

## **The stories of my grandfather and grandmother during World War II**

This story originates from my mother's side. The narratives above stem from conversations I had with my still-living grandmother (who is 91 years old, born in 1934) and my grandfather who passed away last year (at the age of 98, born in 1926). Our conversations were conducted in a relaxed manner, considering the advanced age of my family members, as they shared their recollections of experiences during World War II. In handling these stories, I also attempted to research historical events to substantiate the content of our conversations.

This story commences with my grandfather, born in 1926. However, it is worth noting that this age might not be entirely accurate, given that individuals in the past often refrained from disclosing their true age, possibly due to reasons related to schooling or employment. Additionally, in China, there was a lack of a comprehensive system for documenting births in the past. Before his passing, my grandfather expressed profound gratitude towards the Nationalist government for the opportunities he received, particularly in the field of education. He recounted being admitted to the wartime Canton Children's Care Institute for Education, essentially an orphanage, which commenced operations from early April to June 1939 at the Children's Care Institute in Northern Canton, Shiuchow.

In April 1939, Chu-fang Wu (吳菊芳) established a rescue team that ventured into conflict zones to save children in distress and prepare for accommodating those rescued. By the end of June 1939, after over two months of rescue operations, the team had saved over 900 children and orphans of soldiers in distress, approaching the funding limit allocated by the Central Relief Committee and the Ministry of Finance for the Canton Children's Care Institute. Wu Chu-Fang reported the situation to the Central Relief Committee, Ai-ling Soong (宋靄齡)及 Hsiang-hsi Kung (孔祥熙). As a result, the Central Relief Committee increased funding to support an additional one thousand children, with further funding approved for accommodating another one thousand children after reaching capacity, with funds allocated for operating expenses in proportion to the number of children.

Therefore, he repeatedly expressed gratitude towards the Nationalist government for providing him with educational opportunities, particularly mentioning Chu-Fang Wu and Ai-ling Soong. Later, he mentioned that as he had turned eighteen, he had to leave the Canton Children's Care Institute, which was also a significant moment in his life. According to him, he then joined the Nationalist army during the war to guard the armory. Later on, a book about the Canton Children's Care Institute was published in Hong Kong. I purchased a copy for him, although due to his advanced age, he could no longer read the text. Nonetheless, he cherished the book dearly, and when he passed away, we laid the book to rest with him, ensuring that this chapter of history remains forever intertwined with him.

Another story comes from my grandmother, who was born in Canton but moved to Hong Kong at around 4 years old. When she was 7 years old in 1941, she was living in the Mong Kok area. She

told me that she witnessed Japanese soldiers invading Hong Kong. She then recounted how, due to the scarcity of food in Hong Kong at that time and as part of the Japanese military policy in Hong Kong, she was deported to mainland China. She spent two months traveling to Canton, surviving on tree bark, roots, wild vegetables, and sometimes potatoes if they were lucky. This experience instilled in her a deep aversion to potatoes, as each time she encountered them, it would bring back memories of the hardships she faced during the war.

She also emphasized the dangers faced by girls during wartime, mentioning that Japanese soldiers often subjected girls to sexual violence. Therefore, she explained that girls at that time would deliberately make themselves look unattractive. Some would smear mud on their faces, while others would disguise themselves as boys to avoid attracting the attention of the Japanese soldiers.

She told me about a time when she and her sister were at their home in their hometown, and Japanese planes were bombing the area. For some reason, they did not seek shelter in the air raid shelter. Instead, they hid under the bed. Unfortunately, a bomb hit their house and pierced through the ceiling, landing right in the middle of their home, next to the bed where they were hiding. Fortunately, it turned out to be a dud bomb, and she and her sister were able to safely leave the house. Perhaps due to her experiences during World War II, she has always held negative feelings towards Japan. In recent years, during our conversations, she mentioned that from a young age, she felt a strong connection to the flag of the Republic of China and the image of Dr Yat-sen Sun. This sentiment may be a result of the values instilled in those who have lived through the trials of World War II.