

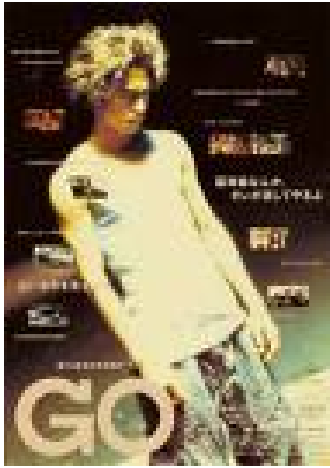


# The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus

n-depth critical analysis of the forces shaping the Asia-Pacific...and the world.

## Zainichi Recognitions: Japan's Korean Residents' Ideology and Its Discontents

John Lie



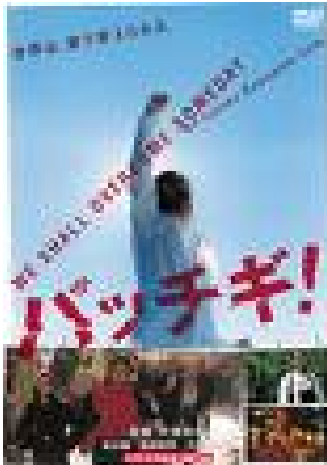
**Go: Kaneshiro Kazuki's best-selling novel was made into an award-winning film, providing a fresh image of Zainichi**

of return, the obstacle of naturalization, and the naturalness of nationalism made other solutions politically infeasible or conceptually anomalous. Zainichi identity arose as the Zainichi population transcended the division of the homeland and the binary of Korea and Japan.

In Kaneshiro Kazuki's *Go* (2000), the protagonist, Sugihara, opens the novel with a description of his communist, North Korean father, the Japanese colonization of Korea, and the family's desire to visit Hawaii—a vacation that requires switching their nationality from North Korean to South Korean (and shifting their membership from North Korea-affiliated Soren to South Korea-affiliated Mindan). The stuff of the novel's first five pages has been recounted countless times by Japanese and Zainichi writers, but no one would have imagined that it would make a best-selling novel. Reciting Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A."—though observing that Springsteen grew up in a poor family whereas his family is well-off—Sugihara sings his own refrain of "Born in Japan." At once erudite and violent, he is highly individualistic and antiauthoritarian; he is the proverbial nail that should have been hammered in. In the 1960s and 1970s, Zainichi was all seriousness and suffering: as the pejorative slang would have put it, "dark" [*kurai*]. The unbearable burden of Zainichi being traumatized, Zainichi life-course and discourse. Instead, Kaneshiro's prose and protagonist exemplify a striking mode of being cool [*kakkoii*] in contemporary Japanese culture.

### Who Am I?

Kaneshiro's book—made a year later into an acclaimed film—capped decades of Zainichi ethnic ferment in which the question of identity was paramount. Inevitably one reflects at times on existential and ontological questions: "Who am I?" "Where do I come from?" "Where am I going?" Such questions are, as I argued in *Modern Peoplehood* (2004), essentially irresolvable. Only the dead may aspire to definitiveness, but since the deceased cannot represent themselves, even that aspiration is foreclosed. Any adequate narrative of a life, moreover, demands nothing less than a Victorian triple-decker (and what truly matters often eludes even the longest memoirs or biographies), yet most readers, most of the time, require brevity: *vita longa, ars brevis*. That questions of identity may be irresolvable may merely make them all the more urgent, and they are especially pressing for people whose place in society is challenged and whose belonging is unsettled. The soul frets in the shadow as it struggles to recognize itself and to be recognized by others. The self invokes collective categories and public discourses even if its ultimate task is to express the private. In the age of modern peoplehood—when membership in an ethnonational group is at once legally mandated and emotionally indispensable—it is not surprising that extant nations should be the principal predicates of identity claims. For Zainichi, it left three plausible identity possibilities in the postwar period: North Korean, South Korean, or Japanese. The implausibility



**Pacchigi: recapturing in film the brighter moments of the Zainichi decades of disrecognition**

The inevitable instability and complexity of identity paradoxically generate expressions of ethnic fundamentalism: the notion that one's ethnic background should disclose profound and meaningful truths about oneself. It would be bizarre to believe that one's peoplehood background was irrelevant; the country, the people, and the life produced the self for which any expression cannot possibly expunge them. The condition of disrecognition tempts the disrecognized to reverse the imputed, indubitably pejorative attributes and to crystallize them as the memory of the struggle itself and the essentialist template of recognition. What remains in the first instance is the recollected and rehearsed history of disrecognition and the struggle for emancipation. Furthermore, just as Japanese disrecognition of Koreans portrayed them in the general, the Korean recognition of themselves capture themselves in the general, though the substantive judgments are antipodal. Thus, some Zainichi would articulate a short litany of essential Zainichi-ness, such as the history of enforced migration and the reality of discrimination, which constitute what I call Zainichi ideology: the flip side of Japanese disrecognition and a generalized solution to the question of Zainichi identity.

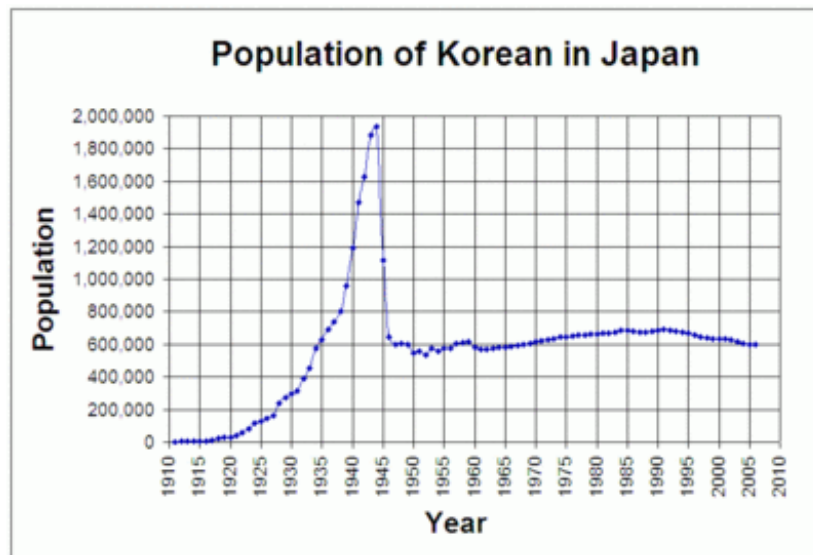
The quest for a simple and fixed notion—the desire for definitiveness and certitude—is no less common among social scientists. Consider the straitjacket of identity offered in the most elaborate Anglophone social-scientific work on Zainichi: De Vos and Lee claim that Koreans in Japan "tend to feel more conflict about committing themselves to any purpose," but several pages earlier they assert that "Koreans in Japan have responded to their present conditions by an ethnic consolidation not dissimilar . . . to . . . the black American population." Elsewhere they write: "The maintenance of Korean identity invariably implies some conflict over assumption or avoidance of responsibility and guilt." This would apply to virtually any group. Beyond contradictory assertions and banal generalizations, they note that "the family relationships themselves become bonds of aggressive displacement, of mute frustration, and of inescapable ignominy. The family is not a haven but a place of alienation." One may quote the poet Philip Larkin—"They fuck you up, your mum and dad. / They may not mean to, but they do"—as a reminder that family alienation is commonplace, but De Vos and Lee blithely assert its specific attribution to Zainichi.

The condition of possibility of Zainichi identity was the transcendence of the two received binaries: the stark choice between repatriation (exile) or naturalization (assimilation), and the conflicting allegiances to North and South. That is, ethnic Koreans in Japan regarded Japan as home, rather than as a place of exile, and tended to conceive of themselves as a coherent entity.

As a form of diasporic nationalism, Zainichi ideology fractured precisely at the point of its crystallization.

### Discriminated Fingers and Lost Names

By the early 1980s Zainichi had become a "problem" that was no longer ignored outright or discussed *sotto voce*. As books and articles on Zainichi proliferated, the anti-fingerprinting (or fingerprinting refusal) movement sought to transform the gaze of disrecognition to that of recognition. Recognition entailed not only distinction—the categorical autonomy of Zainichi from Japanese and Koreans—but also connection—the solidarity of diasporic Koreans in



### Zainichi population, 1910-present. Figures exclude Korean residents who became naturalized Japanese citizens

Japan. That is, recognition at once cleaved Zainichi from Korea and Japan (repatriation or naturalization) and allowed Zainichi to cleave together. Zainichi movements and discourses transformed the population into a peoplehood identity that was also acknowledged and accepted by Japanese people.

The anti-fingerprinting movement began with a “one-man rebellion” by the Zainichi Tokyo resident Han Chongsok in September 1980. The narrow contention was that forced fingerprinting [*shimon onatsu*] during alien registration was a violation of human rights and dignity. The wider concern was the systematic discrimination against Zainichi and other non-ethnic Japanese people in Japan. If Pak Chongsok’s suit against employment discrimination by Hitachi had opened the possibility of legal struggles to combat disrecognition, then the anti-fingerprinting movement denoted its popular political realization.

For Zainichi and other long-term foreign residents in Japan, a passport was necessary to navigate life within Japan: the Certificate of Alien Registration [*gaitosho*]. Often reviled as “dog tags,” Zainichi noncompliance frequently led to harassment and even arrest by police officers. As one Zainichi man told me in the mid-1980s: “One thing I hate most about being Zainichi is the fear of police harassment. If I forget my ‘dog tag,’ then I am a goner [*hotoke*, or Buddha].” In a scatological scene in Yan Sogiru’s *Takushu kyosokyoku* [Taxi rhapsody, 1981], a barroom brawl ends in a police arrest. After finding two ethnic Koreans without their certificates, police officers threaten them with arrest and deportation. One of the Zainichi men ponders: “The memory, attentiveness, and behavior themselves of Zainichi are already seen as criminal.” The other merely daubs his fresh defecation over all the police files: Zainichi shit over bureaucratic bullshit.

The certificate was a reminder at once of Zainichi criminality and illegitimacy. The mandatory nature of the “dog tag” and the literally incriminating character of fingerprinting were often at the forefront of Zainichi consciousness as emblems of Japanese disrecognition. The Japanese authorities claimed the authority of science—Henry Faulds had developed the first classificatory system of fingerprinting while working in Japan—to justify fingerprinting for identification purposes. The inevitable question was why Zainichi needed to be identified beyond the ways in which ethnic Japanese were identified. The all-too-common answer pointed at once to the Japanese presumption of Korean criminality and the Zainichi presumption of Japanese tyranny. Han Chongsok, the “one-man rebel,” observed that the Alien Registration Law was “nothing but an instrument to suppress Zainichi.”

The growing incidence of civil disobedience—refusing to be fingerprinted during alien registration—generated media coverage and even popular debate. As one middle-aged Japanese woman said at the time: “If Koreans don’t like discrimination, then why don’t they [fingerprinting refuseniks] go home?” The compelling xenophobic logic had been shared by the mainline ethnic organizations. The acceptance of Zainichi status as foreign explains in large part the general compliance with forced fingerprinting in particular and the alien registration law in general. Coming to terms with their present and future in Japan, however, some Zainichi, with others sympathetic to their cause and to general human rights and dignity, engaged in the symbolic and legal struggle to resist the fingerprinting. Attending several rallies to support the fingerprinting refusal movement in the mid-1980s, I was struck most by the preponderance of second- and third-generation Zainichi in their twenties and thirties. Most of them said that they were seeking at once to eradicate their shame—being a member of an inferior group or hiding one’s ancestry—and to assert their ethnic pride as Zainichi.

The anti-fingerprinting movement generated momentum through the 1980s, gaining the support of the major ethnic organizations. Ethnic Korean organizations in Japan began tentatively to engage with diasporic concerns from the 1970s. In the last three months of 1983, Mindan waged a campaign that collected 1.8 million signatures—90 percent of them by ethnic Japanese—protesting the fingerprinting. Soren also entered the campaign. Eminent Zainichi intellectuals, such as Kim Sokpom, became “refuseniks.” Kim stressed the unification of Korea as the ultimate goal, but the momentum of the movement prompted him to participate in a domestic ethnic movement.

The resistance to fingerprinting was bound up with other means of asserting ethnic existence. As early as the late 1960s there were sporadic initiatives to use ethnic Korean names in Osaka, and individual “comings-out”—to use one’s “real name” [*honmyo*] instead of Japanese name [*tsumeji*—occurred throughout the 1970s. As a 1970s pamphlet stated, “the use of *tsumeji* itself is clearly a form of ethnic discrimination.” Arguing against the practical benefits of passing, activists sought not only to promote ethnic pride but also to extirpate discrimination. The “real name” initiative marked the limits of passing in the struggle for recognition. As one man told me, he decided to use his real, Korean name in high school because he wanted to claim pride in his ancestry. Son Puja reclaimed her “real name” as she became involved in a Kawasaki group to fight ethnic discrimination. For most ethnic Koreans, “coming out” would occur either at graduation from high school or at college, where ethnic groups and friends, as well as progressive climate, would encourage and support “real name declaration” [*honmyo sengen*]. Another dimension of the “real name declaration” movement was the use of Korean pronunciation. In 1975, a Zainichi minister



## Mindan-organized anti-fingerprinting rally of 15,000 at outdoor Hibiya Hall, Tokyo in 1983

publicized use of legal mechanisms to protect and advance Zainichi rights, it was followed by Kim Kyongdok's effort to become an attorney and Kim Hyondon's struggle to receive the national pension, denied to Koreans on the ground that they lacked citizenship. There were other, less-heralded attempts to protect and promote ethnic Koreans' rights and benefits in Japan, from the establishment of Seikyosha in Kawasaki in the 1970s to the rise of the "rights and benefits" movement by Mindan in the late 1970s. Numerous local initiatives—ranging from Osaka teachers' 1971 proclamation against ethnic discrimination and assimilationist education to progressive local authorities' attempts to ensure access to welfare benefits and public housing in the mid-1970s—bound concerned Japanese citizens with ethnic Korean individuals and organizations. By the early 1980s, Osaka, with the highest concentration of Zainichi, among other local authorities, started to hire Korean nationals for civil service positions—a right that was denied immediately after the end of the war.



## Koreatown in Osaka

with the long genealogy of Soren and ex-Soren intellectuals—it was disengaged not only from the dominant ethnic organizations but also from the experiences and longings of the people who sought to counter Japanese disrecognition, such as those who participated actively in the fingerprinting refusal movement and the ethnic name movement. Zainichi ideologists retained faith in intellectuals as the secret legislators and representatives of the people when it was no longer fashionable or viable to do so in Japanese life.

Let me discuss the work of Yoon Keun Cha, born in 1944, because of its systematic and paradigmatic character. In *"Zainichi" o ikitowa* [To live as Zainichi, 1992], Yoon locates the appearance of the very term Zainichi in the late 1970s. It "has been recognized as a particular philosophy [*shiso*], demonstrating a young generation's way of living and ideology, including historical meaning." As "the historical product of Japanese rule of colonial Korea," that meaning is in a chronicle of vexing events from colonial rule, the division of the homeland, and the Korean War: "Up to today it is unhappiness itself. For the second- and third-generation Zainichi of today, the suffering and the sadness of poverty, losing the family, the inability to meet departed parents again constitute the heartache, which is nothing but 'chagrin' [*kuyashisa*]." As colonial subjects and their descendants, Zainichi belong to the category of oppressed Third World people. Bereft of a stable home and a place of repose, they are also "liminal people" [*kyokajjin*]. After criticizing Soren and the unsavory character of South Korea in the 1960s and 1970s, he bemoans the division not only of the homeland but Zainichi society.

Yoon defines the first generation as those "who spent their childhood in Korea and came to Japan before the defeat of Japan in August 1945. . . . In essence, the major part of their spiritual formation was 'Korea,' and not 'Japan' as 'imperial subject.'" The first generation was defined by "anti-Japanese sentiments of the colonial period" and "strong ethnic consciousness." Reprising the received Zainichi historiography—itsself pioneered by intellectuals critical of Soren—he characterizes Koreans in colonial Japan as being "pushed into the context of absolute discrimination in terms of ethnicity and class. . . [as] low-waged workers at the very bottom of Japanese society." Japan, in short, was "hell." Living in Korean ghettos [*Chosenjin buraku*]—he identifies the first-generation as "the period of 'Korean ghetto'—they longed for the ancestral homeland but lived with "discrimination and oppression." The heroic narrative begins, then, from their suffering and "naked labor" and supported by the philosophy [*shiso*] of "work twice or thrice as hard as Japanese, don't give in to discrimination, protect your rights, let's create school, let's unify homeland" For them, "ancestral land [*sokoku*] or ethnicity, *Heimat* [*kokyo*], family were dream and hope. . .

requested the Korean reading of his Korean name, but NHK, the main television network, refused and used the Japanese reading. It was only in 1983 when the South Korean singer Cho Yong-p'il was introduced by that name that NHK had relented from its rigid practice of using the Japanese reading of Chinese characters in Korean names.

The "real name" initiative was diffuse and sporadic; its first organizational manifestation appeared belatedly in 1985 when the Association to Take Back Ethnic Names [Minzokumei o Torimodosukai] was formed in Osaka. One of its members exemplifies some of the background that spurred Zainichi activists in both the anti-fingerprinting and "real name" movements. Pak Sil was born in Kyoto in 1944. Haunted by discrimination and passing in Japan, he believed that Korea signified inferiority. His sister's job offer was rescinded after her school reported her Korean name to the company. In order to marry his Japanese girlfriend, he was naturalized. Learning about Japanese imperialism, he realized that he had committed a major fault [*ayamachi*] and betrayed his mother. After his child was born, he decided to assert his Korean identity. "Nationality is Japanese, name is Japanese, I didn't know Korean, and I don't know the taste of kimchi. I have nothing in the form of ethnicity." He therefore resolved to learn the Korean language and to participate in Korean cultural activities. Although other Zainichi did not welcome him—he was even accused of being a spy—he participated in the movement to use ethnic names as Japanese. By 1987 he won a court victory to use his Korean name. Pak Sil thereby achieved the hitherto oxymoronic idea of being a Japanese citizen with a Korean name. Similarly, in 1989, Yun Choja, who had grown up with her Japanese mother's name as a Japanese citizen, won the right to use an ethnic name: "If there were no discrimination, my father would have been legally married and I would have my father's surname. . . . Because there was discrimination, I became a 'bastard' [*shiseiji*] and was given Japanese *koseki* [household registry; and effectively nationality]."

The mid-1980s ethnic political mobilization capped at least a decade's worth of the Zainichi civil rights movement. If Pak's 1970 employment discrimination suit was the first well-

Along with the anti-fingerprinting movement and the effort to use Korean names, some sought to create a Koreatown—emulating Chinatowns and Koreatowns in the United States—in Kawasaki, whereas others sought to win local suffrage rights for Zainichi. Each step of the way, the Zainichi legal and political struggle for legitimacy and recognition pricked the conscience of ethnic Koreans and ethnic Japanese. Zainichi disrecognition in Japanese public life was clearly in retreat by the 1980s.

## Zainichi Ideology

In the context of ethnic ferment, there was something close to a party line that emerged in the 1970s that I call Zainichi ideology. Informed by an internal critique of Soren ideology – the ideology of return – it sought to supplant the ideology that had dominated the Zainichi population in the 1950s and 1960s. The notion that Zainichi constituted a relatively autonomous community was alien to the dominant ethnic organization's homeland orientation, which was a systematic misrecognition of Zainichi actuality. The disjuncture is encapsulated in the question of language. Against Soren's espousal of the mother tongue, the primary language of the postwar Zainichi population had always been Japanese, as evinced by early postwar ethnic Korean literary periodicals such as *Chosen bungei* and *Minshu bungei*. The subjugation of literature to politics, which included the question of language, incited some of the earliest resistance to Soren by the late 1950s, for instance among writers around the journal *Jindare*. *Kikan sanzenri* continued in spirit the work of *Jindare*, but these critics' intellectual formation and ethnonational worldview were profoundly shaped by Soren and would leave their mark in Zainichi ideology. Like its leading proponents, men of the left such as Kim Sokpom and Lee Hoesung, Zainichi ideology retained a strong link to the North Korean homeland even as it came to embrace and at times celebrate the Zainichi population's place in Japan.

Zainichi ideology fractured almost from the moment it crystallized not only because of the impossibility of formulating an essentialized identity but also because it was an intellectual construct that faced the withering criticism of rapid obsolescence and ultimate irrelevance. As a product of parthenogenesis—albeit

. That's all they had." In fact, many equated ethnic organization, especially Soren, with ethnicity and homeland. Although he acknowledges diversity—the Japanized Koreans who supported the Japanese war effort and the entrepreneurially successful Mindan members—he is committed to the singular narrative of exploitation, suffering, and resistance. He can only describe the first-generation Zainichi “who were forced to remain in Japan” as having led lives of serious “suffering in the situation of Japanese political and economic confusion.” When he points to the problems of the Zainichi community, such as patriarchy and the dysfunctional family, he is quick to trace their cause to Japanese imperialism.



**Chi to Hone: Rethinking the patriarchal undercurrent of first-generation Zainichi**

Generational transition began in the early 1970s. The idea of “to live as Zainichi” criticized the first generation's homeland orientation and emerged as a self-conscious appellation in the late 1970s. Recognizing that there was no realistic possibility of return in the immediate future yet insisting on the impossibility of naturalization, Yoon had earlier advocated a “permanent” status of permanent residency. Neither Japanese nor Korean, Zainichi constitute a relatively autonomous diasporic culture. The category of the diaspora is appealing precisely because it points to the possibility of an independent existence. Zainichi ideology, then, is a form of diasporic nationalism.

Yoon is acutely conscious of the economic and social diversity of younger Zainichi and their contrast to the first generation: better educated but largely ignorant of the Korean language, increasingly atomized and fragmented rather than being concentrated in the Korean ghettos, and much more diverse than the largely monochromatic first generation. He speculates that Zainichi consciousness is based less on genealogy or tradition and more on the “strongly rooted discrimination of Japanese society.” “To live as ‘Zainichi’ is to live in opposition to discrimination,” though he again traces its cause to Japanese imperialism.



**Yoon Keun Cha**

Yoon fears the lure of assimilation, especially for the third-generation. Whether for Lee Yangji or Kyo Nobuko, ethnicity pales in significance to the self that is common to both Japanese and Koreans. By ignoring the essentially historical and political character of Zainichi existence, he argues that the third-generation philosophy strengthens the exclusionary character of Japan. Rather, it is imperative to incorporate the “consciousness of misfortune” [*fugo no ishiki*]: the population's origins in Japanese imperialism and its destination in Korean unification.

Unification of the two Koreas and of the Zainichi population remains the essential goal for Zainichi in particular and Koreans in general. Some Zainichi intellectuals insist on the category *Chosen* as a nationality. As Kim Sokpom argues, unification is the “ultimate task” of Zainichi and the advocacy of *Chosen* nationality is an expression of the Zainichi commitment to unified Korea. Knowing full well that such a country does not exist, a character in Lee Hoesung's story “Ikitsumodoritsu” admits that it is “simply a sign,” but one that seeks to “transcend the era of division [*bundan jidai*]. The commitment to unification in theory is in turn related to greater ideals that were once associated with Marxism and communism, such as peace and

progress. Rather grandiosely, Zainichi ideology strives for the ethnic sublime: the desire for praxis and ultimate universalism.

In summary, Yoon suggests two basic preconditions for being Zainichi: first, “to think about the meaning of being Zainichi, to protect the pride of ethnicity, and strive to gain citizens’ rights”; and, second, “to be involved in some way in unification.” To be Zainichi means to reflect on Zainichi-ness and to seek unification: to retain historical memory and critique of Japanese imperialism, to sustain oppositional consciousness that is tantamount to anti-Japanese sentiments, and to resist assimilation and naturalization. Zainichi ideology inherited the Soren critique of Japanese imperialism and fervent essentialist ethnonationalism, but rejected its partisan loyalty to the North and homeland orientation.

Yoon's formulation of Zainichi ideology does not command universal assent, but many of his points were reiterated by leading Zainichi intellectuals in the last quarter of the twentieth century. An overview of Zainichi history, for example, discusses the “common consciousness” forged by the historical experience of liberation and independence, the shared desire to repatriate and to build a new country, and the overarching goal of unification. Beyond a consensus on Zainichi historiography—the narrative of forced migration, exploitation and discrimination, and heroic resistance—there are shared political goals. In seeking an alternative beyond repatriation (at least in the short run) and assimilation, the impetus is to create, promote, and protect a distinct Zainichi culture. Sustaining ethnocultural pride means rejecting repatriation and assimilation.

### Zainichi Ideology and Its Discontents

Zainichi ideology is a form of diasporic nationalism. Like Japanese or South Korean monoethnic nationalism, it envisions the ethnonational group as homogeneous. The conflation of the individual and the collective—ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny—and the inevitably political nature of Zainichi existence that legitimate propounders and protectors of Zainichi identity to prescribe and proscribe Zainichi belief and action.

As an ethnic imperative, Zainichi ideology defines the terms and theories of Zainichi identity. Private meditations necessarily draw on historically and sociologically given categories and concepts. The very prevalence of Zainichi identity rests on the dissemination of Zainichi as a category of both population and thought. There are, then, inevitably ethnic entrepreneurs or identity intellectuals who propose what it means to a representative member of the proposed group. They are *tuteurs* of the people: at once teaching them and protecting them. Inventors and guardians of identity prescribe and proscribe actions and beliefs, even going so far as to judge who belongs to the group in the name of the people. In the case of formal organizations such as Soren, there were explicit norms and institutional means to mandate conformity. Dissidents were reprimanded and even expelled. In the case of Zainichi ideology, however, there were no formal organizations to articulate beliefs or to supervise behavior. Instead, identity intellectuals spoke and wrote on behalf of their co-ethnics to the mainstream Japanese media and organizations, which in turn purveyed their ideas to the co-ethnic audience. Zainichi ideology was widely discussed and disseminated in informal clubs and groups or by isolated individual readers, most frequently in universities. The declining hold of the mainline ethnic organizations generated an audience to receive the reformed ideology of Zainichi identity.



**Dear Pyongyang: an award-winning documentary that is part of a reconsideration of Zainichi affinity toward North Korea**

In promoting diasporic nationalism, Zainichi ideology erects a prison-house of Zainichi-ness, a collective confinement to ethnic essentialism. Beyond establishing the fundamental pillars of Zainichi identity, it also projects an idealized Zainichi self that mirrors Zainichi historiography: the dialectics of oppression and resistance, poverty and struggle. It also prescribes, like Soren ideology, cultural nationalism, such as learning Korean language, history, and culture, and retains instinctive suspicion of Japan and discourages assimilation.

Whatever the individual articulation of the ideal Zainichi self, it is clear that many fell short of it. It was something of a common sense among Zainichi in the 1970s and 1980s that there was a natural hierarchy. In one classification, the top are the activists, with a command of Korean; the middle are those with ethnic pride and a knowledge of Zainichi history and ideology; and the bottom are the vast majority, with Japanese names. In one of Lee Yangji's earliest essays, she writes of "not knowing true poverty, the shame of not knowing." Reminiscent of Simone Weil, Lee in fact confesses her deviation from what she takes to be the prototypical Zainichi experience of poverty and discrimination that she missed as a middle-class, naturalized Japanese girl. Even as Zainichi may have faced harassment from classmates or police officers, the specter of *Panchoppari*—of being incomplete, or failed, Zainichi—weighed heavily, at times forcefully pounded in by bullying fellow Zainichi students at Soren schools. Many Zainichi, in effect, failed to be Korean or Zainichi. Language was an insurmountable hurdle for many. The second-generation Zainichi Kim Hiro, who "speaks Japanese better than Japanese" but did not know any Korean, regarded his "generation" as a "deformity." If the Korean language proved to be an unrealistic parameter of Zainichi-ness, then the critical criteria were the adoption of one's ethnic name and the resistance to naturalization. The presumption that any "decent" Zainichi should use one's Korean name led the critic Takeda Seiji to use a Japanese pseudonym: his act of resistance to Zainichi ideology. Kyo Nobuko found the argument against naturalization—the impossibility of maintaining ethnic Korean, or Zainichi, identity as a Japanese citizen—deeply problematic.

Zainichi ideology valorizes and validates some people at the expense of others. Prewar, pro-Japanese ethnic Koreans are uniformly reviled, as are those who do not condemn the evils of Japanese imperialism. Ethnic Koreans who have become Japanese citizens are also beyond the pale. Just as the postwar ethnic Korean organizations sought to distance themselves from the crimes of Ri Chin'u and Kim Hiro, Zainichi ideologists criticize or exclude those who do not fit into their scheme of Zainichi history and identity. The hold of Zainichi ideology can be seen in the received understanding of Zainichi literature, which almost always excludes the author Yasumoto Sueko, even though her *Nianchan* (1958) is the book by a Zainichi writer on Zainichi life that has reached the largest Japanese readership. Japanese literary scholars, to be sure, make a cardinal distinction between "pure" [*jun*] and "popular" [*taisha*] literature; *Nianchan*, if only because of its vast readership, is not really literature in this line of thinking which valorizes the "pure". Yet it is nonetheless surprising to find a systematic effacement of the best-selling postwar book by a Zainichi author.



**From the film of Nianchan**

Much the same can be said about Ijuin Shizuka's Bildungsroman *Kaikyo* trilogy [Strait, 1991–2000]. Although peopled by non-Japanese characters and written by a self-identified ethnic Korean, Ijuin's oeuvre is usually excluded from the discussion of Zainichi literature because of its overtly apolitical nature and popular orientation. The mystery writer Rei Ra is similarly excluded from the ambit of Zainichi literature. The valorization of the political and the collective eschewed the stress on the personal and the private: hence, the critical praise for the work of Kim Sokpom and Lee Hoesung over that of Kin Kakuei. Not surprisingly, the champion of Kin's work has been Takeda Seiji, a self-conscious rebel against Zainichi ideology. Yet those who remained faithful to Soren, such as Yi Unjik (1967–68) and his epic trilogy on the politics of Korean liberation, are also neglected. Narrow is the gate to Zainichi-ness.



**Ijuin: Some best-selling authors are self-identified Zainichi, but somehow fail to be included in the canon of Zainichi literature**

As a form of diasporic nationalism, Zainichi ideology, like Soren ideology, rejects the category of ethnic minority. Soren ideology postulated that ethnic Koreans were to repatriate. Zainichi ideology does not share the ideology of return (at least in the short run) but it also

rejects Japan as *Heimat*. Indeed, anti-Japanese sentiments may be more fiercely expressed among Zainichi ideologists than Soren ideologists, presumably because Soren ideology beckoned Zainichi to look to North Korea whereas Zainichi ideology forces Zainichi to consider Japan as a more or less permanent domicile. Kim Sokpom regarded anti-Japanese sentiments as a critical pillar of his life philosophy. Suh Kyung Sik characterizes Zainichi as "half" refugees in the title of his book. Elsewhere, he categorizes them as "nation" rather than "ethnicity." Beyond the conceptual confusion, the category of ethnic minority is rejected in order to avoid the incorporation of Zainichi in Japanese society. Yet the ideological resistance faces the recalcitrant reality of cultural assimilation.

The similar distance between ideology and reality can be seen in Zainichi ideology's valorization of unification.

The misrecognition characteristic of Zainichi ideology, with its essentialist categories, extends to its genealogy and development. Generational distinctions and transitions are Zainichi clichés, which of course means that the thesis has a grain of truth. Most obviously, first-generation Zainichi with roots to the Korean peninsula—and the mastery of Korean language—are differentiated from second-generation Zainichi without any experience growing up in Korea or having Korean as the natal tongue. Yet these schematic classifications obfuscate more than illuminate. Kim Dalsu, born in colonial Korea in 1919, in fact had no choice but to write in Japanese. Kim Sokpom was born only six years later but in Osaka. Though Lee Hoesung and Kin Kakuei are coevals—born in 1935 and 1938, respectively—their attitudes toward ethnic identification could hardly be called alike. Kin presciently pointed to a position beyond repatriation or naturalization and uncannily illuminated the instability or even the impossibility of solid and stable identity. At the same time, Lee Hoesung sounded nationalist and socialist tunes. Yet one does not necessarily reprise youthful melodies. By the mid-1990s, Lee registered completely different notes, singing paeans to diasporic solidarity. A few years later, he became a naturalized South Korean. Yan Sogiru's thinly veiled fictional double muses, "I was born in Japan, a second-generation Zainichi who grew up in Japan," but is baffled to be taken as a first-generation figure. He concedes that perhaps he is close to the first generation, though he does not speak Korean well and feels viscerally different from them. Concrete but fluctuating self-conceptions and the inevitable diversity of the population hew poorly to the line of Zainichi-ness adumbrated by Zainichi ideology.

### Zainichi Ideology, Zainichi Diversity

Against diversity and dynamism, Zainichi ideology posed a party line that was impervious to deviations and transformations in Zainichi thinking about themselves and their places in Japan. Quite simply, the majority of the Zainichi by the late 1970s did not belong to Soren; they also had little interest in homeland politics. The modal Zainichi existence by then was not one of pathetic poverty and corrosive disrecognition. Far from being a solidaristic and homogeneous population, Zainichi were separated and diverse.

Ancestry is a rather thin and fragile basis to build an identity and a culture. Hence, the stress remained very much on imagined commonalities, such as the history of enforced migration, the sociology of ethnic discrimination, and the political ideal of unification. Yet a more solid, thick foundation for identification was lacking. In the prewar period, Korean language was the lingua franca among immigrants who lived in relatively isolated communities. In the immediate postwar decades, ethnic organizations, especially Soren, provided the infrastructure to protect their rights or facilitate sociality and uplift. By the 1970s, however, language or community, religion or culture did not unite ethnic Koreans. Hence the importance of clinging to shards of the remembered past and the declining but undeniable reality of discrimination constituted Zainichi solidarity. Yet the path of ex-Soren intellectuals and movement participants was often orthogonal to that of the silent majority who were neither professional intellectuals nor committed activists. There is more: whereas the Soren leadership could legitimate, whether through North Korea or itself, its right to represent the membership (and at a stretch the Zainichi population), there was no compelling rationale for Zainichi ideologists to represent the Zainichi population. Those who grew up before the war were, with some frequency, unschooled and even illiterate. They may be highly articulate and eloquent but, whether by inclination, habit, or force, they rarely expressed their idiosyncratic outlooks ahead of those of the mainline ethnic organizations. In contrast, those who came of age in the 1960s and later were not only schooled and literate but—sharing in the prevailing Japanese belief in democratic rights and individual dignity—were willing and capable of expressing their own views. They could and did represent themselves.

Recent Zainichi narratives corroborate the systematic deviation of Zainichi voices from Zainichi ideology. They are exemplary not in the sense of expressing a random or representative sample, or of being the best and the most noble expressions of Zainichi people, but, rather, because they articulate individual experiences without excessive recourse to preconceived categories or received formulas.

Hwang Mingi grew up in a poor area of Osaka notable for a concentration of ethnic Koreans. Living in a tenement house [*nagaya*] in an ethnic enclave, his family and their neighbors experienced a strong sense of community, remarkably devoid of a sense of victimization or of what some social scientists call the culture of poverty. He is critical of poverty tourists, who portray the Korean neighborhood as a site of otherness. Beyond the conglomeration of ethnic Koreans, unlike Chinatown in Yokohama or Harlem in New York, "the town has no special characteristics." For him, the area is simply where he grew up and for which he has fond memories.

Hwang nowhere discusses his Korean or Zainichi identity, but his childhood cannot be understood apart from the situation and concern of the Zainichi population. The news of the 1958 Komatsugawa Incident deeply disturbs his father, and affects him and his buddies enough to stop them when they see the image of Ri Chin'u on television in the streets. Teachers in his school appear to know the real (Korean) names of Hwang and his friends, even though they use Japanese names. Although the four "heroes" of his childhood are all ethnic Koreans—"Queen" Misora Hibari (singer), "Emperor" Kaneda Masaichi (baseball star), "Don" Yanagigawa Jiro (a local yakuza boss), and "Japan's brilliant star" Rikidozan (wrestling champion)—they are not explicitly identified as being of Korean descent. It is difficult to discern whether they are heroes because of their Korean ethnicity, or because they are able to succeed in "ordinary" Japanese society in spite of their ethnicity. Certainly, the fact of Korean descent marks the lives of Hwang and his friends. One boyhood acquaintance takes part in the repatriation project, another commits suicide (possibly over the breakup of a relationship, which may have been due to his Korean descent), and yet another joins an ethnic Korean yakuza.



**Legendary enka singer,  
Misora Hibari**

Nonetheless, Zainichi life is immersed in the larger Japanese society. Popular culture references in fact would not have distinguished Hwang and his friends from most other Japanese youths at the time. They constantly talk about the popular superhero series *Gekko kamen* [Moonlight mask] and Hollywood movies and stars such as Elizabeth Taylor and Audrey Hepburn. Explicitly Korean names and events are "foreign" to them: the North Korean Foreign Minister Nam Il becomes "nameru" [to lick or, as slang, to make fun of]. Even the adoration of violence and the allure of gang life give way to the valorization of the intellect and educational attainment in the context of "the extinction of 'dirtiness' and 'poverty' in the neighborhood in particular and Japan in general during the era of rapid economic growth. From their seemingly unpromising beginnings as juvenile delinquents, some of Hwang's friends become successful: one becomes a medical doctor, Hwang becomes an "intellectual of sorts." As one of his friends tells Hwang: "At the funeral, I felt first that I am not Korean [*Chosenjin*]. And confirmed that I don't want to and couldn't die like my father. . . . I haven't chosen Japan. I merely ceased being Korean [*Kankokujin*]."

Having come of age in the late 1950s, Hwang and his friends are unquestionably Zainichi, even as meditations on Zainichi identity remain peripheral. He claims that he is far from special; he was neither physically powerful nor intellectually brilliant. His childhood is characterized by experiences of boyhood solidarity—jokes and pranks. Growing up in an ethnic neighborhood, he experiences Korean and Japanese people and cultures. Yet when he returns to his hometown, he finds massive changes in the neighborhood, which is replete with "new Zainichi from South Korea and Japanese people with Korean interests." This disappearance of the past is the background of Gen Getsu's "Kage no sumika" [The habitat of shadows, 1999], where the patriarch is one of the few prewar Koreans left and the past is literally crumbling. Yet, as Hwang realizes, what remains are uncertain recollections: "I learned that my memory of place names, personal names, and of the time was almost completely unreliable."

Unlike Hwang, Kyo Nobuko was reared in an affluent Yokohama household. As a child, she had virtually no knowledge of the Korean language, very little familiarity with Korean culture, and little contact with other ethnic Koreans. Celebrating New Year's Day with her ethnic Japanese husband, she can only count the Korean-style rice cake and a diluted form of ancestor worship [*chesa*] as marks of her Koreanness. She cannot, for example, answer elementary questions about Korean culture. She cannot, for that matter, eat "authentic" (i.e., spicy) Korean food.

Kyo cannot but ponder the meaning of being Zainichi (more accurately, *Zainichi Kankokujin*, associated with South Korea), but in temporally distinct ways. She harbored distinct emotional reactions to her ethnic identity. As a child, she was thrilled to learn that she was a “foreigner,” but by the time she reached fourth grade she reckoned: “Perhaps it is a bad thing that I am Korean. Perhaps I should hide it.” She was never bullied in school, but she used a Japanese name. When her classmate suspects that she may be of Korean descent, she lies about being “mixed-blooded” [*haafu*], from a Korean father and Japanese mother. Slightly later, she begins to “avoid and forget” about South Korea and “becomes angry at Japanese.” By the time she is in high school, she feels close to, but “fears that she would be beaten up” by fellow ethnic Korean high-school students. At the University of Tokyo, she uses her Korean name and becomes interested in Korean affairs and culture. However, she is alienated from the prevailing enthusiasm for Marxism, nationalism, and the “deification” of ethnicity. She disagrees with other Zainichi students who advocate unification and condemn assimilation.

Kyo’s narrative places her apart from Koreans, Japanese, and Zainichi. She becomes “conscious of the long distance between South Korea and her” when she realizes that “surprisingly, the place name of my grandfather’s place of origin has disappeared.” She is ignorant of both North and South Korea; both are “foreign countries.” She is comfortable in Japan but she can neither shed the past—stories of Japanese misdeeds toward South Koreans that her grandmother told her—nor stop worrying about the future—such as the possibility of worsening Japanese–South Korean relations. In between, her friends drop derogatory comments about Zainichi. She finds herself in trouble when she confronts the authorities without her Certificate of Alien Registration. Her desire to become a teacher is dashed when she realizes that non-Japanese nationals are excluded from the profession. She faces employment discrimination despite her stellar academic record as a graduate of the prestigious Law Faculty at the University of Tokyo. As much as she feels close to her ethnic Japanese husband, she is aware of how ignorant he is—and, by extension, other ethnic Japanese are—about such Zainichi issues as employment discrimination. Yet she cannot identify with other Zainichi students, especially those who are proud of their “ethnicity” [*minzoku*]. One of them exclaims: “I cannot forgive those who naturalize. They are not human beings. They shouldn’t live.” She is aware that some Zainichi believe that, along with naturalization, “marrying Japanese is to betray ethnicity,” but she hesitates only briefly before marrying her Japanese husband.

Kyo’s “policy is to live naturally without hiding my Zainichi status.” And she insists on the desirability of living “normally” [*futsu*]. “It is not my style to raise my voice in protest or to live quietly without saying anything. I don’t pretend to be Japanese, and I don’t stress my ethnicity. I want to lead an ordinary life in Japan as Zainichi.” She goes so far as to regard her group as a “new species of humanity,” despite her alienation from many other Zainichi youths. At one point, she regards the difference in their nationality as something akin to “being tall, looking good in green, having an extroverted personality.” Her attempt to downplay ethnic distance or to live “normally” [*futsu*] is problematic. If nothing else, her Tokyo University diploma makes her even more distinct from ordinary Japanese people than the fact of her Korean descent. She nonetheless insists on her identity as a not particularly exceptional individual. As in the title of her book, she is an “ordinary Zainichi,” although she considers herself to be quite different from other Zainichi college students.

Yu Miri’s 1997 narrative *Mizube no yurikago* [Cradle by the waterside] begins in doubt and ends by affirming the fictive nature of the past. She is born into a family of secrets; she is not sure of her father’s age or whether her mother was born in Japan. Her parents’ past is a “dark tunnel” that is closed on both ends by “silence.” Her family life, which is a constant theme in her plays and stories, was tempestuous—a violent father, a mother who runs off with another man—but she acknowledges that she was loved by parents, even incurring her sister’s envy. She grew up playing with Rika-chan dolls (Japanese Barbie dolls), but her childhood was marked by her exclusion from group life. Other pupils bullied her from early on, the first time in kindergarten when she came with a different hairstyle. In part she blames herself for being unfit for group life. “I was conceited and I thought that I was a chosen person. I thought I was special.” At the same time, bullying seems inextricable from her Korean ancestry: “For me, bullying and kimchi are somehow linked.”



**Yu Miri: a best-selling author and a figure of controversy**

Yu characterizes herself as a runaway [*toposha*], as someone who flees not to hide but simply to run away. Her adolescence—though common enough among adolescents—is a series of shameful, embarrassing moments and memories. She is ashamed of her aunt, whom one of her friends mistakes for a beggar, as well as the meager lunch she takes to school. She is troubled by her mother taking up a lover and abandoning home for days at a time. Enrolling in a prestigious middle school at her mother’s request, she merely yearns to leave. Although she finds friends from time to time, she feels closer to dead writers than to any living people. “I was closer to the dead than to the living. In my bag were books by [the poet] Nakahara Nakaya and [the novelist] Dazai Osamu, and I could only talk easily with the dead. The living inevitably hurt me, but the dead forgave and cured me.” She develops a crush on a classmate but is rebuffed: “I don’t know what I wanted from her. It was not to become closer or to touch her body or to be touched. Thinking about it now, perhaps I was inviting her to die with me.” She “woke up every morning with self-hatred and regret. I didn’t know what I hated and regretted but in any case I hated everything. I wanted to cut my ties to family and school and drop out of life.” The desire to drop out manifests itself in skipping school, running away from home, and attempting to kill herself. After she is expelled, she contemplates immigrating to the United States.

Yu’s memoir is motivated by a long-standing desire to bury her past. When she moves from her elementary school, her homeroom teacher gives her an antique music box and a handkerchief. She buries them, because “I wanted to change, to become a different person. I didn’t need souvenirs.” Certainly, there are many eminently forgettable memories: a neighbor who molests her, classmates who engage in vicious pranks, and other acts of inhumanity and betrayal. But she also writes in part because she wants to create her own “reality.” Joining a theater company, she discovers the “possibility of rewriting my past.” She decided to write her memoir while in her twenties because she wanted to “leave herself far behind,” to entomb the past. She ends on an ambiguous note: “everything is a fact, everything is a lie.” Her memoir is a “sedimentation of words.”

These narratives are Japanese not only in the (by no means trivial) sense that they are written in Japanese, but also in the deeper sense that they presume broad familiarity with Japanese culture. Precisely because popular-culture names, events, and objects are ephemeral and particular, they provide robust sources of identification with a concrete time and place. Furthermore, they exemplify Japanese cultural repertoire. The postwar idea of cultural homogeneity valorized the ideal of normalness or ordinariness [*futsu*], at once an expression of egalitarianism and a rejection of prewar heroics. Kim Hyandoja, for example, opens her book by stating that there is “nothing particularly special about my way of living or thinking. . . . I am a particularly ordinary [*goku futsu*] Zainichi.” However far apart in their upbringing and outlook, Hwang and Kyo both regard themselves as not just “ordinary” but “particularly ordinary.” Around the time Kyo wrote her recollections, I was at a Tokyo restaurant where my affiliation with the University of Tokyo was mentioned. Middle-aged women at the next table promptly stopped their conversation, turned to me, and then begged me to tutor their children. My fifteen seconds’ worth of celebrity expresses the unusually high regard in which that university has been held in the postwar era. Hwang’s childhood is also anything but “ordinary” for contemporary Japanese people. Only Yu is conscious of her difference and her alienation from group life, but her life is unusual from any perspective.

What in fact unites these three writers beyond their Japanese provenance? The pervasiveness of disrecognition seeps into various spheres of social life. But the reception of discrimination is far from uniform. Neither Hwang nor Kyo mentions being bullied. Although Yo is convinced that bullying and her Korean ancestry are intertwined, she is far from certain that ethnic discrimination is primary. Recall De Vos and Lee’s generalization about Zainichi family alienation. Yu appears to be a paradigmatic case. The violent father is an enduring character type in Zainichi literature, but Yu’s love for him differentiates him from Kin Kakuei’s or Yan Sogiru’s patriarchs. But Hwang’s and Kyo’s narratives do not fit very well into De Vos and Lee’s scheme. Kyo’s seems deviant precisely in achieving the exalted but rarely realized state of agape among family members.

The structure of biography is biology: a prosaic and predictable trajectory from birth to death. It would be odd indeed not to encounter numerous points of similarity among coevals in the same society. Yet diversity, not uniformity, marks the narratives. Consider the question of ethnic identity. Although Kyo struggles with it, she feels alienated from Zainichi who are passionate about Zainichi causes. Hwang, in contrast, is keenly aware of being Korean, but because he grew up in a Korean neighborhood he does not probe its significance. In a different way, YÁ’s sense of self literally makes her a character from a

play, endowed with certain propensities, such as the desire to flee, but unmarked by her ethnic heritage or Japanese racism.

If we consider the impact of Korean or Japanese culture, then we again find no obvious commonality. In Hwang's world, Korean and Zainichi cultures and events appear here and there. In contrast, Kyo grew up ignorant of Korean and even Zainichi culture. Yu grew up playing with Rika-chan dolls and communicating with dead male Japanese writers. Although almost always described as a Zainichi writer, her literary ancestry betrays almost no Zainichi influence. Diversity also manifests itself in naming preferences. Hwang is a Korean pronunciation of a Korean name. Yu is a Japanese rendition of a Korean name. Kyo Nobuko has a Japanese reading of a Korean surname and a common Japanese given name (though possibly Korean) in Japanese pronunciation. Another woman uses the Korean reading of a Korean surname with a more or less purely Japanese given name: "although my identity is Korean, I am completely different from Koreans in the homeland. I am Zainichi. I am almost like a different ethnicity. And I have Japanese nationality."



**Zainichi diversity among the famous and the popular**

Hwang, Kyo, and Yu are Zainichi, but they reveal little commonality. Surely, we can seek their differences in part in their divergent backgrounds: gender, region, class, and so on. These social differences exist alongside different courses and contours of their lives. But this is precisely the point. Beyond the sheer diversity of Zainichi professions and personalities, genders and generations, likes and dislikes, we should not forget that an individual is neither unitary and homogeneous nor stationary and unchanging. Virginia Woolf observes in *Orlando* that "a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many as a thousand." Although "the conscious self . . . wishes to be nothing but one self . . . 'the true self,'" it cannot squelch distinct moments and conflicting recollections, ambiguities and multiplicities. Kyo would expend considerable time studying and living in South Korea, and thereafter exploring the distinct trajectories of the Korean diaspora across Asia. Yu would also learn Korean and go on to write novels and stories with strong Korean and Zainichi themes and characters. In other words, temporal transformation is commonplace. Kim Kyongdok, who was the first non-Japanese citizen to become an attorney in postwar Japan, wrote when he was thirty-six years old that he was only thirteen years old as a Korean. This is because "I used a pseudonym (Japanese name) until I was twenty-three and pretended to live as a Japanese person"; he was, then, "non-Korean" for the first twenty-three years of his life. Only in college did he come to affirm his ethnic ancestry and identity. After becoming an attorney, he spent over three years studying in South Korea "as the next step to regaining my ethnicity." Kim Hiro is often regarded as a hero of ethnic pride or a criminal of violent sensibility. After 1968, he spent some thirty-two years as a "model" prisoner and seemed to be leading a fulfilling life in Seoul when he committed another violent crime. Recidivism notwithstanding, he married again and sought to seek "love" as a way of life. Whatever the truths about Kim Hiro, it doesn't make much sense to call him essentially this, that, or other.

Zainichi diversity goes well beyond these narratives. Whereas Lee Chongja articulates Zainichi identity through classical Japanese poetic forms, other Zainichi writers avoid the question altogether. Among the latter, some, such as Ijuin Shizuka, do not hide their Korean descent, while others do. Some Zainichi writers explore the historical legacy of Japanese imperialism, but others wish to transcend the past. Consider music. Some Zainichi eagerly take up traditional Korean music and recite *sinse t'aryong*. Kyo feels that *sinse t'aryong* "that is full of ethnic feelings is not for her," but she would also explore traditional Korean music after her initial meditation on her Zainichi identity. Chon Wolson, a second-generation Zainichi who attended Soren schools, is an opera singer, whereas Ryu Yong-gi, a third-generation Zainichi who studied at a seminary, is a hip-hop singer. Both experienced discrimination as Zainichi but it would be difficult to generate useful generalizations from their shared background or experience. To say that they are musicians

is rendered nearly meaningless by the distance separating the two genres of opera and hip-hop.

The search for the least common denominators of Zainichi identity is futile. Although certain common questions are raised, they are answered in distinct ways. To the extent that there are convergences, they teeter on becoming rather generic to all human beings. Zainichi ideology, like the earlier nationalist allegiance to North or South Korea, proffered an essentialist understanding of the self, such that Kim Dalsu could write: "In my case, experience in literature means, needless to say, experience as Zainichi." The confident "needless to say" contrasts with the brash pronouncement of post-Zainichi self-representations in writers such as Gen Getsu or Kaneshiro Kazuki. Rather, beyond Korean ancestry, what dominates Zainichi writings is the broad background of Japanese society. Viewing the animated manga "Kyojin no hoshi" [The star of the Giants], Shin Sugok experiences a shock of recognition viewing a paradigmatic scene I mentioned earlier—the drunk and violent father overturns the dining table and slaps the protagonist—and wonders whether the family is not in fact Zainichi. Wherever Zainichi turned, there was Japan. Although many commentators see in Zainichi suicides their secret anguish as Zainichi, suicide is much more in the Japanese cultural repertoire than in the Korean. Most encompassing was the language. When the pioneering Zainichi writer Kim Dalsu observes that "experience in literature means, needless to say, experience as Zainichi," he elides the fundamental condition of his authorship: his inescapable reliance on the Japanese language. As the Zainichi poet Kim Sijong remarked: "Japanese—Japanese that is a foreign language—created the foundation of my consciousness."

Paradoxically, the absence of essences does not abjure the necessity of cognition and recognition. Repressing the inevitable questions of identity in a society of disrecognition is liable to generate the revenge of the repressed or, more mundanely, misrecognition and disrecognition. The protagonist of Gen Getsu's *Oshaberina inu* [Talkative dog, 2003] insists, "For me, it doesn't matter 'who I am.'" As much as he attempts to be a former Zainichi—though he insists that he is "not 'former' anything"—he cannot help but conclude that his impotence is related to his status as a "former" Zainichi. The aforementioned Kim Kyongdok recalls that: "[I] could not comprehend the background of Koreans' poverty and fighting, the illegitimacy of Japanese discrimination. . . . [I] wanted merely to flee from everything Korean." Certainly, the "inferiority complex" of being Korean or Zainichi in Japan is a commonplace recollection among the Zainichi baby boomers.

If we can identify Zainichi essences, they reside in the two terms of their category—Korean descent and Japanese livelihood—and in the persistence of Japanese discrimination that does not allow people of Korean descent to be legitimately Japanese or assume a new form of hybrid identity. The dominant belief in Japanese monoethnicity stipulates that to be Japanese means inevitably to be ethnic Japanese. *Pace* Kyo's title, then, it was impossible to be "ordinary" (Korean) Japanese when she was growing up in the 1960s and 1970s. Given that hybridity and heterogeneity had no place in the dominant Japanese discourse in the postwar period, the fact of Korean descent renders necessary the individual and collective struggles for a viable place and identity in contemporary Japanese society for Zainichi. That Zainichi sometimes struggle together does not mean, however, that there is a simple, static, and homogeneous ethnic identity.

### Identity as Diversity

Why should we expect perhaps a million people of Korean descent in Japan to be homogeneous? What more can we say than that they share the category of Korean descent and their cultural citizenship in Japan? And how important should these factors be in the personal definition of contemporary Zainichi people? How many people would have their epitaph be "Zainichi"?

There was a growing group of Japanese-born Koreans already by the late 1930s. As self-serving and culturally imperialistic as prewar Japanese policies were, efforts to integrate and assimilate ethnic Koreans engendered a cadre who identified themselves as Japanese government officials, military officers, and intellectuals. Class differentiation, not surprisingly, separated the privileged and educated Koreans from their impoverished and illiterate counterparts. Gender and generation, region of origin as well as of destination, fractured the presumed unity of ethnic Korean identity. Whether one considers the length of stay or



the vagaries of individual experience, it is bewildering to believe that there should be anything so singular about the Korean experience even during the colonial period. As a youth (around 1940), O Rimjun read a Japanese book that depicted virtuous Koreans. He was moved by the story—and could not detect any racial prejudice—but he also empathized deeply with ordinary Japanese people in other stories. It would be facile to consider O as a brainwashed pro-Japanese traitor, but there is no doubt that that category included many ethnic Koreans. The eminent South Korean poet Kim So-un spent some thirty-two years in Japan and recalls “good Japanese people” who redeemed the country for him, despite colonial racism and the dominant anti-Japanese ideology in South Korea of the 1970s and 1980s. O and Kim are hardly a small minority of national traitors and ethnic betrayers.

By the early twenty-first century, there were still significant barriers in terms of employment, marriage, and civic participation for Zainichi. However, it is safe to conclude that they did not constitute a uniformly inferior group. Furthermore, many of them were second-, third-, and even fourth-generation Japanese residents who grew up speaking Japanese, watching Japanese television, playing with Japanese children, attending Japanese schools, and so on, such that virtually the sole source of social differentiation from ethnic Japanese is the fact of Korean descent. Even in the case of those who attended and still identify with the North Korea-affiliated schools and organizations, the overwhelming cultural influence was often no different from that of other Japanese children. As the North Korea orientation of Soren-affiliated schools waned, the fact of cultural Japanese-ness became all the more inescapable. For all the incidents of Japanese intolerance and even racism—such as the 1994 Chimachogori Incident, in which female ethnic school pupils’ ethnic costumes were slashed—Soren schools were known and even admired by the Japanese public for their athletic prowess.

In making sense of a racial, ethnic, or national group—categories of modern peoplehood—one usually looks to language, religion, or custom and culture. Yet Zainichi lacked these elementary bases of distinction from the larger Japanese society by the 1970s. Second-generation Zainichi were Japanese speakers. Although Soren school graduates knew a great deal of the Korean language, they effectively spoke the Soren language, thereby distinguishing themselves from both native North and South Koreans. The basic fact, however, was that they were inevitably much more comfortable in wielding their native Japanese-language facility. By the time a new generation of Korean migrants arrived from South Korea in the 1980s, there were no major concentrations of ethnic Koreans where Korean was the lingua franca.

Religion did not separate Zainichi from ethnic Japanese, either. One may plausibly suggest that Soren followers practiced a form of secular religion, but in the postwar decades there were many committed Japanese communists who were at once like Soren communists and unlike other Japanese people. Although Shinto adherents were unlikely to be Zainichi, the major world religions, ranging from Buddhism to Christianity, had faithfuls among both ethnic Korean and ethnic Japanese populations. First-generation Koreans engaged in ethnically distinct Buddhist temples and other ritual practices, but they were clearly on the wane by the 1980s. Prewar ethnic Koreans tended to practice rituals of ancestor worship [*chesa*]. Although almost universally practiced by the first generation, the Confucian ritual became vitiated and transformed under successive generations. Younger Zainichi either simplified or abandoned *chesa*.

Finally, custom and culture—from food and clothing to material and cultural consumption—poorly differentiated ethnic Koreans from ethnic Japanese. Already by the 1940s, ethnic Koreans’ public appearance was similar to their ethnic Japanese counterparts. Ethnic costume was primarily worn by the elderly and women, who tended to stay within the perimeters of ethnic Korean ghettos. The Zainichi novelist Lee Hoesung wore traditional Korean clothes [*hanbok*] for the first time in his mid-sixties, in 2001. The propensity to use garlic and chili or to barbecue meat rendered Korean cuisine distinct from the Japanese. The Japanese-born Korean-Canadian writer Ook Chung has the narrator remark: “I understood that I was Korean the day I discovered that I couldn’t do without kimchi.” Or, as the Zainichi writer Shin Sugok notes, the desire to eat kimchi is “the proof of my grandmother’s existence.” To be sure, we have already encountered Pak and Kyo, who did not consume kimchi regularly, and it is a common Zainichi experience to find “real” Korean food too “spicy.” Sagisawa Megumu retrospectively identifies her family’s signature dish as a permutation of the Korean *p’ajon* (savory pancake): an unacknowledged trace of her hidden Korean ancestry. Yet in the course of the postwar decades there was a striking convergence. Ethnic Koreans adapted to local produce and cuisine; ethnic Japanese, especially after the 1980s, found foreign cuisine delectable. By then, ethnic costume was worn on special occasions and by female students attending Soren schools. Although there were ethnic Korean publications and media, most second-generation Zainichi were weaned on Japanese popular culture. The prevalence of Zainichi stars in sports and music may have generated co-ethnic preferences, but Rikidozan and Miyako Harumi were representative Japanese celebrities.

The undeniable source of distinction was ancestry, recorded in family registries and official documents, and the readily available marker was name. *Koseki* and *tsumei* constituted the two weak links in any Zainichi effort to pass as ordinary Japanese. Furthermore, given the pervasive prejudice and discrimination against people of Korean descent in Japan, the fact of Korean descent has a significant impact on Zainichi identity.

Yet ancestry or descent do not pass on as a homogeneous trace. Many Zainichi belong to ethno-political organizations, but many are regionally based, such as those for Zainichi people from Chejudo. The relative autonomy of Chejudo identity—certainly distinct culturally from their mainland Korean counterparts—manifests itself frequently in assertions of difference from other Zainichi and Koreans. Regional diversity made a mockery of the essentialist claim of Koreanness.

Other social conditions, such as economic or regional background, vary tremendously. What unites Son Masayoshi, Japan’s wealthiest man of Korean origin, and a homeless, and socially faceless, Zainichi man? Or consider regional diversity within Japan: a Zainichi man who grew up in Tokyo writes of Zainichi in Osaka as people “who are clearly a different species, an alien cultural group.” When he first went to Ikaino (a Korean area in Osaka), he wondered whether he was still in Japan. Yet Ikaino proclaimed itself to be “Koreatown” in 1987 and a spiritual home for the Zainichi population.

The diversity of Zainichi identification also excluded traditionalists who continued to embrace Korean identification and exilic status. Soren Koreans have long rejected the very label Zainichi. Ko Yon-i, who teaches French literature at the Soren-affiliated Chosen University, writes: “I reject Japanese people calling me ‘Zainichi’ [because I am] *essentially* Korean [Chosenjin].” In contrast, Sagisawa Megumu was not alone in rejecting ethnic identification altogether: “I personally think that ethnicity is fiction.” Gen Getsu says in an interview that Zainichi “don’t have any identity” and likens it to “floating weed.” Disidentification from Zainichi identity—perhaps the dominant identification among ethnic Koreans from the 1980s—was commonplace from its very birth.

Thus, ethnicity in and of itself cannot in any sense predict the concrete contours of individual identity. Needless to say, their lives variously reflect the traces of ancestral genes or memes and the persistence of Japanese disrecognition against ethnic Koreans, but it would be difficult to conclude that ethnic ancestry and experience leave consistent marks on individual lives, and provide insights into Zainichi as a singular group. I am skeptical that ethnicity has a determining impact on one’s sense of self or personal identity. It is a factor—and it can become the dominant factor for some people at some time—but only one among many. And self-identification may change dramatically over a life course. The usual social-scientific approach—to use social backgrounds or factors as the independent variables and individuals and their identities as the dependent variables—does not work very well. Concrete lives resist simple, reductionist, and essentialist characterizations. Zainichi ideology mischaracterized and misrecognized Zainichi realities.

*John Lie was born in South Korea, grew up in Japan and Hawaii and attended Harvard University where he received a B.A. and Ph.D. He is currently Class of 1959 Professor of Sociology and Dean of International Area Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. His books include [Multiethnic Japan](#) and [Modern Peoplehood](#).*

*This article is adapted from chapter four of [Zainichi \(Koreans in Japan\): Diasporic Nationalism and](#)*

[Postcolonial Identity](#) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). All the references can be found therein. Posted on Japan Focus on November 3, 2008.

See the following articles related to Zainichi and ethnicity issues:

[Kang Sangjung, Memories of a Zainichi Korean Childhood](#)

[Sonia Ryang, The Denationalized Have No Class: The Banishment of Japan's Korean Minority-- A POLEMIC](#)

[Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Migrants, Subjects, Citizens: Comparative Perspectives on Nationality in the Prewar Japanese Empire](#)

[Mark E. Caprio, The Forging of Alien Status of Koreans in American Occupied Japan](#)

[Joshua Hotaka Roth, Political and Cultural Perspectives on Japan's Insider Minorities](#)

Created by Datamomentum