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The Ethnic Is Still Political: Collective Action in the Age of Zainichi Korean Population Decline in Contemporary Japan

Youngmi Lim, Musashi University

Abstract

This article describes where Zainichi Korean minority communities stand in contemporary Japanese society. Diverse Zainichi Korean communities struggle to reproduce and establish their legitimacy, as the narrowly defined Zainichi Korean population declines, and the levels of institutional racism based on legal status diminish. Increasing are more subtle forms of exclusion and microaggressions as well as on- and off-line hate speech. Based on the examinations of two cases of social movements involving Zainichi Koreans, I will examine how Zainichi Koreans are polarized into visible, outspoken subgroups and the invisible. A more resilient and proactive subethnicity can be seen among those who perceive continuing collective suffering and oppression. The Zainichi Korean minority's experience attests to how ethnicity is reproduced and activated through committed collective actions, which build on coalitions with concerned Japanese and beyond.

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Introduction: The Mice and the Elephant

The assumption of Japanese ethnic homogeneity has long been challenged (Lie, 2001; Oguma, 1995; Weiner, 1997), and, indeed, there are encyclopedic enumerations of national origins in resident foreigner statistics in Japan. An English-language introductory textbook about contemporary Japan lists a caste-like minority, indigenous people, former colonial migrants, and more recent migrant workers (many are descendants of Japanese emigrants) (Sugimoto, 2014). Nonetheless, statistically speaking, and perhaps attesting to Japanese common sense, the vast majority of people who live in Japan are Japanese of Japanese ancestry. In August 2020, out of a 125,809,000 population, 123,334,000 – 98% of the population – are “Japanese” (Ministry of General Affairs, 2021). Japanese here means Japanese by nationality. The 98% includes a tiny portion of naturalized Japanese of colonial Korean ancestry and other national origins.¹ Most Japanese do not have to pause and consider what it means to be an ethnic minority in everyday life unless they emigrate to another country. Japanese political and societal institutions do not always respond to the plight of ethnic minorities, which constitute a few percent of the entire population.

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Negligence has no substantial impact on election results. Nonetheless, Japan's reputation on the global stage constitutes a major benchmark for its collective identity (Leheny, 2018) and if a breach in global human rights norms undermines the state's reputation in the global community, Japanese social and political institutions face constraints outside of domestic election results. The local-global feedback loop, as Kiyoteru Tsutsui (2014) calls it, successfully (re)activates minority movements and expanded minority rights, building on global norms of human rights while articulating such norms in turn.

The populational imbalance between the Japanese majority and ethnic (indigenous or immigrant) minorities will last for years to come with significant socio-political implications on ethnic/race relations in contemporary Japan. The history and ongoing struggles of ethnic minorities in Japan resemble a fight between a mouse and an elephant, wrote Choe Son-ae in her final appeal to the Fukuoka District Court in her trial (1984-1985) over her refusal to be fingerprinted in alien registration during the anti-fingerprint movement of the 1980s:

There is a saying, "Only the mouse feels pain, whether the mouse bites the elephant, or the elephant bites the mouse." I am biting a giant elephant called the Japanese legal system. At first, the nation's powerhouse would not have felt anything. It was only we who felt the pain. But now, many mice are biting the same elephant, committing their bodies and entire lives to this cause. Biting and being bitten equally hurt, then, I do not wish to lose my self being bitten. I would rather bite [the elephant] and be myself again (Choe, 2000:16-17, translation mine).

The anti-fingerprint movement (mostly involving resident Koreans) illustrates a successful moment in the battle between the mice and the elephant. The 1970s and the 1980s saw a remarkable lowering of institutional barriers for resident Koreans (Lie, 2008) with many changes introduced as Japan responded to grassroots activism and ratified international treaties on human rights and refugees in 1979 and 1981 respectively. The 1991 settlement, which abolished the alien registration fingerprint requirement and integrated complex legal statuses (see below), was the beginning of social movements as redirected, reactive ethnicity.

Among phenotypically invisible minority groups in Japan, Koreans are gradually losing population in resident foreigner statistics. In 2007, the Chinese ranked as the largest resident foreigners for the first time. Although recent streams of South Korean migrants and their children have somewhat stretched the Korean population base in Japan, the overall Korean population is declining due to death, low birthrates, naturalization, and intermarriages with Japanese (which grant Japanese nationality to offspring) as well as declining outmigration from South Korea.

Two major backdrops to note are the membership definition and the contingent incorporation of immigrants. First, lineage is emphasized through institutionalized formal membership in Japan. Japanese nationality (the term "citizenship" is rarely used in the Japanese language when talking about franchised membership in the Japanese nation-state) is granted only to those who have at least one legal Japanese parent (*jus sanguinis*), and hyphenated Japanese continues to be idiomatically awkward (Kashiwazaki, 2000; Lie, 2008). Second, neither immigration nor integration policies officially exist at the national level, except for laws that

regulate the flow of foreigners. Only 81 out of 10,375 refugee-status applicants were approved to remain in Japan in 2019 (Ministry of Justice, 2020a). Based on secondary sources and fieldwork conducted intermittently between 1998 and 2020, I will examine how Zainichi Koreans (literally, Koreans being in Japan)² are polarized into visible, outspoken subgroups and invisible, silent subgroups. Following an overview of recent demographic trends, I will describe two prominent collective actions involving Zainichi Koreans during the 2010s.

Who are Zainichi Koreans? – Residency and Nationality/Lack of Nationality

At present, the narrowest definition of Zainichi Koreans uses a combination of nationality (or lack of nationality) and legal status, i.e., South Korean or stateless Korean³ “special permanent residents” of Japan (305,615 as of June 2020) (Ministry of Justice, 2021). The vast majority (91%) are South Koreans (see Table 1). Special permanent residency, established in 1991, is granted to those who migrated to Japan as Japanese imperial subjects and their descendants who remained in Japan. Their (or their ancestors’) Japanese nationality was revoked in 1952 when Japan resumed its sovereignty. As formerly Japanese, special permanent residency is the most stable permanent resident status in Japan. Far-right activists who campaign for the banishment of all Koreans adherently oppose this exceptional treatment mostly for old-comer Zainichi Koreans. (The former leader of *Zainichi tokken o yurusanai shimin no kai*/Citizens’ Group Against Zainichi Privileges, run for Tokyo gubernatorial elections twice in 2016 and 2020, receiving 2.6% of the entire vote, 178,784 in 2019 (*Asahi Shinbun*, July 6, 2020).)

The origin of Korean migration is part of global 20th-century labor migration from the colonial peripheries to the imperial-capitalist cores. While the Korean population in Japan (mostly impoverished peasants from the southern provinces) steadily grew throughout Japan’s colonial rule (1910-1945), it rapidly increased towards the end of World War II, approaching nearly two million in 1944 (Y. Kim, 1996:174) because of total mobilization and labor conscription into Japan’s war. Not all Koreans repatriated to the peninsula, and some clandestinely returned to Japan, facing political and economic chaos back home. In 1947, when the Japanese government under Allied occupation started registering Koreans as foreigners mainly to regulate these unofficial streams of return migrants as well as left-leaning activists, Zainichi Koreans were all stateless, lacking an internationally recognized independent Korean nation. The Korean homeland, split and occupied by the Soviets and the United States, eventually saw the establishment of two Korean nation-states in 1948 (the Republic of Korea, hereafter ROK or South Korea, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, hereafter DPRK or North Korea). The intensified civil and international warfare (1950-1953) involving the two Koreas, the United States, and Communist China was devastating. While the population breakdown of South Koreans and stateless Koreans was unknown, 535,065 Koreans were registered as aliens in Japan in 1952 (Y. Kim, 1996:176). Although some pro-South Korean Mindan (the Union of Resident Koreans in Japan) activists declared allegiance to South Korea from the early 1950s, the vast majority of Koreans were stateless Koreans and for Koreans struggling for everyday survival, communist ideals were appealing, as many migrant-generation Zainichi Koreans recall. The influential communist-leaning Korean organization - the Leagues of Koreans - was ordered to dissolve in the intensified

Cold War. Soon after, it was reorganized into pro-North Korean Chongryon (the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan/Sōren in abridged Japanese), which has maintained a stance of non-interference with Japanese domestic political affairs since its foundation in 1955 (S. Ryang, 1997:90).

South Korean status became a recognized nationality within Japan for the first time in 1965 when South Korea and Japan normalized diplomatic relations. Normalization faced strong domestic opposition because of its problematic settlement of Japan's colonization and war-related mobilization. To secure stable permanent residency, accorded only to South Koreans following the normalization, many stateless Koreans filed for South Korean nationality and treaty-based permanent residency by its application deadline in 1971. In 1974, 342,366 were estimated to be South Korean treaty-based permanent residents, and 270,283 were stateless Koreans whose residency statuses were much less stable (Miyata, 1988:245), which means 55.9% of these Koreans residing in Japan were South Koreans, loosely represented by Mindan as South Korean nationals. Permanent residency among those who remained stateless Koreans was granted in 1981, as exceptional permanent residents, an amendment grounded on Japan's ratification of refugee conventions. In 1991 special permanent residency combined treaty-based, exceptional, and other residency statuses as family members. It took four decades to stabilize the legal status of all Zainichi Koreans as former Japanese.

Contemporary stateless Koreans are a minority (9.1%) within a minority. Especially following the Japan-DPRK summit of 2002, when the DPRK admitted its agents' abduction of Japanese citizens, those who filed for South Korean nationality doubled the previous year (Lee, 2021:211). The loss of each year is slightly larger among stateless Koreans (4-5 % each year) than South Koreans (2-3 %) (Table 1). Among those who are ardent supporters of Chongryon, being stateless Korean is only in relation to the Japanese government and they identify themselves as overseas nationals of the DPRK. Some stateless Korean intellectuals express their diasporic identity, identifying themselves with unified Korea, and non-acquisition of any nationality as a committed lifestyle, while others have been simply reluctant to submit cumbersome paperwork (Nakamura 2021:103). The actual breakdown of the meaning stateless Koreans attach to their legal status cannot be known.

Slightly more broadly defined Zainichi Koreans include sojourners and migrants from South Korea after its 1989 deregulation of overseas travel (436,791 South Koreans, Table 1). Research focusing on Zainichi Koreans typically deals with old-comers, whose Japan-born generations altered their collective identity from the national to the ethnic. It is important to note that the children born to new-comers and raised in Japan are no longer an immigrant generation, or a voluntary minority (Ogbu, 1991). Following Ogbu's classical hypotheses, the modes of incorporation significantly affect the modes of adaptation. Old-timers and new-comers' experiences might converge, both being invisibly foreign in Japan, although new second-generation youth retain closer ties with South Korea.

The broadest and the most diffuse definition of Zainichi Koreans includes those who are Japanese citizens and those who were born to Japanese and Zainichi Korean or new-comer Korean

couples (throughout the 2010s, eight of ten Koreans marry Japanese nationals on average). Between 1952 and 2019, 379,878 Koreans naturalized and acquired Japanese nationality (Ministry of Justice, 2020b). Naturalized Koreans are aggregated in statistics as Japanese and there is no way of knowing exactly how many Korean Japanese live in Japan. Even if the estimated 1-2 million Korean Japanese – either by naturalization or having one Japanese parent – are all included, Zainichi Koreans, again, constitute a small numeric minority, still less than two percent of the population.

Table 1 Total of Resident Koreans/Special Permanent Resident (SPR) Koreans, 2006-2019*

	South Korean Total	S. Korean Total	Korean Total	% Previous Year	S. Korean SPR	S. Korean SPR % Previous Year	% Total Korean SPR	Stateless Korean SPR	Stateless Korean SPR % Previous Year	% Total Korean SPR	SPR Total	SPR % Previous Year	SPR % Loss
2020.06	436,791	27,695	464,486	*	278,465	*	91.1	27,150	*	8.9	305,615	*	*
2019	485,257	28,096	513,353	89.5	281,266	97.4	91.1	27,543	95.1	8.9	308,809	97.2	2.8
2018	543,938	29,559	573,497	98.9	288,737	97.6	90.9	28,961	95.8	9.1	317,698	97.4	2.6
2017	548,899	30,859	579,758	103.6	295,826	97.5	90.7	30,243	95.0	9.3	326,069	97.3	2.7
2016	527,077	32,461	559,538	101.2	303,337	97.4	90.5	31,826	95.6	9.5	335,163	97.2	2.8
2015	519,134	33,939	553,073	101.9	311,463	*	90.3	33,281	*	9.7	344,744	97.2	2.8
2014	N/A	N/A	542,635	98.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	354,503	96.0	4.0
2013	N/A	N/A	549,798	97.0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	369,249	97.9	2.1
2012	N/A	N/A	567,049	104.0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	377,351	98.0	2.0
2011	N/A	N/A	545,401	96.4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	385,232	97.5	2.5
2010	N/A	N/A	565,989	97.8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	395,234	97.5	2.5
2009	N/A	N/A	578,495	98.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	405,571	97.0	3.0
2008	N/A	N/A	589,239	99.3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	418,309	98.1	1.9
2007	N/A	N/A	593,489	99.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	426,207	97.1	2.9
2006	N/A	N/A	598,219	*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	438,974	*	*

*The Japanese government began publishing the exact breakdown in 2015.

Source: Ministry of Justice Statistics on Resident Foreigners, each year (extracted and computed from Table 99-01 and Table 1-2 from 2012 on, as of December 31, except for 2020).

Regardless of nationality, not all Zainichi Koreans advertise their Korean ethnic background, by solely using Korean names in everyday life. A 1993 survey of Zainichi South Korean youth demonstrated only 6.4% used Korean names all the time, while the rest situationally use their Japanese-style name. Eight out of ten respondents use Japanese names more frequently, most of the time, or always (Fukuoka and Kim, 1997:77). In 1940, all Koreans, in Japan and in Korea, were ordered to “create” Japanese-style names (Ijichi, 1994:16-17), and many Koreans in Japan started using Japanese names to avoid discrimination in job and housing markets. Until 1986, the Ministry of Justice had an internal memorandum stating the name after naturalization should be Japanese style (Ijichi, 1994:93-94). Naturalized Japanese of Korean descent typically adopt Japanese aliases they have already used as their new legal names. It was only through appeals to the family courts in the 1980s that Pak Shil, Yun Choja, Chong Yang-i, and others could

successfully retrieve Korean-style names while maintaining Japanese citizenship (Ijichi, 1994:98). It is not unusual to encounter Korean names in urban areas. The Japanese mass media update the gossips of South Korean celebrities (all uses Korean names, pronounced in Korean, of course). Nonetheless, Zainichi Koreans who go by their Korean names, are the minority. Again, there is no way of knowing how many Zainichi Koreans there are based on subjective and proactive identifications and practices, rather than by ascribed membership by birth.

The relations between Japan and the two Koreas affect the social costs attached to being Zainichi Koreans. The termination of the military dictatorship in South Korea throughout the 1990s, its 1996 entry into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the increasing popularity of South Korean pop icons since the 2000s are in contrast to the DPRK hermit status. The Japanese government, under the U.S.-Japan security treaty, has adopted draconian measures against North Korea. However, Japan-South Korea relations fluctuate, having clearly deteriorated over territorial and historical debates, especially war-related redress issues during the 2010s, regardless of either state's administration. Zainichi Koreans, regardless of their nationality/lack of nationality, have faced institutionalized exclusions, hate speech, and microaggressions, reflecting the recurring tensions in East Asian geopolitics (Higuchi, 2016; Y. Ryang, 2020). Anti-Korean demonstrations officially call for the earliest possible solutions to North Korean agents' abduction of Japanese citizens, territorial disputes with South Korea, the historical issues on conscripted labor and other issues, or alleged Zainichi Korean privileges or local disputes. In July 2011, when I observed a far-right rally in front of a rural private museum commemorating Korean conscripted laborers, the demonstrators spent only a few minutes addressing their political claims, and the remaining 40 minutes were reserved for hate speech and intimidations with repetitive racial epithets in a deafening volume. Although hate demonstrations in public space decreased in recent years, in response to counter-hate movements and the 2016 anti-hate speech law and some municipal ordinances, online hate speech and in-person harassment prevail. 75.7% have encountered hate demonstrations in public space, and 73.9% came across anti-Korean hate speech on the Internet among over 1,000 Korean students who attend Japanese schools and receive a scholarship from the Korea Scholarship Foundation (Chōsenshōgakkai, 2021:3).

Zainichi Korean communities⁴ face a momentous demographic crisis, at least in terms of the official statistics definable by combinations of nationality and legal residency and comparisons of their size with other groups of foreign origin. In 1992, the year after the establishment of special permanent residency, 585,170 Korean special permanent residents were reported (Y. Kim, 1996:177), which means their population nearly halved in less than three decades. Although Zainichi Koreans used to be the largest foreign population throughout most of the post-WWII years and Japanese policies on foreign residents addressed mostly Zainichi Koreans, this is no longer the case. In 1998, I went to hear a two-day symposium in Tokyo organized by Zainichi Korean grassroots activists who represented alternative activism to conventional nation-wide organizations such as Mindan or Chongryon. The symposium's major theme, and its most contentious topic, was accelerating assimilation through naturalization and the drastic decline in Zainichi Korean endogamy (Zainichi Dōhō no Seikatsu o Kangaerukai, 1999). Zainichi Koreans are in the final phase of assimilation, which threatens the reproduction of ethnic communities or

organizations. Heated debates in earlier years have never reversed the trend of structural assimilation. A well-known conservative Zainichi Korean critic declared “the end of Zainichi (South) Koreans,” leaving the maintenance and succession of Korean identity and heritage up to personal choices (Tei,2001:193). Is compartmentalized ethnicity, esoterically practiced in the private sphere, still an ethnicity? Like the late Sagisawa Megumu, the novelist, who accidentally discovered her grandmother’s Korean roots, (partial) Korean lineage can easily be kept as a family secret or completely obliterated. Is ethnicity possible without an acknowledged and shared history or without collective actions? Or is it infertile and obsolete to refer to any of the modern peoplehood categories of race, nation, and ethnicity (Banton, 2015; Brubaker, 2009; Lie, 2004; Wimmer, 2013), when analyzing Zainichi Koreans?

Where are Zainichi Koreans? – The Most Visible among the Invisible

Zainichi Koreans are too diverse to lump altogether in a single, united, and uncontested ethnic group category (Lie, 2008). Given the multiplexity of positionalities and intersectionality, the abstract Zainichi Korean ethnicity should be either ethnicities or subethnicities under one umbrella ethnicity. Class positions or intergenerational mobility patterns provide crucial backdrops in analyzing the political dimensions of being part of an ethnic minority community. Zainichi Korean life chances depend on combinations of numerous factors. Old-timers benefited from a trickle-down effect of Japan’s high economic growth throughout the 1950s and the mid-1970s (Lie, 2008:72). At least, they are no longer in collective destitution, although observers note increasing inequality among Zainichi Koreans. According to sociologist Myungsoo Kim’s large-scale 1995-1996 survey (2003), Zainichi Korean status attainment patterns among male South Koreans are similar to those of the Japanese majority. Self-employment and the use of ethnic networks alleviated the effects of structural disadvantages in the Japanese labor market (M. Kim, 2003). Zainichi Koreans are a model minority after all, an upwardly mobile minority group without proactive intervention by the state to affect educational and economic opportunities and outcomes. Bumsoo Kim (2011) updates Korean socioeconomic status attainment patterns (all nationality and residential status; both old-comers and new-comers) using national statistics published in aggregation and points out the enlarging status gap among Zainichi Koreans. Between 1985 and 2005, Korean unemployment rates are consistently about twice as much as those of the entire population in Japan for both men and women (B. Kim, 2011:242).

Class positions, nonetheless, do not make Zainichi Koreans visible in contemporary Japan. Emergent organized expressions of anti-Korean hate throughout the 2000s and the 2010s, imply an increasing polarization of Zainichi Koreans, not alongside political ideology over the divided Korean homeland nor based on enlarging inequality in socioeconomic statuses but over communal and political visibility. Visibility derives not necessarily from materialized ethnic traits such as language, name use, and nationality but increasingly politics practiced at a communal level, voicing dissent and demanding justice often but not always through collective actions. Many organizationally detached Zainichi Koreans I interviewed between 1998 and 2000 maintained apolitical stances, while sharing occasional encounters in which they feel they do not fully belong

to the Japanese society. Rather than a belonging of a choice, Zainichi Korean status is a label and the meanings attached to it have never been neutral. Second-, third-, and fourth generation Zainichi Korean are native speakers of Japanese and share cohort experiences with Japanese, growing up in Japan. 87.8% of South Korean and Korean Japanese youths (outreached by Mindan's Youth Organization) never attended full-time Korean schools (M. Kim, 2014:97). Visibility has long been lost in terms of cultural traits except for a few Korean customs preserved in private spheres such as ancestor worship. Being invisible and indistinguishable except for legal status has long been the norm, since the dominance of Japan-born generations. Where are Zainichi Koreans now? Political visibility seems to matter all the more in recent years.

The Uri-Hakkyo (Our School) Community, Litigation Struggles, and Supporters

Ko Chanyoo, the journalist and the director of the documentary film, *Ai/kodomo-tachi no gakkō/hakkyo* [Children's Schools] (2019; Ko, 2021), explained Chongryon-affiliated DPRK-flagged Korean schools (Chōsengakkō) (I avoid calling North Korean schools in that not everyone in the school community identifies herself/himself as North Korean overseas national) as one of the world's exceptionally large-scale overseas educational enterprises at an online film-screening event (2/17/2021). The purpose of this film production is to support the causes of DPRK-flagged schools, promoting an understanding of the school system among outsiders. The DPRK-flagged school community is the most visible Zainichi Korean entity. Numerous ethnographic studies, journalistic reports, and documentary film productions are devoted to them, exploring their needs as a school community and outsider (including South Korean from South Korea) curiosity.

Referring to it as “*uri hakkyo*” [our schools], insiders signal respect and attachment to the school community contextualized as a long struggle to establish and maintain schooling exclusively for Zainichi Koreans. From kindergarten to college, independent curriculums are used where students receive instruction in Korean. In exchange for the Korean language immersion instructional style and independent curriculum from the standard curriculum regulated by the Japanese Ministry of Education, DPRK-flagged schools do not receive any national or municipal subsidies available for Japanese private schools, except for some prefectural and municipal supplement funds. In 2020, 64 primary and secondary schools in 28 prefectures across Japan have 4,903 students (*Asahi Shinbun* 11/22/2020). In the 1960s, the total student enrollment exceeded 35 thousand, declining to 10 thousand by the 2000s (Cho, 2011:97), and now half that number. Since Chongryon support for father-son succession in DPRK leadership, the curriculum of DPRK-flagged schools has faced skepticism among non-Chongryon Zainichi Koreans (Yang, 1983). Ideologically performative aspects used to be prominent during the 1980s until a series of curriculum reforms, with pragmatic orientations to the globalized economy, were implemented throughout the 1990s and especially after 2003 (O, 2019; Yamamoto, 2014).

Full-time Korean schools, whichever flag they raise (South Korean schools operate in much smaller numbers), play a pivotal role in the Zainichi Korean community reproduction, at both collective and individual levels. The *uri-hakkyo* community, in particular, maintains viable close-knit ties among the students and alumni of DPRK-flagged schools (who become parents and/or teachers of the school system). The *uri-hakkyo* community stretches beyond residential

proximity (Cho, 2012:124). Enrollees are typically connected from parents' or even grandparents' generations through the school system. Active parental involvement in school operational matters supplements the lack of resources. The school community's ability to mobilize both students and parents is astonishing. While multiple informants of mine who left the school community expressed frustration with their school experience, they cheerfully sang the revolutionary songs in Korean they learned at school in unison at off-line meetings of the Zainichi Korean online community back in 1999. The alumni know so many people in common, easily getting connected with each other. Both alumni and students identify themselves as part of the school community, not necessarily as part of (rather detached from) the pro-DPRK Chongryon community (Cho, 2011, 2012; Han, 2006). At an individual level, Korean-language immersion curriculum and the minority-majority environment (Zainichi Korean minority is the majority within the school) secure Korean proficiency (even though Zainichi Korean language is strongly influenced by the Japanese language everyone acquires as the first language at home (O 2019:197-202)), and students acquire a collective experience as Zainichi Koreans (Cho, 2011; Yamamoto, 2014). While avoiding negative identity formation as a minority, Zainichi Koreans who belong to the *uri-hakkyo* community exercise and express creative, critical, and pragmatic agency, navigating inside and outside of the school (Cho, 2011; Ha, 2017; Han, 2006).

The *uri-hakkyo* community also includes Japanese activists and supporters, many connected with labor and peace movements. More recently, South Korean unification-oriented progressive grassroots activists have expressed ardent support.⁵ Throughout the 2010s, the *uri-hakkyo* community has been going through a series of litigation struggles over hate demonstrations in Kyoto, the termination of prefectural and municipal government supplement funds in Osaka, and the exclusion of DPRK-flagged high schools from the high-school tuition voucher program in five prefectures, including Tokyo and Osaka. Except for the Kyoto case, where the defendants were far-right activists who were ordered to compensate the school for damages, community claims continue being rejected. Court rulings almost always favor Japanese political and administrative authorities.

The free-tuition high-school voucher program began in 2010 for everyone other than students enrolled in DPRK-flagged high schools. Public high schools no longer collect tuition, and private high school students receive a voucher equivalent to public high school tuition (approximately 120,000 yen per student each year; parental income restrictions applied from 2014). International school students become eligible once approved by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The related special law clarified three types of international schools; 1) overseas-national schools of countries with which Japan has formal diplomatic relations and embassies in Japan to which the MEXT places an inquiry concerning the equivalency with Japanese educational system; 2) accredited international schools; and, 3) neither of the above. The eligibility for DPRK-flagged high schools was expected to be fulfilled by this third criterion. However, in combination with various sanctions against the DPRK government, eligibility was withheld by the eventual elimination of the third clause (Chon, 2019: 119). When the Liberal Democrats regained administrative control, they decided to exclude DPRK-flagged schools from the program. Out of 10 DPRK-flagged high schools across the nation, five high schools (or students/former students) filed litigation from 2013 on. Litigation strategies are slightly

different depending on the legal team of the region. Osaka school sought for the retraction of the eligibility decision, Aichi, Fukuoka, and Tokyo students demanded state redress, and Hiroshima school challenged the decision while the students demanded state redress. Except for a district court decision in Osaka which favored the school, the Supreme Court ruled on Tokyo's and Osaka's cases, holding in favor of the state in August 2019. The Aichi case was decided in the Supreme Court in September 2020. The Supreme Court unanimously decided against the plaintiffs in all cases. Hiroshima and Fukuoka's decisions are pending as of March 2021. These five parallel litigations demonstrate a moment of communal and political visibility, which reproduces the *uri-hakkyo* community through perceived collective struggles over the past seven decades.

I attended meetings about the Tokyo case following district and high court decisions on Sep. 13, 2017 and Oct. 30, 2018, respectively. Both meetings were held in different event spaces with capacities of over 800 and 1,300 each. They were fully packed; all the seats were taken, and many sat on the floor or stood by the hind exist. The slogan of the Tokyo case was, "Bring Smiles to Korean High School Students!" and the meeting handout included the symbol of a Korean-style female uniform's color and ribbon, one strap inscribed Korean Schools in Chinese characters (Chōsengakkō/Chosonhakkyo), and the other "Opposing Discrimination." Both meetings were organized by the Tokyo Litigation Support Group; the Nation-wide Support Network of the Korean Academies (*Chōsen Gakuen*) (Korean academies are prefectural school-administrative bodies of DPRK-flagged schools); the Forum on Peace, Human Rights, and Environment; the Mothers' Group of Tokyo Korean Schools; and Tokyo Korean Middle- and High-School.

Following the conventional format of post-legal decision meetings for litigation supporters, the 2017 Tokyo meeting opened with a report from the team of lawyers, appeals from students and parents, and supporters representing four other voucher-program litigations, both Japanese and Zainichi Koreans. A supporter from South Korea also spoke up, followed by an interpreter. Both Japanese and alumni Zainichi Korean lawyers, first, expressed bitterness, anger, disappointment, and other mixed feelings while elaborating legal explanations. The District Court decision blindly complied with the state's viewpoints; to the legal team, it was neither strictly legal nor procedurally correct. At that time, the Osaka District Court's decision was in favor of the school, whereas the Hiroshima District Court ruled against the school. The legal team was expecting Tokyo would repeat Osaka's victory. The lawyers expressed their continuing commitment and efforts in upcoming examinations at the High Court. The appeals by the students and parents were intense with occasional tears, some students expressing their aspiration to become lawyers to join in the long-term struggle of the school community. The parents also expressed their determination to continue the struggle for the future of the children. Then everyone was asked to stand up and chant, "Don't take away the rights (to learn) from the children!"

For the closing of the meeting, collective chants, "Guarantee all children rights to learn!" and everyone sang a song, written by Korea University (Chōsen Daigakkō, the postsecondary institution of the DPRK-flagged school system) students with Japanese and Korean lyrics, entitled "Voices, Gather, and Become a Song." The song is about the angry voices but not being heard, and it recalls 1948 4-24 Korean Education Struggle Incident, one of the starting points of the enduring struggles of defending Korean education in Japan. The meeting's program handout

includes the lyrics of the song together with an explanation about its origin. The song had debuted in 2013 at a nation-wide assembly demanding eligibility for the high-school voucher program and starting in June 2013, Korea University students and other supporters have been continuing to rally in front of the MEXT on Fridays.

The 2018 meeting, larger than the 2017 meeting, repeated the flow of the earlier meeting: first the legal team; then the students, the parents, representatives of parallel litigation across Japan; finally, supporters from South Korea, all sharing their emotionally draining disappointment from the defeat in the higher court. A Japanese professional photographer based in Kyoto who followed up on Zainichi Korean community events came to this meeting, taking countless pictures. A supporter from South Korea encouraged the audience, “Whether winning or losing litigation cases is not important. This is not [merely] litigation, but a struggle to protect human dignity.” He expressed his continuing engagement in the cause, promised to raise funds in South Korea for scholarships, and applause followed. There were moments of applauses, collective chants, and singing “Voices, Gather, and Become a Song” together. While intense emotions had just been shared, on the way out to the exit of the event space, so many circles of participants kept talking, introducing themselves to each other and exchanging business cards, while the Chongyon newspaper reporters as well as Japanese journalists collecting quotes. These post-litigation meetings provided opportunities for intra- and inter-communal bonding, as well as the significant display of *uri-hakkyo* communal solidarity to outsiders.

Another legal dispute with the Japanese political-administrative system involves supplementary funds from local governments. Osaka City and Prefecture initiated the elimination of these grants for DPRK-flagged schools in 2011, in response to the state-level sanctions against the DPRK. Osaka prefectural supplement funds had been granted since 1974 and Osaka municipal subsidies since 1988. The Osaka school filed a case in 2012 over the decision to terminate Osaka prefectural and municipal grants, and the litigation culminated in the 2018 Supreme Court decision, affirming lower court decisions defending the legal stance of Osaka Prefectural and Municipal governments (Mushōka Renrakukai Osaka, 2019). In 2016, the MEXT issued a memorandum instructing municipal governments to access the fair and effective distribution of supplementary funds to DPRK-flagged schools strictly for educational purposes. And Ibaragi, Mie, and Wakayama, as well as Gumma prefectures curtailed the subsidies from the following budgetary year (*Mainichi Shinbun* 4/17/2017).

The plight of the *uri-hakkyo* community, once improved by the 1990s, drastically worsened in the past decade or so, always being connected with Japan’s geopolitical concerns in the Korean peninsula. The *uri-hakkyo* community, reproduced by attending full-time DPRK-flagged schools, nonetheless seems to be strengthening communal ties through these daunting litigation struggles, even though they did not always end successfully. The community (including supporters, regardless of nationality) has been advocating the universal right to learn and the right to an ethnic minority education. The trinity of the DPRK state, Chongyon, and DPRK-flagged schools is probably reinforced by external labeling grounded in a strong “Korea phobia” in contemporary Japan (Itagaki, 2015), or more specifically, “North Korea phobia” (Yamamoto, 2017). North Korea phobia in line with the Japanese state sanctions against North Korea denies *uri-hakkyo* communal

concerns for Zainichi experiences, while community members cherish memories of growing up protected by a minority-majority environment on the school premises, and they pay tribute to the collective struggles of Korean minority education.

Multiethnic Pockets at the Frontlines of Anti-Racist Struggles

Ongoing concerns about hate speech and microaggressions, on- and offline, anchor renewed roots in local grassroots activism. Kawasaki-City's Sakuramoto neighborhood, adjacent to the industrial zone, has historically drawn Zainichi Koreans and more recently, Filipinas and Japanese Peruvians. This area and other well-known Korean neighborhoods are some of Japan's multiethnic pockets, where alternative approaches to Korean minority education practiced at local Japanese public schools, have long been succeeded from the 1970s and the 1980s on. Also, from the early 1970s, Southern Kawasaki has been the home of an incipient Zainichi Korean movement in collaboration with Japanese citizens, first tackling employment discrimination based on nationality. The local Korean community of Sakuramoto also has a Christian organization that runs a wide range of community services. Fureai-kan [Interaction Hall] is a well-known pioneering local community center, bridging Japanese, Zainichi Korean, and other communities of foreign workers. Fureai-kan receives municipal subsidies to run community programs meeting the needs of all age groups, providing many researchers with a fieldwork site and an entry point to a Zainichi Korean community. Fureai-kan's Japanese literacy education accepts Zainichi Korean elderly women who had little chance of attending school because of poverty and sexism among Korean families as well as immigrant workers who arrived more recently.

Southern Kawasaki attracted media attention especially from the mid-2010s on because it became a fierce battleground of anti-Korean hate demonstrators and anti-racist activists consisted of both Japanese and Zainichi Koreans. It resembled the situation in the Korean commercial neighborhood of Ōkubo in Shinjuku, Tokyo in 2013, when anti-Korean hate demonstrations and the counter movements skirmished every weekend. Between 2013 and 2016, Kawasaki City's public space had at least 12 anti-Korean hate demonstrations (Kitazaki, 2016). Between April 2012 and September 2015, 1,152 hate demonstrations were confirmed to have taken place across Japan (Hayashida and Gotō, 2016). The first hate demonstration - "Purify Japan from Kawasaki" - came to Sakuramoto on November 8, 2015, when Choi Kangija, the Zainichi Korean Fureai-kan staff who grew up in Sakuramoto, joined the counter-hate protestors with her Japanese spouse and 13-year-old son. It was this 13-year-old boy who determined to raise his voice for the first time, which took his parents to the frontline of anti-hate counter actions (Kimura, 2016:50). The family stood in the opposite direction from another hate demonstration in Sakuramoto on January 31, 2016. In ten days, on February 9, the Kawasaki Citizens' Network Against Hate Speech (launched in January; hereafter, Citizen's Group) including Choi and her son, visited Kawasaki's mayor and filed the complaint with the city and asked for help, to which the City responded that it would be difficult to block hate demonstrations within the existing legal framework (Kimura, 2016:50). On March 20th, alongside the anti-Korean demonstration and the counter-protestors there was a violent encounter, resulting in the arrest of four far-right demonstrators. The Citizens' Group distributed its flier while collecting signatures in its campaign for proactive counter-hate measures. Choi

stated her opinion at the Upper House's jurisdiction committee on March 22nd. In less than ten days, ten congresspeople, including the ruling Liberal Democrat, visited Sakuramoto, received by Choi and other Citizens' Group members. Choi, who just wished to cherish everyday life in peace in her favorite community with her spouse and children, had immediately become the icon of the on-going anti-hate speech movement (Kimura, 2016) which is now aiming at the passing of encompassing anti-discrimination laws with negative sanctions. Citizens' Group submitted collected signatures to Kawasaki City on May 12th. Choi in the meanwhile wrote a letter to the hate-demonstration organizer, proposing to initiate a dialogue. The 2016 hate speech elimination act (The Act on the Promotion of Efforts to Eliminate Unfair Discriminatory Speech and Behavior against Persons Originating from Outside Japan) passed both houses on May 24th and was enacted on June 3rd. Kawasaki-based counter-hate activism played a pivotal role in this successful legislation process. While many criticisms and reservations followed - indigenous and other minorities are excluded and there is no penalty against its violation, the passing of the hate speech elimination act itself was a milestone. One hate demonstration planned on June 5 was dismissed, facing the counter protests. The police also persuaded the organizers not to march on. Choi made a speech in front of the counter-hate protestors, "the despair I felt on January 31st is now overwritten by a hope" (Kunimoto and Kinoshita, 2016). The anti-hate speech movement has accumulated experience on how to block hate demonstrations through court and administrative procedures as well as direct opposition.

Activists in the Kawasaki anti-hate-speech movement, however, continues combatting endless battles online. Choi and her son had become the target of frequent online hate messages via Twitter and other platforms, since their advocacy was reported by the major media, nationwide newspapers, and net-work televisions in March 2016 around when Choi expressed her opinion at the Upper House jurisdiction committee. The situation escalated until Choi received death threats, the police strengthened her neighborhood patrol and Choi removed her nameplate from the front door of her house (Goto, 2016; Hata, 2020). When the Bureau of Justice issued a warning to the hate demonstration organizer in August 2016, hate messages sent directly to Choi and her minor son kept growing (Kimura, 2016:52). Choi suffered from stress insomnia and hearing-impairment (Hata, 2020). In September and October 2016, Choi filed a complaint of human rights violation to the Minister of Justice Human Rights Bureau and Yokohama District Bureau of Justice respectively (*Asahi Shinbun* 10/26/2016). Some tweets were deleted, while many were left untouched. In May 2017, Choi filed a criminal complaint against the account holder of one of the most vicious Twitter accounts. The police identified a 52-year-old man, whose house was searched in December. Since then, hate tweets from that particular account have ceased (Hata, 2020). He was not prosecuted after all. Therefore, Choi filed a charge against this 52-year-old man for the violation of the Kanagawa prefectural anti-harassment ordinance, and Yokohama Local Public Prosecutors Office filed a summary indictment against him. The Kawasaki Summary Court ordered the man a 300,000 yen fine in December 2019. While Choi's name and face are frequently reported in the mass media, this 52-year-old perpetrator continued anonymous. It took more than three years to reach a settlement. And this is only one out of many anonymous online hates Choi has been facing. In the meanwhile, on September 8, 2017, Choi joined in the protest in front of Twitter Co. in Tokyo, the company leaving numerous hate messages intact.

Kawasaki City again found itself in the spotlight when it introduced penal sanctions for hate speech perpetrators in December 2019, the first such move in Japan (Saitō 12/19/2019), another moment of successful achievement for the anti-hate advocacy. In the past five years, Choi's name appeared in 55 *Asahi*, 37 *Mainichi*, 20 *Yomiuri*, and seven *Nikkei* daily newspaper articles, for her actions and comments (each media's database as of 3/10/2021). Choi, as an outspoken anti-hate advocate,⁶ holds press conferences, accepts interviews by newspaper staff writers and television crews, issues statements as needed, speaks up in symposiums and study groups. At virtually all the hate-speech-related meetings I attended between 2017 and 2019, Choi, the lawyers with whom she worked closely, and Japanese journalists were present. Kawasaki-based anti-hate advocacy propels the active engagement of both Japanese and Zainichi Koreans, while these frontrunners are exposed to numerous threats, online and offline.

Concluding Remark: The Ethnic is Still the Political?

Outlined above are the declining Zainichi Korean population defined by nationality and legal status and two visible examples of ongoing struggles involving Zainichi Koreans in the past decade. Where do Zainichi Korean minority communities stand in contemporary Japanese society? Diverse Zainichi Korean communities struggle to reproduce and establish their legitimacy, as Zainichi Korean population declines, and institutional racism attenuates by improved legal statuses. More subtle forms of exclusion, microaggressions, and hate speech prevail, although these phenomena are not necessarily framed in lineage-based categories such as race, nation, and ethnicity. Sharing emotional reactions and appreciating mutual support and encouragement at the meetings and through interviews, both movements enhance communal solidarity which is not confined within a single ethnic group. The *uri-hakkyo* community's movement, so far, seems unable to dismantle the state's logic of security concerns. Kawasaki anti-hate protests still face challenges while having achieved two major gains in state legislation and municipal ordinance. The state, however, might be hesitant about introducing an anti-discrimination law with a penalty, which drives the counter-hate movement forward.

The *uri-hakkyo* community's litigation battles demanding inclusion into a state-sponsored program while maintaining curriculum independence pay tribute to preceding generations who passed along postcolonial reconfigurations of collective identity through defending the school system exclusively for Zainichi Koreans. The institutionalized exclusion of DPRK-flagged schools has clearly intensified since the 2002 summit. Geopolitical security concerns regarding the DPRK's militarism justify exclusion from the state- and even municipality-level policies, no matter how the *uri-hakkyo* community frames the problem in terms of universal children's rights to learn and/or a more specific minority children's rights to learn. Contending parties – the school community and the Japanese nation-state have no common frame. Sociologist-cum-activist Ryang Yong-song (2020) applies the concepts of racialization and racism to his analysis of contemporary Japanese society, where the majority of people do not consider racism a serious social problem at all. Rather than in ethnic, subethnic, inter- and intra-national terms, the visible, out-spoken

Zainichi Koreans reproduce communal peoplehood increasingly in race-relations terms, as “[t]he crucible of minority peoplehood is forged by racism” (Lie, 2004:248).

At the frontline of the Kawasaki anti-hate-speech struggles a parallel racialization moment occurs. Hate speech has been both a chronic and acute social problem in Japan since the mid-2000s when numerous conservative activist groups began organizing themselves and went off to the streets. Hate demonstrators, driven by anti-Korean or anti-Zainichi Korean sentiments, criticize broader (often international) political issues while screaming racial epithets at maximum volume. Choi Kangija, who had been working in multi-ethnic community Sakuramoto, raised her voice to express her concerns, revealing her identity in public. While collaborating with Japanese residents, journalists, and local civil servants, she participated in lobbying sessions and filed court and administrative procedures to block hate-motivated demonstrations and personal cyber threats. Regardless of citizenship, residents expressed concern for hate-driven disruptions of their quiet everyday lives. Even today, she keeps working against countless hate messages targeting her on the Internet, because she is Zainichi Korean. Lineage-based persecution prevails among visible and outspoken Zainichi Koreans, while the invisible and silent Zainichi Koreans are not fully exempted from explicit and implicit microaggressions.

For both *uri-hakkyo* community and anti-hate counter circles, the two examples of the most visible Zainichi Koreans at the frontline of longstanding minority struggles, Zainichi Korean women, children, and adolescents are the movements’ faces and major beneficiaries. The weaker, the more suffering minority within the minority are the visible, outspoken subethnicity. Deploying anti-racist logic and tactics, the visible Zainichi Korean communities simultaneously deconstruct the confinement of a specific ethnic or racial group. They strive for the betterment of universal humanity, in search of a right to be respected as a person no matter what category is imposed. Even the most centripetal and seemingly close-knit *uri-hakkyo* community relies heavily on Japanese supporters and beyond (South Korean supporters from South Korea) and the objectives they have are not pragmatic gains, but mutual respect, support, and love and peace, not hate. However, this more resilient and proactive subethnicity can only crystalize among those who perceive continuing suffering, oppression, and injustice.

The experience of the Zainichi Korean minority reaffirms how ethnicity is reproduced and activated primarily through committed social movements and collective actions. The lack of Japanese nationality institutionalized the systematic exclusion of Zainichi Koreans from Japanese economic, political, and social systems until the 1980s. The hurdles Zainichi Koreans face in contemporary Japan are now based on indirect criteria other than being foreigners or having Korean ancestry. The plight of DPRK-flagged schools is often pointed out as an example of “state-sponsored hate” (Itagaki, 2015; Y. Ryang, 2020). Contemporary Zainichi Korean exclusion materializes through universal and powerful phrases frequently used in everyday life in Japan, such as security threats - all the faults of the militaristic North Korean regime -, the state of emergency which as-a-matter-of-factly trumps individual human rights, and breaches of international laws for history debates and redress issues of conscripted labor during WWII - all the faults of South Korea since all the settlement claims were solved back in the 1965 normalization

treaty. Zainichi Koreans, visible or invisible, are implicated with all these issues. And where visible Zainichi Koreans are where outspoken collective action unfolds.

A longer-term overview of Zainichi Korean communities within and beyond the post-1945 transformation of Japanese society and culture, highlights a transformation from the colonial to the postcolonial, or from the national to the ethnic or diasporic/transnational. While Zainichi Korean ethnicity (or ethnicities paying attention to intersecting positionalities) entails varieties of subethnicities, visible ethnicity seems fundamentally communal and political. Post-2000s visible Zainichi Koreans, not in resident-foreigner statistics but in social problems of contemporary Japanese society, continue bringing in a bigger elephant of global norms in the battle with the elephant. The Zainichi Korean minority's experience attests to how a lineage-based community is reproduced and activated through committed social movements and collective actions. Zainichi Koreans, be they framed as a diasporic ethnic group, (trans)national group, or racial minority, do not exist without ongoing social movements and collective actions. The aggregated number in statistics does not matter. A handful of the minority within the minority group - approximately 1,500 DPRK-flagged high school students or Zainichi Koreans in Sakuramoto neighborhood, for example - functions enough as symbolic icons. The true beneficiary of such social movements might be ultimately the Japanese majority and the entire humanity. Who are the free riders of social movements, then?

Notes

1. In the past decade (between 2009 and 2019), the average annual naturalizations were 11,118 (computed from Ministry of Justice, 2020).
2. In Japanese, Koreans all used to be called Chōsenjin, and Chōsen itself carries a negative connotation even today (there are more hostile epithets, of course), reflecting a racialized minority status of colonial origin and of their lower socioeconomic statuses as migrant workers. Various labels include Zainichi Chōsenjin (not only North Koreans but also those who identify with unified Korea), Zainichi Kankokujin (South Koreans), Zainichi Kankoku/Chōsenjin, Zainichi Korean (transliteration of Korean in English, often includes those who are naturalized and children of intermarriages), and just Zainichi to avoid favoring either Korean state as well as hinting at proactive diasporic consciousness (Lie, 2008; Miyauchi, 1999; Yun, 1992). The nomenclature of this ethnic minority group is much less complicated in English. More recent English literature on this minority group uses just Zainichi (or *zainichi*) Koreans, rather than (resident) Koreans in Japan.
3. The 1948 division of the Korean peninsula into the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) itself did not create a different nationality status among resident Koreans. In 1947 (prior to the establishment of two Koreas), the Japanese government registered all Koreans as "originated in Korea [Chōsen]." Especially since the normalization between Japan and South Korea, those who declared allegiance to South Korea increasingly sought a more stable residency (treaty-based permanent residency) and the ability to visit relatives. The

vast majority of Zainichi Koreans originated in the southern provinces of contemporary South Korea. See Kashiwazaki (2000) for the political dimension of legal statuses among Zainichi Koreans.

4. I use Zainichi Korean communities to indicate plural communities, reflecting major historical and ideological cleavages along the axes of support for one of the divided Korean states, regional affiliations, and class and generational differences.

5. Midan's official newspaper periodically publishes a critique of progressive South Korean unification-oriented activists for their support of DPRK-flagged schools (see Pak, 2018).

6. An anti-hate advocate in Osaka who filed litigation over online hate is also a Zainichi Korean woman. Being a woman and Zainichi Korean clearly has intersectionality effects, becoming the target of online and offline hate incidents. A survey conducted by the Korean Scholarship Foundation indicates Korean women are more likely to receive discriminatory treatments at school and in public spaces (Chōsenshōgakkai, 2021:3).

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