem to have overlooked the narrating role of Christopher's memories and their internal connections with East Asia.

Elizabeth Weston argues that "In *When We Were Orphans*, Kazuo Ishiguro creates narrative representations of states of mind such as nostalgia and melancholy that often follow traumatic losses in a person's life" ("Commitment Rooted in Loss" 337). Contrary to Weston's argument, I would like to consider this novel as a maze of memory that is closely related to such issues as self-positioning, imagination, Asian locality, unreliability, and orphanhood. Matthew Beedham observes that memory is "a topic seemingly present in all of Ishiguro's fiction" (*The Novels of Ishiguro* 6). In fact, memory, and memory of East Asia in particular, is one of the prominent issues projected in almost all of Ishiguro's writings. For instance, in *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko recalls her story in a postwar Nagasaki; in *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono narrates his memory of Japan's recent history; and *When We Were Orphans* presents Christopher's memory of Shanghai, even though in the first encounter it "gives the impression of being a conventional detective thriller" (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 67). Along this line, Yugin Teo's *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory* has done an excellent work to probe into Ishiguro's writings of memory by considering three central concepts of forgetting, testimony, and release.

Bain postulates that for Ishiguro, "stories about Shanghai are narratives about the exposure of Western consciousness to the conditions through which its 'interests' are secured" (243). In *When We Were Orphans*, the exposure of Western political and economic interests is mainly achieved through Christopher's memory narratives, which cumulatively build up a fictionalized world of Shanghai in the

1930s. Using memory as a powerful tool for worldmaking, Christopher demonstrates his full capability of being a detective to connect all events and characters, such as the quarreling and mysterious disappearance of his parents, uncle Philip's abandonment of him in a crowd of strangers, Akira's worry about being forced back to Japan, Akira and his childish play of looking for his missing father, Wang Ku's conflicts with his mother before she went missing, Chinese servant Ling Tien's mysterious keeping of the magic lotion, Sarah Hemmings's going with Sir Cecil Medhurst for a peacemaking trip to Shanghai and her consequential escape to Macau, and Christopher's direct encounter with both Chinese soldiers and Japanese invaders on the site of war. In other words, his memory serves as a linkage of these events and characters, all of which are situated in Shanghai. Diachronically speaking, Christopher's memory of Shanghai falls into two distinctive categories: his childhood memory of the International Settlement as an ideal place and his adulthood memory of Shanghai as a war-torn and decadent city. While the first category romanticizes Christopher's life, making the grown-up Christopher rather nostalgic, the second category forces him to see human vulnerability, enabling him to acquire a new recognition of his and his parents' identity. In this sense, I agree with Silvia Caporale Bizzini who argues that "Memories do not only belong to and recount a past time, but they are also instrumental in connecting past and present" ("Recollecting Memories, Reconstructing Identities" 70).

However, both categories of Shanghai memory are fictionalized by his imagination, even though they contain some historical truth related to the establishment of the International Settlement, the Sino-Japanese War, and the internal conflicts between Chinese communists and nationalists. Perhaps, this is what fiction of memory is all about. As Birgit Neumann says, more often than not, fictions of memory "turn out to be an imaginative (re)construction of the past in response to current needs" ("The Literary Representation of Memory" 334). In this light, *When We Were Orphans* might better be seen as a book of imagined memories, which is aptly illuminated by Ishiguro himself. Ishiguro admits in an interview that "I don't know Shanghai firsthand at all. It's a place that I have put together in this book from my association with that city at that time. It was a pre-Communist Shanghai. I learned about it through my father. There were a lot of photos that he had in an album. I couldn't quite believe that people I actually knew, who I always thought of as leading a very sedentary kind of life in England, had lived there. That my grandfather, who I knew as a small child, actually had lived in this wild and exotic place" (*Conversations* 190).

In the real world, Ishiguro uses his imagination to create a city he has never visited. In the fictional world, the narrator Christopher employs his own imagination to recreate places when his memory fails him. Interestingly, he constantly reminds the reader of the acts of memory upon which his story depends, by saying "I remember," while emphasizing his vividness and accuracy in doing so. For instance, when Christopher unexpectedly meets Colonel Chamberlain, he claims that he has "the most vivid memory of the occasion," when they met for the first time. "This was no lie," he says, "Even now, if I were for a moment to close my eyes, I could with ease transport myself back to that bright morning in Shanghai and the office of Mr. Harold Anderson, my father's superior in the great trading company of Morganbrook and Byatt" (*When We Were Orphans* 25). His accidental encounter with Colonel Chamberlain brings Christopher's mind back to his childhood memory of leaving Shanghai for England. In that occasion he left his missing parents and the familiar city of Shanghai to go meet his unknown aunt in a strange place in England. For the purpose of denying his sadness when departing Shanghai, Christopher once again stresses the accuracy of his memory by saying "For according to my own, quite clear memory, I adapted very ably to the changed realities of my circumstances. I remember very well that, far from being miserable on that voyage, I was positively excited about life aboard the ship, as well as by the prospect of the future that lay before me" (28-29). As these lines suggest, Christopher deliberately places a lot of weight on the reliability of his memory through the use of such expressions as "quite clear memory" and "remember very well". However, textual incongruities of the passage betray him. Even though he might have intended to become "positively excited," he could not help feeling "irritated" and emotional. This becomes more evident in another instance when Christopher narrates that,

Even then, my tears were more of anger than sorrow. For I had deeply resented the colonel's words. As I saw it, I was bound for a strange land where I did not know a soul, while the city steadily receding before me contained all I knew. Above all, my parents were still there, somewhere beyond that harbour, beyond that imposing skyline of the Bund, and wiping my eyes, I had cast my gaze towards the shore one last time, wondering if I even now I might catch sight of my mother—or even my father—running on to the quay, waving and shouting for me to return. But I was conscious even then that such a hope was no more than a childish indulgence. And as I watched the city that had been my home grow less and less distinct, I remember turning to the colonel with a cheerful look and saying: "We should be reaching the sea fairly soon, don't you think so, sir?" (29-30)

Christopher's sadness and anger are mainly caused by leaving his comfort zone — the International Settlement, a privileged place for foreign occupants in China. As is known, on November 29, 1845, George Balfour, an English consulate representing the English government, and Kung Moo-yun, Taotai of Shanghai (the Circuit Intendant), representing the late Qing government, signed The Shanghai Land Regulations, which initiated the history of the International Settlement. According to the signed regulations, English citizens and Chinese citizens were supposed to live separately, and it was not the Chinese government but the English consulate that would be fully responsible for governing the residents of the International Settlement and for maintaining order in that area. For Christopher's family, together with some other foreigners in Shanghai, lived in that privileged place. Against this background, it can be seen how he stayed in a paradise-like place, well-fed and happy with his childish games, while the rest of the world seemed to be in a state of chaos. Christopher remembers his sorrow upon leaving, which might be explained in two ways: on the one hand, he was born in Shanghai, had spent all his happy childhood days there, and was therefore reluctant to move from a place of familiarity to an alien land; on the other hand, he was about to go to England orphaned, not knowing whether his missing parents might ever be found, the recognition of which saddened and shamed him. However, Christopher is also smart and adaptable. Once realizing that his fate had been set, he attempted to appear brave, pretending to be happy and cheerful, while still determined to grow up to become a detective, eventually to return to Shanghai to look for his missing parents.

According to Charlotte Linde, "Identity and memory are acts of construction" and the very idea of identity "requires at least some degree of continuity through time. An identity of this moment, not related to the past and not remembered in the future, hardly counts as an identity at all" (*Working the Past* 222). Christopher's childhood memory is best represented by his recounting of the days he spent in the International Settlement of Shanghai as a superior English citizen. While ordinary Shanghai residents lived in tiny places in ghetto, Christopher and his family enjoyed a comparatively luxurious place with a garden, maple trees, and an "English" lawn. In short, the house is described as "a huge white edifice with numerous wings and trellised balconies" (*When We Were Orphans* 53). The adult Christopher is rather doubtful that this memory is reliable. He admits that "I suspect this memory of the house is very much a child's vision, and that in reality, it was nothing so grand" (53). Soon after voicing this suspicion, Christopher hastily adds, "But the house was certainly more than adequate for a household comprising simply my parents, myself, Mei Li, and our servants" (53-54). Christopher's sense of superiority as an English citizen is further strengthened by the Chinese residential areas nearby. It is rumored that they were full of ghastly diseases, filth, and evil men. In Akira's words, the truth concerning the Chinese district is even worse: "There were no proper buildings, just shack upon shack built in great proximity to one another. It all looked, he claimed, much like the marketplace in Boone Road, except that whole families were to be found living in each 'stall.' There were, moreover, dead bodies plied up everywhere, flies buzzing all over them, and no one there thought anything of it" (57). In reality, Akira once witnessed "the huddled low rooftops across the canal" (56) when he and his mother accidentally took a carriage going through Chapei district.

To a large extent, Christopher's innocent and beautiful childhood memory of Shanghai forms a sharp contrast to his adult recollections of this city. For instance, when he was in Chapei district looking for his parents, he was rather shocked to find that the poorest people lived in those warren-like places, akin to an ants' nest, with seven or eight people sharing. According to the lieutenant in the Chinese army, even a tiny black closet was once divided into four sections, each of which was shared by a whole family. However, staying a little bit longer in Shanghai, Christopher was getting used to seeing Chinese refugees "in the lamplight, sitting, squatting, some curled up asleep on the ground, squeezed one upon the other" (195). Regarding Christopher's contrasting memories of Shanghai, Ben Howard insightfully comments that as a child, Christopher "lived in the shelter of the International Settlement, but as an adult detective in quest of the truth, he comes face to face with human suffering" ("A Civil Tongue" 414). As a matter of fact, what is exposed in front of the adult Christopher is not only the war-torn landscape of Shanghai but also the seeming decadence of the people he met there, including both upper-class Chinese and foreigners. Staying outside the International Settlement, he was shocked by the wretched life of the lower-class Chinese people. Yet, when staying inside the International Settlement, he began to despise the upper class and leaders of the city. This becomes more evident when Christopher suggests that, "As I hurried around the International Settlement talking with many of the city's most prominent citizens, there was a part of me virtually laughing at the earnest way they tried to answer my questions, at the pathetic way they tried to be of help. For the truth is, the longer I had been in Shanghai, the more I had come to despise the so-called leaders of this community" (*When We Were Orphans* 230-31). Most unbearably, his childhood hero Inspector

Kung had degenerated into an opium or alcohol addict, who "looked to be little more than bones" (218).

Throughout the novel, Christopher's memories of male characters and female characters fall into two distinctive categories, negative and positive memories. While his memories of male characters such as his father, Uncle Philip, Sir Cecil, and the warlord Wang Ku are negative, his memories of female characters, particularly his mother, Diana Banks, and Sarah Hemmings are all positive. In Christopher's childhood memory, his mother is a beautiful woman not only in terms of her physical appearance but also in terms of her heart. Akira always regarded Diana with "a peculiar awe" (57), about which Christopher felt rather perplexed, since Akira was usually unintimidated by adults and Diana spoke to him in a gentle and friendly way. The young Christopher attributed Akira's sense of awe toward Diana to her beauty, about which Christopher recalls:

I did, for a while, consider the notion that Akira regarded my mother as he did because she was "beautiful". That my mother was "beautiful" was something I accepted, quite dispassionately, as fact throughout my growing up. It was always being said of her, and I believe I regarded this "beautiful" as simply a label that attached itself to my mother, no more significant than "tall" or "small" or "young". At the same time, I was not unaware of the effect her "beauty" had on others. Of course, at the age, I had no real sense of the deeper implications of feminine allure. But accompanying her from place to place as I did, I came to take for granted, for instance, the admiring glances of strangers as we strolled through the Public Gardens, or the preferential treatment from the waiters at the Italian Café in Nanking Road where we would go for cakes on Saturday mornings. Whenever I look now at my photographs of her—I have seven in all, in the album that accompanied me here from Shanghai—she strikes me as a beauty in an older, Victorian tradition. Today, she might perhaps be regarded as "handsome"; certainly, she is not "pretty." I cannot imagine her, for instance, ever having had the repertoire of coquettish little shrugs and tosses of the head that we expect of our young women today. In the photographs—all of them taken before my birth, four in Shanghai, two in Hong Kong, one in Switzerland—she is certainly elegant, stiff-backed, perhaps even haughty, but not without the gentleness around her eyes I remember well. In any case, the point I am making is that it was quite natural for me to suspect, initially at least, that Akira's odd attitude towards my mother derived, like so many other things, from her beauty. But when I thought the thing over more carefully, I recall settling on a more likely explanation: namely, that Akira had been unusually impressed by what he had witnessed the morning the company's health inspector visited our house. (58-59)

The above quoted paragraph is saliently marked by its typical use of dual-focalization. Christopher's focalization as a character is embedded within his focalization as the narrator, the distinction of which lies in the tense usage: the former is indicated by the past tense, while the latter is indicated by the present tense. Intriguingly, the two focalizations suggest different interpretive judgments about Diana's beauty. This narrative phenomenon is best accounted for by Wolfgang Müller-Funk, who argues that "all forms of memory are explicitly or implicitly based on retrospective narratives that seek to cross the unbridgeable gap between the time of narrating and the time of the events that will be narrated" ("On a Narratology" 207). It is true that, as a child, Christopher always considers his mother's beauty as an accepted fact. Specifically, the character "I" (younger Christopher)—or to adopt the narratological terminology, the experiencing "I" is rather inexperienced in that he sees Diana's beauty as such external qualities as being "tall" or "small" or "young," which are closely associated with her "feminine allure." The experiencing "I" even admits that he could not understand the effect of his mother's physical beauty and its deeper implications, because during all those years he had taken for granted others' admiration of and respect for his mother. What his regret and confession imply is that he attempted to attribute "admiring glances of strangers" in the Public Gardens and "the preferential treatment" from the waiters at the Italian Café to the physical beauty of his mother. On the surface, it seems that the narrator Christopher (the experienced "I") intends to use the vision and voice of the character Christopher (the experiencing "I") to praise Diana's physical beauty. However, a close reading of the text reveals that the meaning of the surface text is more or less subverted by the subtext, which suggests an opposite meaning.

Undoubtedly, Diana is physically beautiful and attractive. However, the admiration and respect that she wins from other people is largely due to her internal beauty as a kind woman and, in particular, being a fighter in the anti-opium campaign, which is focalized through the narrator Christopher. The simple expression "I believe" indicates that the experienced "I" is making a judgment of the experiencing "I." In the rhetorical theory of narrative, narrative judgments fall into three general categories that are interpretive judgment, ethical judgment, and aesthetic judgment. Specifically speaking, "interpretive judgments about the nature of actions or other elements of the narrative, ethical judgments about the moral value of characters and actions, and aesthetic judgments about the artistic quality of the narrative and of its parts" (Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction* 9). Despite the fact that James Phelan sees narrative judgments mainly as a part of readerly dynamics, they can also be seen as a part of textual dynamics in the sense that, inside the text, both narrators and characters can make judg-

ments of other characters' narrative judgments (Shang, "The Activation" 197-213). As argued above, younger Christopher judges Akira's awe for Diana as something owing to her beauty and her physical beauty in particular, and he goes even further by citing evidence for the admiring glances she has received from strangers in the public gardens and the preferential treatment from the waiters at the Italian Café in Nanking Road. However, the older Christopher reconsiders Diana's beauty from a contemporary perspective, which not only differs from the younger Christopher's interpretive judgment but also subverts it. Once again, the present tense in "Whenever I look now at my photographs of her" indicates the focalization of an experienced "I," from whose perspective, Diana is perhaps "handsome," but certainly not "pretty." He uses the photographs taken of her when she was in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Switzerland to illustrate what he means by "handsome." In those photos, she looks "elegant," "stiff-backed," and "haughty." Even though the younger Christopher attributes Akira's odd attitude toward Diana to her beauty, he feels rather curious. Looking back from today's vantage point, Christopher sheds a fresh light on Diana's beauty and makes a new judgment of Diana by associating her encounter and conflict with the company's health inspector and her enthusiasm for the anti-opium campaign in Shanghai. From the perspective of the older Christopher, this sounds like a more reasonable explanation. In fact, it is this part of his memory that highly decorates Diana's image and justifies her consequential actions.

Christopher's inconsistent narratives produce paradoxical effects. The textual oddities and incongruities are typically embodied in such strategies as "dis-narration" ("The Disnarrated" 1-8) and "dual-focalization" (Phelan, *Living to Tell about It* 98-131). That is, the narrator's previous narration is constantly negated and denied by his later narration. In *When We Were Orphans*, the younger Christopher attributes Akira's awe for Diana to her physical beauty, which is later negated by the older Christopher's correction that Akira's awe for Diana is largely due to her internal beauty as a key figure of anti-opium campaigns and her consequential success and influence. However, this correction is once again denied by Christopher's search of the historical archives in the British Museum, which shows that his mother's name is not mentioned at all. Perhaps this can be best explained by the unreliability or untrustworthiness of memory. In memory narratives, Neumann points out, "textual incongruities, ambiguities, (self-) contradictions or the representation of deviant norms are most likely to be attributed to the narrator's unreliability" (338). For instance, in Ishiguro's earlier work *A Pale View over Hills*, the narrator Etsuko confesses that "Memory, I realize, can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers" (156). The conditional term "circumstances," in Christopher's case, designates his preference to beatify the image of his mother in his childhood memory, and he chooses to believe in her and imagines what is best for her. However, what Christopher has to face is harsh reality. When he was a child, he had to accept the fact that his mother went missing shortly after the mysterious disappearance of his father. As a woman fighter against the opium business in China, Diana naively relies on the male characters for support. For example, she largely relies on her husband for financial support for her teas and luncheons; she relies on Uncle Philip for suggestions and assistance, and she even relies on the warlord Wang Ku to use his armed forces to stop the ships from importing opium to China. Ironically, all her efforts have ended in a series of betrayals. Her husband has fled with his mistress, Wang Ku has kidnapped her as his sex slave, and it is Uncle Philip who has helped Wang Ku to take her. When Christopher's beautiful childhood memory of his mother encounters the harsh reality, it makes her fate seem even more tragic.

I agree with Albrecht Classen who argues that "Memory is a powerful instrument in everything defining human existence and identity" ("German Literary Historians" 184). As far as the novel *When We Were Orphans* is concerned, Wojciech Drag argues that memory emerges from the novel "as an inherently unreliable mechanism prone to manipulation and fabulation and subject to the dictates of identity" ("Beyond the Confines of Realism" 331). The question is what human existence and identity does Ishiguro try to define through memory? A close look at the title of the novel raises a few other interrelated issues, beginning with the word "orphans": who are these orphans? How have they become orphans? What are the consequences of their orphanage? The word "were" indicates that the story takes place in the past; while the word "when" indicates that someone is recalling their experience of characters' orphanage from memory.

Literally, the word "orphan" in the narrow sense, refers to those who are parentless; while in the broader sense, it can also refer to those who are homeless. However, in an interview, Ishiguro offers a new interpretation of the word. "For me," he says, " 'orphans' is just a metaphor for that condition of coming out of that bubble in an unprotected way. Most of us are not orphans, and we have our hand held as we come of the illusionary world that adults have created for us we grow up...You leave that protected world and then you suddenly find yourself alone in this harsher world" (*Conversations* 168). In other words, from Ishiguro's perspective, the term orphan refers to someone who has little protec-

tion. In that case, how is the identity of an orphan constructed? According to Dan P. McAdams, "[the] *self* is many things, but *identity* is a life story" ("Identity and the Life Story" 187). McAdams argues that "identity takes the form of a story, complete with setting, scenes, characters, plot, and themes" (187). In every sense of the word, Christopher is an orphan, which is what he has repeatedly emphasized throughout his recounting of his life story. To be more exact, his identity as an orphan has been positioned by his memory of what he has experienced and his inability to forget the past. To use Linde's words, memory is "central to the concept of identity", and any analysis of identity is also "an examination of memory" (222). As a matter of fact, in his childhood memory, Christopher has no particular feeling about his father's disappearance. He confesses, "I do not remember much about the days immediately following my father's disappearance, other than that I was often so concerned about Akira" (*When We Were Orphans* 111). In the eyes of the younger Christopher, the disappearance of his father is not as serious as his failure to meet up with his playmate Akira the other day. When Christopher does meet up with Akira, they even start playing a game of rescuing his father. It is not until the moment when he is abandoned by Uncle Philip in Kiukiang Road and returns home to find his house empty and his mother missing that he finally comes to a fearful recognition of his identity—an orphan with no parents, no home, and no protection. For years, Christopher has been haunted by the memory of losing his parents and consequentially losing his protection in Shanghai, despite his reluctance to admit it. When he finishes writing about how he has become an orphan, Christopher cannot easily let this memory go, even though it is very late at night. He writes: "It is now late—a good hour has passed since I set down that last sentence—and yet I am, still at my desk. I suppose I have been turning over these recollections, some of which I had not brought to the fore of my mind for years" (131). After this, he decides to return to Shanghai to look for his parents.

To a large degree, the adult Christopher's investigation into the whereabouts of his parents in Shanghai can be seen as an effort to rid himself of his identity as an orphan. Ironically, as a recognized detective, Christopher successfully solves quite a few mysteries but fails to find his own missing parents. However, it is through his journey and search for his parents that readers gradually come to see why, in the title of the novel, Ishiguro deliberately employs the plural form "orphans" instead of the singular form. Adopting Ishiguro's suggested criterion of unprotectedness, one can also consider Diana and Sarah as orphans. Seen as an orphan, Diana is subject to her fate and remains unprotected in at least three senses. First, she is betrayed by her husband, who has abandoned his family in Shanghai and fled with his mistress to Hong Kong. Second, she is betrayed by her closest friend, Uncle Philip, who has assisted the warlord Wang Ku in taking her as his concubine to Hunan. Third, as Wang Ku's concubine, she not only surrenders to him in bed but also experiences the humiliation of being whipped by him in front of his dinner guests to cheer them up with this so-called game of "taming the white woman" (315). Similarly, Sarah loses her protection in Shanghai, too. She is first betrayed by her husband Sir Cecil in that he has not been devoted to his peacemaking mission, but has turned into an ignominious gambler and opium addict, and she is even humiliated by him in public. In addition, she is also betrayed by her close friend, Christopher, who is the last person that she could rely on. However, Christopher leaves her at the last moment, breaking his promise of escaping with her to Macau, leaving her at the mercy of a strange world.

If Ishiguro's criterion of unprotectedness is extended further, the word "orphans" in the novel's title should also include Chinese civilians, who have experienced not only the Japanese invasion but also the civil war between the communist party and Chiang Kai-shek's armed forces. The atrocity of the Japanese invasion is vividly depicted through the eyes of Christopher when he is at the site of the war in Chapei looking for his parents. Arriving at the house where Christopher assumed that his parents could have been possibly kidnapped, he was first and foremost looking for his parents. As he remembers, "when I saw the bodies, my terrible fear was that they were those of my mother and father—that the kidnappers had slaughtered them on account of our approach. I have to confess that my next emotion was one of great relief when I saw that the three corpses thrown about the room were all Chinese" (289). What he indicates is that these Chinese are slaughtered by Japanese invaders, which accounts for why the little Chinese girl turns to them for help with her dog. On the one hand, he is relieved by seeing that his parents are not among the corpses, on the other hand, he seems to be shocked by what has seen in front of him:

Near the back, over by a wall, was the body of a woman who might have been the young girl's mother. Possibly the blast had thrown her there and she was lying where she had landed. There was a shocked expression on her face. One arm had been torn off at the elbow, and she was now pointing the stump up to the sky, perhaps to indicate the direction from which the shell had come. A few yards away in the debris, an old lady was also gaping up at the hole in the ceiling. One side of her face was charred, but I could see no blood or any obvious mutilation. Finally, closest to where we were standing—he had been obscured at first by a fallen shelf—lay a boy slightly older than the little girl we had followed in. One of his legs had been blown off

at the hip, from where surprisingly long entrails, like the decorative tails of kite, had unfurled over the matting. (290)

In this part of Christopher's memory, he vividly recalls how the girl's family had met their unexpected death, which is evidenced in the shocked expression on the woman's face, an old lady's gaping up at the hole in the ceiling, and a boy's surprisingly long entrails unfurling over the matting. In addition, he painstakingly reveals the cruelty of the war by depicting in minute detail: the arm of a woman torn off at her elbow, one side of the old lady's face charred, and one of the boy's legs blown off at the hip. With all her family members dead and the house fallen, the little girl is completely unprotected at the very site of the war. She is turned into an orphan in every sense of the word, though she hardly knows what it means to her. In contrast to this scenario, the girl, who has just lost all family members, asks Christopher and Akira to save her wounded dog despite the fact that the Japanese soldiers were approaching. Regrettably, what happens next is beyond Christopher's control. When a troop of Japanese soldiers arrive at the house, Christopher is forced to leave the little Chinese girl to them. Despite his plea for the Japanese captain to take her to a safe place, he has not received an affirmative answer. Therefore, the fate of this little Chinese girl is left to the reader's imagination. Given what actually has happened historically, her future would not look optimistic. In my view, Christopher's recalling his experience of the war in Chapei more or less conveys an expectation that there would soon be more Chinese civilians losing their families and homes, owing to the massive invasion of China by the Japanese, which is also coupled with civil conflicts between the communist party and Chiang Kai-shek. Unprotected as they are in this chaotic world, these Chinese civilians can also be seen as orphans by Ishiguro's criterion. This is perhaps another reason why Ishiguro entitles the novel *When We Were Orphans*.

As Neumann affirms "[memory] and processes of remembering have always been an important, indeed a dominant, topic in literature" (333). Though *When We Were Orphans* begins and ends with Christopher's memory in England, most of the novel is about characters' experiences in and memories of Shanghai or Asia. For instance, Christopher had the best part of his childhood in Shanghai, and spent many years as an adult there looking for his parents. Diana organizes anti-opium campaigns in Shanghai, later is taken as Wang Ku's concubine in Hunan, spending her last few years in Hong Kong. Sarah assists her husband Sir Cecil with his peacemaking mission in Shanghai, and has finally escaped to Macau, travelling and spending the rest of life in Malaya, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Except for Christopher, all these characters end their lives in Asia. When Christopher eventually finds his mother in Hong Kong, he decides not to take her back to England, about which he explains, "She'd lived all her life in the East. I think she'd prefer to rest out there" (329).

Christopher's decision reminds us of the conversation between him and Akira in the International Settlement when he says, "Then, staring at a boat going by, he murmured: 'I don't ever want to live in Japan.' And because this was what I always said when he made this statement, I echoed: 'And I don't ever want to go to England'" (105). Christopher's childhood wish of never going back to England has been fulfilled by his decision to leave his mother in Hong Kong, while he finds London coming to be his "home." He also considers living with Jennifer and her husband in the future. About this ending, Ringrose argues that "One's first reaction might be to register this as a verbal irony" (182). According to Ringrose, on the one hand, he is surely deceiving himself that London has become his "home," since "he is a perpetual exile and orphan who has no home except childhood memories"; on the other, the ending suggests a gap that cannot be closed, which mainly refers to the gulf existing between "a resignation to living out one's life in certain places, and the need to be at home, fully and intuitively" (182). If Christopher finds London becoming his physical home and is going to live the rest of his days there, what will be perpetually on the move is his Asian memory as an orphan and about orphans, owing to the novel's publication and circulation. This in turn is related to his sense of mission, which is suggested in his confession: "our fate is to face the world as orphans, chasing through long years the shadows of vanished parents. There is nothing for it but to try and see through our missions to the end, as best we can, for until we do so, we will be permitted no calm" (*When We Were Orphans* 335-36).

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