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Live as Fireflies: The Narration of Traumas in Two Films

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In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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LACS: Chinese and Japanese

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The films *Grave of the Fireflies* and *To Live* are comparable in the aesthetic traditions of China and Japan through their portrayal of survival and the trauma induced by tragic events of the mid-twentieth century. *Grave of the Fireflies*(火垂るの墓), directed by Isao Takahata in 1988 and adapted from a novel of the same name by author Akiyuki Nosaka, is a Japanese war tragedy that tells the story of the survival of Seita and Setsuko after the firebombing air raids of Japan destroyed their city, Kobe. *To Live*(活着), directed by Zhang Yimou in 1994 and also adapted from a novel of the same name written by author Yu Hua, is a Chinese drama following the Xu family as they live through the ever-changing history of the early People's Republic of China. In both films, the resilience of the characters is tested as their countries go through periods of great change, and they are forced to do whatever it takes to survive. The films *Grave of the Fireflies* and *To Live* depict many victims' fear of death as the traumatic history of twentieth century China and Japan unfolds and forcibly shapes their surrounding society. The films concentrate on how the respective countries' citizens react as tragic events inflict trauma upon the survivors, and characters within each film portray this trauma through their actions and attitudes. I argue that these two films depict traumatic expressions of the Chinese and Japanese people to their respective historical tragedies through the abnormal behaviors and uncanny psychologies of the characters.

To fully understand the films and the trauma of the main characters, it is important to know the details of the historical events that took place during the setting of the films. During the 1940s, in the midst of World War II, air raids conducted by the Allied Forces wreaked havoc across Japan. These air raids decimated Japanese cities and left many Japanese citizens homeless or forced to relocate. Moreover, thousands of children became orphans and were left to survive

by their own means. Food became scarce as Japan struggled to recover from these tragic events, and the Japanese people were forced to begin rationing food. Survivors of the bombings who attempted to return to their own way of life experienced mass trauma because, after losing everything to the bombings, they were troubled with doubt and fear of what was to come next. They were left to rely on society for assistance, however, increasing societal hostility towards the victims of the bombings worsened their trauma and quality of life. Therefore, they were left with the choice of giving up or doing whatever it takes to survive. *Grave of the Fireflies* depicts the struggle Japanese victims faced through the portrayal of Seita, whose trauma constantly influences the decisions and thinking of his daily life as he fights to survive this historical tragedy.

The mid-Twentieth century in Chinese history features a substantial amount of societal change. Through the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese citizens lived their lives under the Republic of China; it wasn't until 1949 that China began to change due to the Chinese Civil War. The civil war, fought by the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party, resulted in the rise of communism, and the Chinese Communist Party came into power. Then, under Chairman Mao Zhedong in the 1950s, China went through what is known as the Great Leap Forward, which considerably altered every day Chinese life and required residents to collectively work to better China. The Great Leap Forward was a tragic era where Chinese citizens were expected to work hard to survive, and it resulted in many people dying because they failed to adapt to the changing times. By the 1960s, a new revolution, The Cultural Revolution, arose and lasted until the late 1970s; during this revolution, communist ideologies revitalized and sought the purging of capitalist and traditional Chinese ideologies, which were deemed as counter-revolutionists and persecuted.

These changing times in China were extremely traumatic for citizens and completely changed their way of life. The revolutionary ideologies forced citizens to forget their history of Chinese traditions in order to adapt to a new status quo. Many people feared what would happen if they did not adapt and were faced with trauma as they reluctantly changed their ways for the sake of their own survival. The loss of their own historical memory brought about fear for their future and left them to question the methods used for their survival. The Chinese people have a rich culture and history which has fostered a strong collective identity among them. However, the major changes of The Cultural Revolution caused people to move forward with feelings of uneasiness and uncertainty because their identity was forcibly forgotten. The film *To Live* depicts Fugui's struggle with his trauma as he and his family endure through the turbulent period of Chinese history.

Grave of the Fireflies tells the journey of Seita, a young teenager, and his younger sister Setsuko as they struggle to survive after their home and family were lost during the air raids of Japan. After his town, Kobe, was bombed and his mother was killed, Seita was left to take care of his younger sister. The siblings left town to stay with a relative but had trouble integrating into their relative's family because their age did not allow them to be able to contribute to the family. Rising tensions with their extended family cut their stay short, and the siblings decided to leave and live together in an old air raid shelter. While in the shelter, they struggled with malnourishment due to a lack of resources and isolation from society. During this time Seita does as much as he can to ensure the survival of himself and his sister, but ultimately, they both die from malnourishment.

After the bombings, Seita and Setsuko were filled with trauma from the events that transpired and consequently changed how they acted and behaved. They lost everything: their

mother, house, and almost all their personal belongings. The siblings begin to develop trauma, which causes them to frequently question how they can survive together. Their desperation to live forces them to realize that they must make sacrifices in order to prolong their lives. In dealing with the death of their mother, the siblings begin to recognize that they only have each other as a family, which causes them to develop trauma in familial ties. When the siblings arrive at the home of their aunt, there is not a strong familial tie between the siblings and their extended family. The lack of a familial bond intensifies the trauma felt by the siblings as their feelings of isolation and helplessness increase. These two aspects of the children's trauma, no familial ties and desperation to live, play a major factor in their survival through the course of the film. While it may be believed that their response is "fight or flight," their response should be considered as a culmination of their trauma that causes the siblings do whatever it takes to maintain their familial ties between each other in the face of peril. Their trauma is a defining feature of their behavior and plays a crucial part in explaining their actions.

Throughout the course of the film, the abnormal reaction to tragedy is a key indicator of traumatic expression and clearly captures how the children feel in various situations. This is most clearly shown in the scenes in which the children continue to play when they go to the ocean or outside of the old bunker. While the playing of children is not often viewed as an abnormal behavior, when considered in the context of the children's past, their actions are clear responses to their trauma. In the scenes of Setsuko playing alone or with her brother, her refusal to fully acknowledge her present situation shows an unwillingness to accept the traumatic events that have reshaped her life. Setsuko's reactive attempt to revitalize her lost childhood is not only a subconscious response for her to protect herself from further trauma but is also the only response she is capable of at her age. Seita, on the other hand, reacts to trauma differently from his sister.

Seita takes it upon himself to protect himself and his sister, even if it requires him to make choices that go against his principles. Seita's sudden desire to be a caretaker for his sister is also an abnormal response, since his aunt was willing to take care of them, despite their difficult relationship. Seita chooses instead to abandon his childhood to assume the role of caretaker for his sister, as he believes that only he can truly care for Setsuko. It is important to recognize the children's reactions because they are portrayals of their emotional states throughout the course of the story. By observing the actions of the characters, specifically Seita and Setsuko, as they become more "abnormal" to that of what they originally were, viewers can gauge the impact of the trauma inflicted by the bombings and the mother's death as well as the affect it has had on the siblings' lives. In the death scene of Setsuko, as her life slips away, she offers her brother a rice ball, which is in fact a ball of mud; her delusion of a normal life with normal food serves as a protective barrier concealing her present reality. Setsuko's final actions move Seita to tears as he realizes that there is nothing he can do to save himself and his sister from the reality they are in and that there will not be a happy ending for him and Setsuko.

Further emphasizing the characters' traumatic story is the film's refusal to depict a happy ending. The film's ending, which is in fact the first scene, shows Seita dead in an abandoned train station, among other dead orphans, holding a container with bone fragments of his sister. This clearly shows from the beginning that there is no happy ending for the siblings, and the film's plot depicts the tragic story of the siblings. The sibling's deaths, both due to malnourishment, serve as a reminder that their story is no different from others who suffered similar experiences from this tragedy. Despite the siblings' efforts to fight their trauma and endure the tragedies they went through, they were not able to have a happy ending; that itself is another form of a traumatic expression of historical tragedy. A happy ending would imply a

resolution to trauma, so, therefore, the refusal to allow for a happy ending reminds viewers that trauma follows people throughout their lives and will not simply go away. Seita and Setsuko's actions that lead to their deaths depict that their trauma followed them throughout their lives, making a happy ending for the siblings unjustified.

The sacrificing of moral and ethical principles, specifically portrayed through Seita, further articulates the impact that trauma had on their lives. As Seita perseveres through tragedy and his survival is tested, his trauma affects his decision making and causes his ethical principles to be challenged and questioned. In the film, after the siblings leave their aunt's house to live on their own, their survival begins to be tested. After leaving their aunt's house with some money, food, and supplies, they were initially fine; however, as their supplies dwindled, Seita began to question what is ethically right or wrong in doing what it takes to survive. When food became scarce, Seita realized that their survival was more important than the principles that had been set forth by society. This is first seen when Seita and Setsuko are walking back to their home and suddenly dive under the cover of crops in order to escape the view of the enemy fighter plane. Under these crops, Seita looks at the tomatoes, and without thinking about the consequences of stealing food during wartime, he begins to eat them. While they know it is wrong to steal the tomatoes, their desire to survive justifies their actions. Previously, Seita had tried to obtain their food through buying and trading, but this could only provide for them for so long because Seita's young age deemed him unfit to work and he lacked the proper knowledge of where to ethically buy and obtain food. Their situation almost completely isolates them from the world, so the only option they had left was to steal. While theft goes against society, they need to steal food in order to survive, so, therefore, it is justifiable. Seita grew up in a society that taught him that one must follow the rules to survive, but his current situation clearly shows these principles taught to him

are not always right. Had he not chosen to give up on his principles, his survival would not be guaranteed, so the exigencies of his survival made it necessary to steal food. This further emphasizes the concept of an abnormal reaction to tragedy, portrayed through Seita's transgression against society and the community he is in. A normal reaction, such as continuing to follow the rules, effectively signals an acceptance of tragedy and a refusal to fight against and acknowledge trauma as if there is no change to their life. Therefore, Seita directly going against societal ways depicts an abnormal reaction to his trauma, which actively follows him and influences the decisions he makes.

As Seita continues to sacrifice ethical and moral principles, the impacts of the trauma he experiences begin to affect his decisions and slowly change his subconscious, subjective view of what is important in his life. Through constant hardships, his subconscious slowly begins to shift away from obedience within society to doing whatever he wants, with the justification that everything he is doing is to ensure his survival. The subconscious shift in values changes not only how he views society but also how he views his family, as he begins to prioritize himself over his sister. This can be seen during the period of Seita's looting, in which his health remains stable and he has the strength to be on the move to find what he needs to survive. However, his sister continues to become more malnourished as she solely relies on her brother providing food. While Seita can eat through the day and smile when he finds food to bring back, Setsuko must wait for Seita to bring her food. Seita's choice to go out rather than care for his sister highlights the blurry sense of morality that can occur when there is a strong precedent for survival. Familial obligation would influence Seita to stay and help his dying sister, but the need for survival makes him go against his morals in order to maintain his own survival and prolong his sister's life. However, on the day of her death, Seita tries to feed Setsuko and notices that she has been

chewing on marbles and hallucinating that they are candy. Setsuko then offers her brother a rice ball, which is actually a rock, and Seita finally realizes the extent of her condition. Seita had understated her dying condition in order to prevent more traumatic thoughts from occurring and ensure their survival. While it was morally wrong for Seita to do this, it was an unconscious, moral sacrifice of self-preservation meant to keep him motivated. It is clear that Seita doesn't even realize the change in his self-preservation, as the justification for all his actions are his sister's and his own survival. Seita's altered subconscious deepened his trauma because he has again survived tragedy at the expense of a family member. The death of Setsuko provokes Seita's tragic past and his inability to escape the trauma leads to his eventual death.

While Seita and Setsuko were staying with their aunt, she would frequently talk about how the children are not trying to help restore Japan unlike many of the Japanese people. Seita's cousin, who is actively working to help Japan, receives favorable treatment from their aunt because she considers their cousin a functioning member of society. Their aunt is a representation of societal opinion of the time. Societal consciousness acts as another mechanism of historical tragedy expression because the depiction of community values changing shows the influence of trauma on societal thought and action. As Japan attempts to recover from the bombings, those who are homeless or do not contribute to the revival of Japan are looked down upon, and this notion is reflected through their aunt's disapproval of them. Society has changed their own principles and deemed those who help better society to be right and those who do not to be in the wrong. When Seita and Setsuko were living in the old bomb shelter, children in the community would stumble upon the siblings' home and begin to mock and damage it. Unlike Seita and Setsuko, who fight for survival every day, these children do not struggle to survive and are able to run about and play; therefore, they see and respond to Seita and Setsuko as though the

siblings are lower people than they are, despite them all being the same age,. This shows that even the children have been molded into this new societal viewpoint. In the last instance of societal representation, a farmer catches Seita stealing and instead of showing sympathy for his situation, the farmer beats Seita and tries to have him arrested. In the farmer's eyes, Seita does not contribute to society and should be punished for working against societal progress since his age inhibits his ability to actively help restore Japan. Society has sacrificed its old moral principles in place of a new system that has been shaped by the tragedy of the bombings. In the many instances where the siblings interact with members of society, their interactions bring to light the two different Japanese societies: the society with trauma and the one without it.

As society has set aside their old values of morality and ethics, a form of indifference to the horrific trauma faced by victims has arisen which can be seen through the characters' representation of the change in societal consciousness. In her paper, Wendy Goldberg (2008) discusses the effect of indifference to trauma directed at those who have experienced and gone through tragedy versus those who have not. She explains, "Throughout the film, people's casual reactions, even indifference, to the devastation of the war reminds us that Seita and Setsuko's story is only one of many tragedies" (47). As seen in the early scenes of the film, those who have been through tragedy share similar trauma and hold each other in the same regard. However, many of the people who have not been through the horrific tragedy do not sympathize or understand their situation. This indifference to trauma is most clearly shown through Seita and Setsuko's aunt whose main concern is with the children's hesitancy to contribute towards her family and survival, despite the fact that Seita and Setsuko lost nearly everything they have, including their own mother. Their aunt uses "the language of nationalism to cover her selfishness"(45) in an effort to get the siblings to make sacrifices, like selling their mother's

kimono, for resources. Goldberg details how the aunt is taking advantage of the societal shift in nationalist consciousness to force the children into sacrificing their family belongings in order to get more money to buy rations. Their aunt does not care for the trauma that the siblings have experienced and shows her indifference to trauma by only caring about obtaining more food for her survival rather than maintaining familial bonds. The dichotomy between the aunt and children can be broadened to a societal level to reveal how society uses a veil of nationalist speak to promote selfish survivalism and indifference to those who have experienced trauma.

Traumatic expression can also be shown through the ways in which characters remember the past and their attitudes towards it, and this method of representation is most prevalent in the scenes that portray the siblings remembering their mother and coping with the memory of her. Family is an extremely important concept within Japanese society, and familial ties to generational lineage have shaped the way society behaves and what traditions they value. Therefore, the sacrifice of familial ties represents traumatic expression through an idiosyncratic way of remembering the past. The beginning of Seita's sacrifice of familial bond can be attributed to his trauma resulting from the air raids. After the death of their mother, Seita is left with the task of taking care of protecting his sister. Seita's first decision was to hide the death of their mother from Setsuko and only tell her she is away at a hospital. Hiding the death of their mother from Setsuko was the right thing to do because Setsuko has been through too much trauma for her young age. Instances of hiding family deaths break apart the familial bonds holding them together and prioritizes the present over memories of the past. Later, when the siblings are at their aunt's house, their aunt suggests the children should sell their mother's kimono to be able to buy more food. However, kimonos are considered important family heirlooms in Japanese society, so the thought of selling it creates distress for the siblings as

selling their mother's goods would sacrifice and erase her memory. Without even a having proper burial, Seita is asked to rid all memories of his mother in order to guarantee his and Setsuko's survival, and this sacrifice of family memories highlights the severity of one's self-preservation in situations of survival. A question of whether or not survival can be achieved without compromising the value of tradition is brought to light, but Seita's actions reveal the answer. As their aunt continues to belittle the siblings for not contributing to society, tensions within the household increase; therefore, Seita decides it is in his and Setsuko's best interest to cut ties with their aunt and live on their own. In times of tragedy in Japanese society, it is important for Japanese families to come together and support one another, so Seita cutting ties with his family represents that his and Setsuko's own needs for survival are more important than maintaining family ties with his aunt. Once again, this illustrates that in times of tragedy, when one's decisions are under the influence of a burdening trauma, survival has a stronger precedent than familial ties.

Within *Grave of the Fireflies*, many different techniques of representation are used to express trauma and articulate historical tragedy. The story of Seita and Setsuko depicts the trauma faced by two children who were orphaned from the bombings on Japan and portrays how they live through tragedy and address their trauma throughout their perseverance to survive. Through their abnormal reaction to tragedy as well as their abandonment of familial ties and principles, the children fully exhibit the trauma that follows and shapes their lives. For Seita and Setsuko, their trauma is based on their inability to change their life of hardship and isolation. Because their age inhibits their ability to recover from their situation, they are forced to come face to face with their traumas and ultimately succumb to the adverse conditions of their situation.

To Live follows the story of Fugui and his family as they endure the revolutionary changes affecting Chinese society and way of life. The film starts in the 1940s, where Fugui, an addicted gambler, loses his family's estate and is left with nothing but a box of puppets, which he uses to form a shadow puppet troop. One day after a shadow puppet performance, he and his group are confronted and forced to fight for the Kuomintang in the Chinese Civil War against the Communists. When the Kuomintang are defeated, Fugui and his partner, Chunsheng, are captured by the communists, and in order to survive, they perform the puppet routine for the soldiers. When Fugui is finally able to return home, he finds his wife, Jiazhen, and his children, Youqing and Fengxia, delivering water to make ends meet and survive in the changing period. The story's setting then advances years into the future to the Great Leap Forward, where the Xu family has continued to deliver water and host shadow puppet performances and exemplify model comrades in their communist commune in order to endure through the time. However, tragedy befalls the family one day when, after falling asleep from exhaustion at work, Youqing is killed by a wall collapsing onto him. The death of Youqing fosters Fugui realization that being a model citizen does not ensure their survival. The setting then moves a few years into the future to the Cultural Revolution, and at this point the Xu family continues to be model comrades and their daughter, Fengxia, gets married and becomes pregnant. However, during the Cultural Revolution, countless scholars and doctors are imprisoned and persecuted as counter revolutionaries, so the Xu family undergoes another tragedy as Fengxia dies in childbirth because her doctors were still students and not qualified to deal with her postpartum hemorrhage. The final scene shows time has advanced again and portrays Fugui and Jiazhen, along with their son-in-law and grandson, visiting the graves of their deceased children. As the family leaves, Fugui, despite all the personal hardships and tragedies in his life, expresses optimism that his

grandson's life "will get better and better" as society begin to positively change and move forward.

Historical trauma within *To Live* plays a critical role for Fugui and shapes how he functions within society. The Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution forced the Chinese people into a life of fear and the rigid following of the status quo. Fugui, developing trauma out of fear for his and his family's life, dealt with his trauma by abiding by the rules. His trauma manifested through a life of subservience to such rules, and often his chosen way of life caused a strain in his family relationship. For Fugui, the only way to deal with trauma was to obey the people in power, and while he did personally struggle with the actions and decisions he made, those choices were necessary to prevent further trauma. His trauma changed his perception of what is best for him and his family, as he begins to prioritize what is best for society over what is best for his family. While Fugui finds other justifications for his change in reasonings, it is clear that his choices have greatly affected his way of life and the actions he takes as he endures through the difficult time period. In "To Live: The Survival Philosophy of the Traumatized," Zhaohui Xiong(2008) brings forth an idea of death anxiety and how the violence of modern history creates a traumatic experience. This idea helps to better understand Fugui's actions and serves as an explanation for his subservience and fear of putting himself or family in the face of punishment. Xiong describes death anxiety as the "breaking down of any meaningful connection between the individual's perception and political movements," (207) which clarifies how Fugui's fear of death prevents him from being able to fully join society and be an active member. Though Fugui currently participates within society, his motives are out of fear of what would happen if he does not obey rather than out of support and belief in the new ways of society. This notion is exemplified through scenes in which Fugui displays loyalty to the

Communist party because his actions are intended to help his family blend in, rather than to show unwavering support for the party. Xiong explains how Fugui's death anxiety is the mechanism that leads him to become completely subservient to the Communist Party. While I do believe this idea is prevalent and partially drives Fugui's actions, I also believe his actions stem from an inability to fight against the changing society and the fear of being labeled as a disobedient, rebellious citizen. The inability to fight back is best described in "Illuminations From The Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China," in which author Ban Wang (2005) writes, "The revolutionaries and nationalists tend not to relate their history to tragedy. Instead, in their eyes the successful revolution becomes epic, not tragedy. The sense of tragedy as rooted in cultural crisis and its denial via an epic, redemptive narrative may be said to mark the two divergent tendencies in historical narrative in modern China" (59). History does not leave everyone with an epic feeling of triumph, rather it leaves some with an engrained sense of trauma. This notion is portrayed through Fugui who is denied of the liberty that is needed to go against societal ways for his own benefit. Shown through the tragic death of his children, Fugui felt as if he failed his family because of his inability to prevent the conditions that lead to their deaths as well as his inability to express outrage regarding their unjust deaths. Complementing Wang's analysis, Fugui's experience is not formed by the hardships faced during The Great Leap Forward and The Cultural Revolution, but rather it is rooted in the death of his children and how his losses impacted his way of life. Therefore, Fugui's inability to fight or revolutionize against society allows tragedy to continue to play a major role within Fugui's life and further amplifies his trauma.

Similar to the portrayal of tragedy and trauma within *Grave of the Fireflies*, Director Zhang Yimou utilizes character's abnormal reaction to tragedy to express trauma within *To Live*.

The constant abnormal reactions of the characters throughout the film emphasize the impact trauma has had on their lives. As constant tragedy befalls Fugui, his abnormal reactions are part of what helps him survive and live through these events. Fugui was once a rich, prideful man, but after losing everything his outlook on life dramatically changed and causes him to prioritize the safety of his and his family's life in any situation. In instances where Fugui's safety is endangered by the occurring situations, his reaction is subservience to the rules and a willingness to do whatever it takes for his family to be seen in a good light. This reaction is abnormal for Fugui, who was once prideful in his actions, but he is now willing to completely put his pride aside to maintain his safety. Fugui justifies his abnormal reactions as being completely normal and necessary for their continued survival, so he does not seek to jeopardize his status by challenging or going against society. Within the story, any aspect of revolution against society is punished, and this notion explains Fugui's subservience to the revolution and intensifies the trauma and emotional pain he felt.

Another directorial technique used within the film, similar to *Grave of the Fireflies*, is the distinct omission of a happy ending. The ending of the film shows Fugui and Jiazhen visiting their children's graves with their grandchild, Mantou, and son-in-law. The visiting of the graves portrays to the audience that this is not a happy ending because though the difficult times are over, the aftereffects are still present. Honoring the memory of their dead children continues to evoke the trauma they felt during the tragedy of their deaths. However, because the book's ending shows only Fugui surviving, the movie's ending can be interpreted by some as a happy ending relative to the life Fugui live has lived. In the scene where Fugui and Mantou are discussing the future, Fugui's positive and hopeful comments of Mantou's future can also be seen as reminder of the hardships Fugui faced through his own life. The ability to see his

grandson have a good life came at the expense of Fugui having a tragic life, which represents the film's refusal to have a happy ending for Fugui. These various aspects of directorial techniques help to articulate the various trauma and hardships faced by the characters as they endure through historical tragedy.

Similar to *Grave of the Fireflies*, trauma is also articulated through the sacrifice of moral and ethical principles, because historical tragedies experienced during The Great Leap Forward and The Cultural Revolution have molded people's interactions within society. As society begins to adapt to the new time period, individual moral principles are beginning to be set aside which creates a divide between people. This is clearly shown in the scene where the family is eating in the commune dining hall. When Youqing learns of his sister being bullied, he walks over to the bully and dumps a bowl of noodles over the bully's head. Youqing's behavior shows independence and a willingness to defend his family's honor, however Fugui becomes worried Youqing and the rest of the Xu family will be viewed as rebelling against the community and that they will, consequently, be punished. Fugui immediately scolds his son and takes precautions to not be viewed in a bad light by others in the commune. This instance shows Fugui's failure to fight against society by portraying a prioritization of community over family. Fugui's actions depict how his moral principles favor following rules and setting aside individual pride rather than defending his family's honor and doing what is right for his son and daughter. The sacrifice of one's own pride in favor of societal security is a key indicator of what it means to give up one's morals. The father and the son act as counterpoints because Youqing's actions are of those who have not sacrificed their moral principles by giving into societal subservience, while Fugui has given into subservience. When Jiazhen gets mad at Fugui's behavior after the event takes place, Fugui justifies his actions by claiming he is doing what it takes to ensure their

survival. Though Fugui's decisions are to ensure their family can maintain its position in the community rather than the defense in his family's honor, which is more closely related with Chinese traditional value, this creates a divide within the Xu family. This situation illustrates how historical trauma can be expressed and explained through a character's decisions. Fugui's subservience to the new rules exemplifies his shift in his principles that results from fear for what would happen if he does not follow them. The consequences of disobedience can be seen through the death of Long'er, the man who won Fugui's house from him through gambling, who was killed because of his selfishness and "revolutionist" mindset of individuality. Fugui witnessed his execution and perceived the consequences of a failure to adapt to the status quo. This only intensifies his trauma because it reinforces the reality of Fugui's inability to fight back against society in seeing how Long'er had fought back and was killed. As hardships continue to impact Chinese society, the Xu's family allows society to control their actions and behavior, making it harder to escape their deepening trauma. Fugui's sacrifice of his moral principles illustrates his uncanny psychological shift in values which stemmed from his own trauma and fear for what will happen to him and his family.

As Fugui and his family are affected by historical tragedy, their ethical principles are compromised in order to endure the pain caused by the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, and Fugui's reaction to Youqing's death exemplifies this notion. Because of his fatigue from being overworked, Youqing fell asleep under a wall at work and later died after a government official drove a car into the wall causing it to collapse on Youqing. Fugui and Jiazhen were devastated upon hearing the news of their son's death, but they were not allowed to express their outrage when they got to the site of the accident because a government official was behind Youqing's death; therefore, their outrage would be seen as selfish and inappropriate acts

of disobedience. After only hearing the news of her son's death, Jiazhen began sobbing, so Fugui, being the first to see his son, knew letting his wife see him would cause her too much pain. As bystanders comforted the family through their pain, they also advised the Xu family to accept Youqing's death and not speak out against the government official. The pain of losing their son was further augmented by their inability to express outrage towards the person who was responsible. Normally, it would be a reasonable reaction to condemn the wrongdoer's actions and attempt to get retribution for the wrongdoing, but the systems put in place for society deemed it wrong to criticize authority. The Xu family was forced to set aside their ethical principles that they know to be right and endure the pain of losing their son and the frustration of not being able to do anything. This scene reexplores the film's recurring theme of trauma stemming from the inability to fight against society. The inability to fight back forces individuals to endure through pain in confidence, which induces further trauma on the individuals. Fighting back against the death of Youqing would help ease the pain and provide closure for the family, but because they were not able to, the Xu family experienced a lasting pain that caused it to take years for Jiazhen to accept the death of her son.

The second major death of the film, the death of Fengxia, further exemplifies the trauma that stems from an inability to fight back, as the Xu family is powerless in preventing the death of another child. The death of Fengxia was largely due to the failure of society and the inadequacy its new ideological views promoted. When Fengxia was admitted into the hospital to give birth to her son, all of the doctors had been replaced by medical students because the Cultural Revolution called for the removal the educated people from positions of power and encouraged the youth to take their place. The present society forces Fugui to allow the current change to come into place and look past the flaws in what is happening. However, because Fugui

was still worried and wanting to keep his daughter safe, he devised a plan to keep an imprisoned doctor nearby in order to help in case something went wrong. This was a risky plan because doctors were deemed as “counter-revolutionaries” during this time, so Fugui risked being imprisoned if he was caught harboring the doctor for personal needs. In an effort to protect his daughter, Fugui tries to fight against society and hold true to his principles. However, during the delivery the experienced doctor was incapacitated from overeating because he was being starved in the place he was imprisoned prior. Thus, when medical complications arose and the medical students were not able to stop the post-partum hemorrhaging, the family was left to watch Fengxia die. The Xu family was once again unable to save another child from death due to the system put in place by society. While Youqing’s death caused pain due to an inability to express outrage, the death of Fengxia caused pain because of the family’s powerlessness in preventing the failures of society from causing problems. In both cases, the failure to fight against society and the hurtful systems put in place induce trauma upon the Xu family. Fugui and Jiazhen are unable to change or stop the harmful societal principles from impacting their lives, and they are expected to endure through their pain and accept the tragedies happening in their lives without question. While none of the actions of society are right, citizens are compelled to sacrifice their own ethical principles to align with the expectations that society has put into place.

The directorial techniques used within *To Live* were able to articulate and explain the trauma felt by the characters during the time. Most clearly shown in the film is the theme of powerlessness as a result of an inability to fight against society, which greatly shaped the actions and behavior of Fugui and his family. The Xu family’s inability to fight back after the deaths of their two children resulted in them not being able to find closure for their deaths, which only intensified their trauma and pain. The inability to fight back also shaped the Fugui’s attitude

throughout the film and helps to show how the new principles of China's revolutions shaped actions and expectations within society. The abnormal reactions of the characters throughout the film also help depict the characters' psychological states as traumatic event unfold. The extreme reaction to tragedy shows not only the pain they felt over the tragic events but also shows the pain they experience knowing that they will not be able to be outraged over it. The third major technique, the refusal of a happy ending, is a reminder of the overall tragedy of the story and how the events within China impacted real families, whose pain continued to prevail long after the revolutions ended. While it does end on a positive outlook for the future, it also reminds viewers of the traumatic experiences that Fugui and Jiazhen endured to get to that point. It is through these various techniques in which the trauma is portrayed within the film in order to facilitate a better understanding of the tragedy and trauma of historical events for viewers.

To Live and *Grave of the Fireflies* illustrate the ways in which trauma can stem from historical tragedy by telling the stories of individuals who endured Japanese and Chinese tragedies. Through the aesthetic techniques of both directors, viewers can understand trauma through the characters' 'abnormal reactions, the narratives' lack of a happy ending, as well as the moral compromises made in order to endure through tough times. As the characters persevered through their respective traumatic situations, their actions and attitudes were often justified by the necessity of survival. While these stories are unique in their own right, they, to a large extent, represent the collective consciousness from all the people who experienced the tragedies of these times. As orphans struggling to survive, Seita and Setsuko represent the tragic consequences of the air raids that targeted Japan, and the Xu family represents the powerlessness of Chinese peasants during China's historical tragedy of the twentieth century. The traumatic expressions conveyed through the films clearly show the repercussions that the historical events within Japan

and China had on society and individuals at the time, and they illustrate how the aftereffects of these tragedies persisted into the future and are now innate in the national identification of these two countries.

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