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What is Our “Homeland?”: Zainichi Korean High School Students on “Homeland Visit” Tours to the DPRK

Kaori Yamamoto, Aichi Prefectural University

Abstract

Less Zainichi youth are opting for Chosŏn (i.e. pro-DPRK) schools, partially because of integration into Japanese society and the wider career options that Japanese public education offers. Nevertheless, Chosŏn schools continue to provide education in Korean to nurture “proud and proper Koreans.” To this end, Korean schools aim to connect the students to their “homeland”: The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Participant observation of school trips to the DPRK reveals what the “homeland” means to the students and how it relates to the schools’ educational goal. Vis-à-vis the rampant xenophobia in Japan, the schools’ practices carry an urgency that cannot be ignored.

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Introduction: Discussing the “Homeland” in the Context of Chosŏn Schools

What could the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK¹) mean to Chosŏn school students in Japan? This article aims to answer this question based on the students’ own experiences in the country.

Chosŏn schools, or Ethnic Korean schools, are schools for Zainichi Koreans originating from *kokugo kōshūjo* (Korean national language schools) built shortly after Korea gained independence from Japanese colonial rule on August 15th, 1945. These small-scale schools have taught Korean language, culture, and history to Korean children in Japan with the aim to “restore” their language that was taken away from them during colonial rule. Today, there are over 60 Chosŏn schools in Japan, offering education at all levels from kindergarten to high school. They have a deep historical relationship with the DPRK.

The question posed in this article could be an extremely sensitive issue in present-day Japan since it requires us to take a deeper look into the political stance of Chosŏn schools, that is, upholding the DPRK in the North as the one legitimate state on the divided Korean Peninsula. Still, examining what the “homeland” means to Chosŏn school students would allow us to

understand the positions that Zainichi Koreans are in today. At the same time, this article aims to respond to those who criticize the practices in Chosŏn schools as “nationalistic” and “ethnic-essentialist.”

What inspired my question are the dire circumstances Chosŏn schools are facing in present-day Japan. Chosŏn schools have been attacked, both socially and politically, because of their relationship with “North Korea.” Online slander against them is an everyday occurrence. In December 2009, Kyoto Chosŏn Daiichi Elementary School suffered a xenophobic attack (for a detailed account of this incident, see Nakamura, 2014). Deeply scarring those involved, this became an emblematic case of hate crime in Japan. Chosŏn schools were supposed to be safe places in Japan where Zainichi Koreans could be themselves without any fear of denial. The attackers of 2009, however, threatened the very basis of that.

The Japanese central government and local municipalities have also blatantly discriminated against Chosŏn schools. When the nationwide high-school tuition waiver program started in 2010, Chosŏn schools were excluded from it.² This then led to municipal governments suspending subsidies for Chosŏn schools. More recent events include the exclusion of the Chosŏn kindergartens from free preschool education and daycare (which started in October 2019) and the exclusion of Korea University (*Chosŏn Daehakkyo*) from the Emergency Student Support Handout Program launched amid the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Japan has thus completed a system of exclusion targeting a whole range of students and pupils from Chosŏn kindergarteners to university students.

Under the central government practically approving whatever cruelties done to Chosŏn schools simply because of their ties with “North Korea,” these schools are ostracized both in the public and in the civic level. Mori describes this as a situation where “grass-roots racism” is tacitly approved by “racism from above” (Mori, 2014).

What allows such discrimination to continue? At its roots, of course, it is the deep-seated colonialism in Japanese society that has existed since the colonial era. Such a mindset is further amplified by the recently prevalent “North Korea-Phobia” (Itagaki, 2015). On the one hand, people hold a fear of “North Korea” which comes from the DPRK’s abduction of Japanese citizens, its nuclear program, and missile launches. At the same time, people picture “North Korea” as “an absurd and nonsensical country,” and when this image is intertwined with fear, the phobia amplifies. Hate crimes against Chosŏn schools are “justified” because they have connections with such a country. Even in circles of Japanese civic activists who are supposed to be “understanding,” I occasionally come across people who argue, “while discrimination is unacceptable, Chosŏn schools also do have issues when it comes to their undesirable ties with North Korea.” However, there are much needed questions that have never been asked in such circles: why have Chosŏn schools maintained their ties with the DPRK until today, and why do the students call the DPRK their “homeland” and express their attachment to it?

In the field of Chosŏn school studies where the focus has mainly been on history, there have been some recent publications based on participant observations or fieldwork in the schools (Song, 2012; Kim, 2020). Nevertheless, these studies have hardly ever touched on the

relationship between the DPRK and the schools, except for the mentions of Educational Support Fund and Scholarships provided by the DPRK government since 1957. Discussion on topics such as the substance of relationships between Chosŏn schools and the DPRK or the thoughts and feelings of students and teachers towards the country are avoided, whether intentionally or not.

Why is it so difficult to proactively talk about Chosŏn schools' ties with the DPRK? This, I would argue, is because the DPRK's political/social structure is viewed as something drastically different from Japan's "democratic values" that have been nurtured after WWII albeit imperfectly. From such a viewpoint combined with "North Korea-phobia," the DPRK has been thoroughly demonized. Therefore, unless utmost efforts are made to detach ourselves from the stereotypical images of the "DPRK" ingrained in our minds, it would be difficult for those of us living in Japan to understand what the "homeland" (i.e., the DPRK) means to those in Chosŏn schools.

Presumably, detaching one's perception of the DPRK from its stereotypes should be difficult for those of the Republic of Korea (ROK) as well. If anything, discussing such things could be even more difficult when ROK society defines the DPRK as its "partner in reunification" who also is its "enemy." Moreover, in Japan today, those who attempt to give a subjective account of the relationship between Chosŏn schools and the DPRK are often labeled as "brainwashed." Despite such difficulties, I aim to shed light on Chosŏn high school students' thoughts and feelings towards their "homeland" based on findings during the school's "homeland visit" tours on which I accompanied them, and thereby consider what the "homeland" means for Chosŏn schools and their students.

Angles of Analysis

As mentioned earlier, this paper aims to discuss what the "homeland" means for Chosŏn high school students based on participant observation of their "homeland tour." To do so, we first need to consider the general significance of the DPRK in the Chosŏn school education.

The reason why Chosŏn schools maintain ties with the DPRK is frequently attributed to the Educational Support Fund and Scholarships, i.e., the subsidies sent from the state of the DPRK. Could we really say, however, that the relationship is purely financial?

In his volume on the educational history of Chosŏn schools, Oh (2019) discusses the ties between the schools and the DPRK. According to Oh, the DPRK has "always been an integral cornerstone and reference [for Chosŏn schools]. While it was impossible to 'homeland-ize' their education [i.e., to copy the exact educational curriculum in the DPRK], the education [in Chosŏn schools] has always oriented itself towards the homeland" (Oh, 2019: 367). He argues that the educational objective of Chosŏn schools is "decolonization": to overcome the colonial mindset ingrained deeply even in the minds of Zainichi Koreans as being "the ruled." To fulfill this objective, simply extricating oneself from Japan (i.e., imperialism) is not enough; a national identity needs to be nurtured as well. Some, of course, argue that Zainichi Koreans should not

fixate on one state or the other but instead should try to bring the North and South together. However, in the face of the actual division of the Korean Peninsula, people practically have no choice but to choose which state to align themselves with.

Another ultimate objective of Chosŏn schools is to educate young Zainichi Korean students to be *tŏttŏt'an chosŏn saram* (“proud and respectable Koreans”). This, in one sense, means to acquire “ethnic accomplishments” such as the Korean language and culture and to nurture “a patriotic spirit” to become someone who “contributes to both the homeland and the *tongpo* [fellow compatriots] community.”

Such human-development and education ideals upheld by Chosŏn schools seem to fall into the category of “ethnic-essentialist” and nationalistic education which have been subjected to criticism in the fields of anthropology and sociology. Social constructivism has become a more common topic of discussion in Japan today. With the notion of the “nation” having been deconstructed through such discussions, the aforementioned practices of Chosŏn schools may seem dated. In fact, Zainichi Korean studies after the 1990s have severely criticized the “authoritativeness” and “oppression” inherent in ethnic essentialism (Lee, 2016).

However, Lee Hong Jang argues that such deconstructivism finds itself “in a dilemma where revealing the socially-constructed character of ethnicity will lead to denying Zainichi Korean solidarity, which holds ethnicity as its very basis” (Lee, 2016: 29). Therefore, according to Lee (2016: 30), deconstructing ethnicity “is a ‘correct’ approach to take with regards to cultural theory, but it would never be effective at defeating ethnic oppression in the real world.”

It is also true that the lives of Zainichi Koreans have become diverse, one aspect of this being those who are active globally. These Zainichi Koreans do explicitly recognize the significance of the goal that Chosŏn schools officially uphold, that is, “educating *tŏttŏt'an chosŏn saram*.” At the same time, they “do not want to limit [their] scope of life there” and state that they decided to “step out of [Zainichi Korean community]” for this very reason. It could be said that these Zainichi Koreans, who have become active globally while promising “never to let go of their Korean identity” are creating an ideal example of a cosmopolitan community.

From such perspectives, living and working amongst Zainichi Koreans with the Ch'ongnyŏn³ community at its center – which is the opposite of the cosmopolitan way of life – may seem like choices forced by “authoritative” and “oppressive” ethnic-nationalist education. It should also be added that the “proud and respectable Korean” education practiced by Chosŏn schools are criticized for “unduly pushing collective identity onto [students].”

Such criticisms are not far off – even true to a certain extent. It is true that education in Chosŏn schools has been “ethnic-essentialist” and has placed emphasis on nurturing a collective identity. If they had not, however, it would have been impossible for these schools to be maintained (or to be protected, in the words of the actual people involved) despite all the hardship they have faced for over 70 years after the Korean liberation. Would such steadfastness have been possible if, as the critics argue, ethnic essentialist “authority” and “pushing” of collective identity had been all that Chosŏn schools had to offer?

It would be helpful to look at Matsuda Motoji's argument on what he describes as "a justice called essentialism" (Matsuda, 2009: 40-41). According to him, while "[constructivism revealed that what we had believed to be organic were mere constructs,] this revelation has caused a variety of difficulties in real life because these essentialized entities had been the basis upon which people practiced everything from daily life activities to political resistance." What Matsuda points out here is exactly the dilemma that comes with Chosŏn school studies. How should we describe the "essentialist practices" present in Chosŏn schools' education? In this paper, I refer to the dilemma identified by Lee (2016) – the "correctness of constructivism" versus the "desire for ethnic essentialism" – to look into the "homeland visits" of Chosŏn high school students and the significance of the "homeland" as seen from these tours.

Moreover, we would need to respond to criticism towards the nationalistic aspects that education in Chosŏn schools involves. The fact that Chosŏn schools connect the children with the "homeland" (i.e., the DPRK) through their educational practices is loathed not only by the Japanese societal majority but also, in some cases, also by Zainichi Koreans themselves. However, So (2002: 173) dismisses such "loathing," stating:

Zainichi Koreans cannot omit the element of "the mainland" from the conditions of their liberation, not because they feel nostalgic for or are attached to the Korean Peninsula as an "imaginary Heimat," but rather because their daily lives are bound by the political reality of the Peninsula, even though they cannot have much of a sense of belonging in terms of "imagination." In other words, what transcends national borders here is not the ethnic "imagination" but the ethnic "reality."

Chosŏn schools are frequently criticized by people, including even fellow Zainichi Koreans, who say that "a 'homeland' is nothing but an illusion for Zainichi." However, the reality that those affiliated with Chosŏn schools live in is far from a blissful illusion because they are constantly exposed to unsparing "anti-North Korean" gazes. Therefore, Chosŏn school students sometimes try to describe themselves without using the word "Chosŏn/Chōsen," saying that they are "South Koreans who grew up in Japan." In Japan today, however, animosity towards the ROK runs high too, and some people equate anything ROK-related with being "anti-Japan." In this current social climate, knowing how to deconstruct nation and homeland does not seem to be a tool effective enough to survive the discriminatory gazes.

It goes without saying that Chosŏn school students' lives are not dictated solely by their ethnicity. Nevertheless, in Japan where colonialism is alive and well in the form of revisionism that refuses to recognize what harm the state and society have been doing throughout history to Zainichi Koreans, Chosŏn schools are conflated with "North Korea" and thus targeted by xenophobes. In such a situation, those affiliated with Chosŏn schools are always forced to ponder what it means to "be a Korean."

These are the premises upon which I interpret the words and actions of Chosŏn high school students while in their "homeland," the DPRK. To put it differently, these are analytical angles that are necessary to understand the Chosŏn high school students who may seem overtly nationalistic at a first glance, even "brainwashed" in some respects. I do recognize the fact that

the “homeland visit” program is a part of the school curriculum and thus is also an apparatus that prompts the students to lean in a certain direction. Still, I would like to look beyond this and consider what significance the “homeland” holds for Chosŏn high school students who, as described by So Kyong-sik in the earlier quote, face this reality where their daily life in Japan is controlled by the division of mainland Korea.

To address this question of the “homeland” further, I would like to mention a documentary film created by a director who accompanied Chosŏn school students on their homeland visit, just like I did. This film, *Sorairo no Shinfonī* [Sky-Blue Symphony] (2016) by Park Yeong-i poses a question to the audience: “What does the ‘homeland’ mean to Chosŏn high school students?” In this sense, the film resonates with my research pursuit. Unlike me, however, the director Park is a Zainichi Korean who went to Chosŏn schools, graduated from Korea University, and had experience working full-time for Ch'ongnyŏn. The film depicts how the students encounter the people, nature, and land of the DPRK, as well as how they grapple with the question of “homeland” with joy and sincerity. To Park, such scenes were just “natural.” He told me in an interview that he “wanted Japanese society to see the DPRK [he knew]” including what the students experienced there (August 20th, 2018). On the other hand, the entire process of my research has been, in a sense, an internal battle against my own biases of the DPRK. Park’s film and my study thus have completely different foundations. I also experienced some “limitations” in the DPRK as a Japanese, which I will explain later.

The “Homeland Visit” Tours

The Overview and History of the Tours

“Homeland Visits” are tours that the ten Chosŏn high schools located all over Japan plan for all their third-year students. The tour takes place annually from around June to July although some schools schedule them in September. The students spend two weeks in the DPRK, during which they visit various places, mainly in Pyongyang city, and participate in exchange programs with locals. The places they visit are basically the same for all of the schools aside from slight variations.

These “homeland visits” for third-year students date back to the early 1980s. At first, those eligible to participate in the tour were “model class” students who were praised for achievements such as perfect attendance, outstanding efforts for academic improvement, and fulfilling the requirement of the “100% *uri-mal*” [our language] campaign.⁴ Participation in the tour was restricted in this manner from 1982 to 1988.

Starting in 1989, all third-year students became eligible to participate. There also have been some changes over the years due to the deterioration in DPRK-Japan relations, such as the means of travel shifting from the *Man Kyŏng Bong* ship leaving from Niigata to air travel via Beijing. Nevertheless, the tours have continued so far without interruption.⁵

The 1980s were a time when it became apparent that Zainichi Koreans were to permanently reside in Japan. Recognizing the students' needs to directly see their "homeland," schools began to discuss the importance of letting them "experience" the DPRK that they knew only from books. These discussions eventually brought the "homeland visits" to actualization. Of course, there also were external factors that enabled the tours. For example, in 1965, Zainichi Koreans with *chōsen-seki*⁶ status obtained the "right to visit the homeland." Later, the DPRK increased its capacity to welcome large-scale tours, laying the groundwork for the "homeland visits."

Table 1 2017

Day	Morning	Afternoon	Night
May 25 th , Thu		Aichi Chosŏn High School delegation arrives	
26 th , Fri	Paying respect to the bronze statues of President Kim Il-sung and General Secretary Kim Jong-Il on Mansu Hill, Arch of Triumph, Tower of Juche Idea	President Kim Il-Sung's birthplace at Mangyŏngdae; National Circus show at Pyongyang Circus Theater	
27 th , Sat	[Revolutionary site for Fatherland Liberation War]*	Lunch (Pyongyang <i>raengmyŏn</i> ⁷) at Okryu Restaurant; Hana Musical Information Center Sci-Tech Complex	Fountain-and-light show (Taedong River)
28 th , Sun	Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery, Central Zoo, Nature Museum	Lunch at the Kyŏngch'un Diner (owned by one of the student's grandmother); Munsu Water Park	
29 th , Mon	Korean Revolution Museum	[Mangyŏngdae Revolutionary School]	
30 th , Tue	Flight from Pyongyang to Samjiyŏn Airport; Bus ride to Paektu Mountain; Paektu Mountain Climb	Leaving Paektu Mountain; Samjiyŏn Grand Monument	Flight from Samjiyŏn to Pyongyang**
31 st , Wed	A ride on the Pyongyang metro	Patriotic Martyrs Cemetery; Watching a dance performance (<i>The Song of Four Seasons</i>) at Pyongyang Grand Theatre	
June 1 st , Thu	Pyongyang Elementary and Middle School; Mirim Horse Riding Club	Youth Movement Museum; Mangyŏngdae School Children's Palace	

2 nd , Fri	Mt. Myohyang, International Friendship Exhibition House	Lunch (barbeque at Mt. Myohyang), Pohyōnsa	
3 rd , Sat	[Meet-and-greet with the Pyongyang Female Antiaircraft Artillery]	Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum (“Liberation War” refers to the Korean War)	Kaesōng Youth Park with Ch’angdōk Secondary School (sister school) students
4 th , Sun	P’anmunjōm	[Meet-and-greet with the Taedōksan Unit]	
5 th , Mon	Sports day at Pyongyang International Football School	Shinch’ōn Museum	
6 th , Tue	Tree planting at Ch’ongnyōn Patriotic Forest	Pyongyang Bowling Alley (with Ch’angdōk Secondary School students)	Dinner at Ch’ongnyōn Station Square Diner
7 th , Wed	Meet-and-greet at Ch’angdōk Secondary School	Continuation of the meet-and-greet at Ch’angdōk Secondary School; [Roundup discussion]	Farewell party for Aichi Chosōn High School at the Pyongyang Hotel
8 th , Thu	Leaving for Pyongyang International Airport		

*The brackets “[]” indicate parts of the itinerary that I was not able to attend. The underlined places/activities were off-limits to me, while those without were places/activities that I could have gone to if I had taken necessary procedures in time but could not do so due to last-minute changes in the itinerary.

**The visit to Paektu Mountain is normally an overnight trip, but it became a day trip in 2017 since the local hotel was under repair.

The Itinerary

The “homeland visit” participants generally follow the same itinerary every year. The destinations, ranging from factories to schools to cultural institutions, do slightly vary from year to year as well as from school to school, but the basic format has remained consistent across schools and throughout the tour’s history.

Table 1 shows the itinerary of a tour in 2017 as an example. Since most of the participants were visiting the DPRK for the first time, this tour was meant to be somewhat of an “introduction” to their homeland. During the two-week trip, each class was assigned a bus to get around in and one or two instructors from the Pyongyang-based Agency of Overseas Koreans Affairs (AOKA). The entire delegation was accompanied by a supervising instructor, a doctor, a

nurse, and a filming crew including a director who documented the entire tour. All these people travel along with the students during the entirety of the tour and even stay at the same hotel. Spending time with the delegation of students literally 24 hours a day for two whole weeks, these staff members are the locals whom the students interact with the most closely.

Every night, the students hold a meeting to look back at what they did during the day, discussing what they felt and thought about. While the homeroom teachers mainly observe these meetings, the AOKA instructors also occasionally participate to facilitate the students' understanding.

Circumstances Leading to Participant Observation in the DPRK

In this section, I detail the circumstances that inspired me, a Japanese, to accompany Aichi Chosŏn High School students on their "homeland visit" and how I managed to do so.

As noted earlier, my inquiry stems from my doubts about the recent claims made regarding Chosŏn schools. In Japan today, especially in the context of defending Chosŏn schools, it is often said that "the ties between the schools and 'North Korea' aren't as strong as they used to be." I started conducting fieldwork in Chosŏn schools in September 2011, but I must admit that such statements did in fact ease the sense of "taboo" I felt towards the schools and encouraged me to do research there.

However, once I started visiting Chosŏn schools, I started to feel doubtful about the claims mentioned above. Even today, Chosŏn schools explicitly assert the legitimacy of the DPRK. The ties with the state are apparent in daily life at school, especially at the high school level. Manifestations of such ties include the portraits of political leaders hung in each classroom as well as wall newspapers created to celebrate DPRK holidays.

In the early stages of my field research, I was bewildered to discover these facts. What especially astounded me was the atmosphere of the start-of-term and end-of-term assemblies after the sudden death of Supreme Leader Kim Jong-Il on December 17th, 2011. I felt uncomfortable to the point that I thought, "Am I even allowed to be here?" Of course, my brain knew that Chosŏn schools were entitled to maintain ties with the DPRK. Still, the uneasiness I felt overcame logic.

Faced with these facts, however, I also began to realize that we cannot discuss Chosŏn schools while pretending that their ties with the DPRK do not exist. In other words, an ethnography of Chosŏn schools is impossible unless we inquire into what the "homeland" (the DPRK) means for those affiliated with the schools. Concurrently, I realized that Chosŏn school students express their longing and fondness for the country not only officially but also personally.

Coming from Japanese society that defines the DPRK as the absolute “other,” I had a very limited perspective of the country and therefore struggled to take in the fact that the students had psychological proximity to it on an everyday level.

Moreover, I was somewhat perplexed by the changes I saw in the students immediately after their “homeland visit.” The students unanimously told me that they “had fun” and that they “want[ed] to visit [the DPRK] again.” They tried to explain what was so great about the country, which I still could not understand. Their heartfelt words were not enough to free me from the negative perception of the DPRK prevalent in Japanese society.

“You’d never get it unless you actually went there.”

These are the words of a male student who was a freshman at Korea University (or *Chosŏn daehakkyo*) is a university-level Korean educational institute located in Tokyo.

At the time, that motivated me to visit the DPRK myself. He said to me:

There’s something I always say when I’m asked about my experience in *uri-nara* [“our country”]. I don’t think you’d get this, but it’s different over there. Once you set foot on the land, I feel it. The atmosphere is completely different. I understand, I feel, that this is my homeland. The way the people there treat you, the atmosphere and all, you know. It’s really special. You’d never really get it unless you visit.

“Why does he call the DPRK his “homeland” when it’s not the place of his birth nor his upbringing? Is it right to brush this off as an outcome of Chosŏn school education? If I visited Pyongyang myself, would I be able to bridge the gap that lies between the students and me?”

These were the thoughts that came to my mind while interviewing him. I eventually decided that I wanted to visit the DPRK, preferably with the students to spend time together in Pyongyang.

I wasted no time in conveying my wish to the then principal of the Chosŏn school and the teachers in charge of external affairs. However, I was told that it would be “difficult” for me to accompany them on the tour because of how the DPRK deals with visitors including overseas *tongpo*. In the DPRK, all visitors from the outside are approved by different institutions depending on their purpose of visit. For instance, tourists are overseen by tourism bureaus, researchers are dealt with by the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (CCRFC) in charge of civic exchange, and overseas *tongpo* are taken care of by the AOKA. The visitors are taken around in designated cars, and guides (also called “instructors”) from the respective institutions accompany them throughout their stay, from the moment of entry to departure. Since these agencies are completely compartmentalized, cross-department negotiations are rare and difficult. Therefore, I was told, it would most likely be impossible for me to go on the tour with the students.

I refused to give up and continued negotiating. Eventually, I was told, “find an opportunity to visit the DPRK [on your own]. Build mutual trust with the CCRFC which is the

department that would care for you and try to make them understand why you want to accompany the students on their trip.”

My immediate reaction was, “how can I possibly do that?” However, once I set my mind to it, visiting the DPRK was easier than I imagined. After my first visit from the 18th to 22nd of October 2011, I traveled to the DPRK another two times. During my visit in late August 2012, I explained my research objectives to my CCRFC guide every night over drinks. Finally, late in the night before I left Pyongyang, he nodded his approval: “All right, let us do it. Next time you come, schedule your visit at the same time as Aichi Chosŏn High School’s homeland visit.” Thus, my first participant observation of the tour in June 2013 was realized.

I was accepted into the DPRK as part of a separate visiting group *pro forma*. The CCRFC discussed it with the AOKA beforehand so that I could accompany the students on the pretense that I was visiting the same places as the students by pure chance. Because of this formality, I was not allowed to join the students in their buses (although there were some exceptional instances in which I was able to) and got around in a car assigned specifically to me with my two guides. Similarly, I was not allowed to stay in the Pyongyang Hotel with the students in 2013, since this hotel is principally defined as an accommodation for Zainichi Koreans. However, from 2014, the guide who has taken care of me since my first visit made arrangements so that I could also stay in the Pyongyang Hotel, saying, “if you can stay at the same place as them, you can observe various aspects of the students’ life here.”

Nevertheless, I still am a “Japanese” visitor who is to be treated differently than the students who are *tongpo* to the DPRK. There were many programs that I was not allowed to attend, most of them being meet-and-greet events with military personnel as young as the students. I observed the students practicing hard for the “art performance” section of the meet-and-greet using whatever small pockets of time they found, and then had to see them off as they left for the actual program. Unaware of my situation, the students would smile at me and say, “*Sŏnsaengnim* [Ms. Teacher], let’s go!” The instructors accompanying the students would say, “*Sŏnsaengnim*, you’re not coming? ...Oh yeah, I forgot. I’d love for you to see the students perform, though.” In such moments, I felt the barrier between them as Zainichi Koreans and me as Japanese.

Also, during my 2013 and 2014 research, I still felt uneasy upon seeing how most of the students did not protest much at what the local instructors and youth told them but rather took it all in enthusiastically. I ended up spending most of my stay pondering over how I should understand what happens to the students, which they themselves call “*uri-nara* magic.” In a way, this may have been a preparation period for me to detach myself from the bias towards the DPRK instilled in me and to observe the students in their “homeland” from their point of view.

Undoubtedly, I still struggle to face the “North Korea” I have internalized and agonize over how to describe what the “homeland” means to Chosŏn high school students. Nevertheless, I would like to present what I saw and heard from the students during my participant observation of the visits as an ethnography. This is also a pragmatic attempt to discuss whether the Chosŏn

schools' "ties with North Korea" should be criticized in the way the majority of Japanese people have criticized them.

From here, I would like to offer concrete accounts of the "homeland" as seen from the students' eyes.

The "Homeland" as Seen from the Students' Eyes

The "Love" and "Thoughtfulness" of the Homeland Felt Through the Visits

How do the students respond to what they are taught in the DPRK? Overall, the students seem to take in what they experience in their own ways while also enjoying meeting with the locals, making the most of their two-week stay.

On the last morning of the two-week visit, the students leaving the hotel for the airport have a hard time parting with the locals. They lean out from the bus windows waving their hands, and the hotel staff members wave back. Relatives who live in and around Pyongyang also come over to see the students off. Tears are in everybody's eyes. On the bus heading to the airport, the guides who have spent the whole two weeks with the students offer them their final message:

We know that you are all having a hard time in Japan. But stay strong and go on because, trust us, the homeland is always on your side. Of course, the *tongpo* community and the Ch'ongnyŏn organization must stay strong. But we also want you, as individuals, to hold your head up high without giving in to the difficulties in Japan (2017, in group two's bus).

After the speech, the students sing Korean songs (*uri-norae*) they learned during the stay, as if they did not want to waste even a minute of the half-hour bus ride to the airport. At the airport, the students continue to wave at the guides even after passing through the customs that separate them. Seeing this every time I join them on the tours, I have wondered why the students are so moved in the DPRK. Spending time together in the DPRK with the students allowed me to realize that they are not just being sentimental, but it is extremely difficult to put into words.

As mentioned earlier in the article, the students have a sense of affection towards the DPRK. This originates, for instance, from the education given in various forms since their elementary school days and the stories they hear from close family members and friends who have visited the DPRK. Moreover, they are thankful to the state for providing its continuous financial support to Chosŏn schools, contrary to the oppressive Japanese government and the apathy of the ROK government. Studying in Chosŏn schools which are always faced with severe financial difficulties, the students presumably nurture a sense of proximity to the DPRK as the "homeland" that constantly supports them.

Halfway through the tour, the students are no longer nervous, following the itinerary with very relaxed looks on their faces. This could partly be because the students get used to the

Korean accent of the local native speakers. It is natural that, as their communication becomes smoother, they become much closer to the locals. Nearing the end of the visit, the students come fully out of their shells with the local guides and hotel staff members, calling them *nuna/õnni* [“sister”], *õmõni* [“mom”], or *oppa/hyõngnim* [“brother”]. In between visiting different places, I sometimes even saw the students joking around and laughing with the guides.

The students who came back from the “homeland visit” occasionally describe the beauty of the country using words like “the love” or “the thoughtfulness of our homeland.” These presumably refer to the casual, everyday kindness of the local people as has been described.

I have visited the homeland before. The first visit was when I was a 6th grader in elementary school, and the second was in the second year of middle school. It was during the winter. The people here were walking outside in the freezing cold while we went around in our own buses everywhere. We could see that things are tough in our homeland. Still, the people welcomed us so warmly and made sure that we were spending our time in comfort. Also, when we went to Kaesõn Youth Park [an amusement park in Pyongyang] where the people were queuing for the rides, they would allow us to cut in line so that we wouldn’t have to wait. I’d be annoyed if I were in their position, but they just smiled and said, “Go ahead.” These might be little things, but we understand them as the love and thoughtfulness our homeland has to offer. (From an interview on August 16th, 2014 with a third-generation female sophomore of Korea University)

Words like “the love and thoughtfulness of our homeland” may sound somewhat exaggerated. However, it should be noted that Chosõn school students are treated exceptionally well in the DPRK with the state covering a considerable proportion of the students’ expenses during their stay. The students seem to understand the financial support for their “homeland visit” as an extension of the continuous aid the DPRK (their “homeland”) has provided to their schools, recognize it as a manifestation of its “love and thoughtfulness,” and thus renew their sense of gratitude.

The Changes in the Students

What the students experience first in the DPRK is a change in their perceptions towards the country. The students do learn about the country in school and have a lot of opportunities to receive explanations of various political and diplomatic issues from this standpoint. At the same time, they live their daily lives surrounded by negative information about the DPRK from sources including the Japanese mass media. Therefore, many students say that they were left wondering, “They say good things [about the DPRK] in school, but what is it really like over there?” Here are some excerpts from the field notes I kept during my participant observation.

I’m glad I came here [to the DPRK]. What did I think before? Um, I was interested, but I wasn’t sure if it was worth the high travel costs we had to pay. I also thought that, if we’re just going on a school trip, traveling somewhere in Japan would be enough because what we see on Japanese TV doesn’t really make it look like an interesting country. It’s

like a dictatorship, and all we see is the military. But the senior students have told us it's going to be fun, so I wondered what the truth was. (female student on the 2014 tour)

(Pointing at the high-rise apartment buildings in front of the Pyongyang Hotel) *Sōnsaengnim*, did you know before visiting *uri-nara* that they have such nice buildings here? In Japan, they say that all buildings in *uri-nara* are run-down and people can't live in them, but that's just a lie. Now that I'm able to say this, I already feel like coming here was worth it. (male student on the 2017 tour)

Seeing the daily life in the DPRK which is never broadcasted on Japanese mass media, the students say:

When we wave to the pedestrians from the bus, they all smile and wave back. Japanese TV makes it seem like all the people here are walking around with gloomy faces, right? But there are people walking with their babies in their arms, elementary school students studying while walking up to their schools... there's a really nice rustic atmosphere. (female student on the 2015 tour)

Experiencing the DPRK through their own senses, the students start bridging the gap between the “Chōsen” from the Japanese media and the “Chosŏn” they encounter in school, textbooks, and personal stories. This apparently enables them to recognize how distorted the image of “Chōsen” created and circulated in Japan is.

As they progress through the itinerary, visible differences start to appear in the way the students act, which can only be described as them “growing more responsible.” Apparently, I am not alone in feeling this way. Graduates of Chosŏn high schools who visited their “homeland” before 2013 say as follows:

Spending time in *uri-nara* does really change everyone. For example, after being with our own people for a while, even those who used to behave rather badly start telling other students to queue properly and such. There were lots of these kinds of moments that really surprised me. Everybody was becoming more responsible. I started to feel that, through our time in *uri-nara*, we were starting to take pride in being *chosŏn saram* [Koreans], even if little by little. (From an interview on September 13th, 2011 with a fourth-generation female born in 1992)

The people of *uri-nara* are so good-natured that they inspire us to be better. We wouldn't want them to think that we're lax. So, curiously enough, everybody starts to mature. It is as if we start standing tall and proud. (From an interview on August 13th, 2015 with a fourth-generation male student born in 1992)

What changes the students internally are their encounters with the people of the DPRK. In fact, when I asked a student to describe the experience of her visit in one word, she said: “*mannam* [encounters]” (during the 2017 tour). The itinerary of the tours includes meet-and-greet sessions with sister-school students and military personnel of similar age. The students

spend time with the youths, sharing meals and snacks, talking, singing, and dancing together. While this may sound like them just having fun, conversations with young people of a similar age seem to inspire the students to think in multiple ways.

For instance, there was a female student who told me about her experience in a meet-and-greet with DPRK servicewomen. As noted earlier, I was not allowed to accompany the students on this part of the itinerary. When I was having a tea break at the hotel with the guide assigned to me, the students came back from the meet-and-greet. The female student found me, rushed over, and started talking non-stop without even bothering to take her stuff back to her room.

Those *onni* [referring to the woman soldiers] are sometimes super scary. We got to see them train, and they were shouting, “*Palsa* [fire]!” But in the meet-and-greet, one of the *onni* told me, “I had a dream, too. To tell you the truth, I actually wanted to be a scientist. But I decided to join the People’s Army to serve my country.” And she’s only a year older than I am. It really makes me think. I’ve been kind of nonchalant in *uri hakkyo* (our school); I’ve thought that I would only do what I want to do and that’ll be enough. But now, I’m not sure if that’s the right thing to do. That *onni* said, “for *uri-nara*,” you know. *Sōnsaengnim*, could it be that I am being brainwashed by those *onni*? But I do also feel like I’m thinking for myself right now. Is there anything we can do for our homeland? Maybe we could work to protect our *tongpo* community? Ugh, I don’t know. Am I being brainwashed, *sōnsaengnim*? (During the 2014 tour)

Later, she chose to enter Korea University rather than the Japanese university she originally was aiming for. As of today, she works for an organization under Ch’ongnyōn. It should be noted that she was not really a “model student” type of girl and used to show some resistance to the school’s principles of educating “proud and respectable Koreans.”

As seen here, meeting people of the same age in the DPRK often changes the students’ outlook on life. A then 23-year-old male graduate of Aichi Chosŏn High School who went to Korea University and found work in an organization under Ch’ongnyōn told me:

When I visited the “homeland” in high school, I was, like, moved by the DPRK. [*Author: You were moved?*] Yeah, I was. Before anything, it was completely different from what we see in the Japanese media. It meant a lot because it was an opportunity for us to [directly] see [the DPRK]. [Before actually visiting the DPRK,] I saw the people cheering [the Supreme Leader], “*Manse, manse* [Long live, long live]!” and I thought, “Seriously? No way!” “That’s a dictatorship right there. That’s not OK.” That was what I felt. But seeing the people with my own eyes, [I felt that] they genuinely respect something about [the Leader]. I thought, “OK, so this is what their lives are like. This is how people live in the DPRK.” They’re living with genuine conviction in their hearts; that’s what I learned. Through the discussions with my friend at night, I thought hard about my future path. And my answer was clear: I decided that I was going to live as a Korean to support the Zainichi community. (From an interview on August 13th, 2015 with a fourth-generation male born in 1992)

Thus, the students are granted an opportunity to give serious consideration to their future paths through the experiences of meeting the locals (especially those of similar ages) and in their discussions with their classmates. Apparently, the students are greatly inspired by how the DPRK youth, who live within a state, polity, and social regime so different from those of Japan, sincerely consider and choose their paths vis-à-vis the state. This encourages the students to reconsider what is seen as self-explanatory in Chosŏn school education, such as their Korean selves, living as Koreans even in Japan, and being aware of their connection with the “homeland” despite being in a foreign country. In other words, this is an opportunity for them to reaffirm their identity.

The 17- to 18-year-old students who are in the middle of their formative years are not only inspired by DPRK youths’ way of life but also by how they pursue things other than material wealth. This, according to the students, encourages them to reconsider their views on happiness in life. When they part with their hosts at the end of the meet-and-greet sessions, they promise to meet again even though they know that it will be an extremely difficult pledge to honor. Even today, when it seems as if the Internet connects the whole globe, maintaining contact with the youth in the DPRK is practically impossible. The once-in-a-lifetime nature of these meetings, in a way, makes them even more special.

“What Makes You Feel ‘at Home’?”: The Conditions that Make a “Homeland”

When I collected life histories of Zainichi Koreans, I noticed that many narrated their experiences in the ROK in a negative light. “ROK was a foreign country to me,” “people of the ROK know nothing about Zainichi. I was repeatedly told that they see us simply as Japanese.” In sum, they felt that they were rejected in the ROK which ultimately is alien to them.

On the contrary, according to what the majority of Chosŏn high school students so clearly state, the DPRK made them feel that they were indeed in their “homeland.” While the students do candidly say “if you’re asking me if I could live in the DPRK forever, that’d be impossible” (male student on the 2013 tour), they still tell me “the DPRK is nice. It’s my ‘homeland’, after all.”

How should we understand such sentiments? This is the question that is central to my study. While I do not have a definite answer to give yet, it could be most importantly interpreted as a sentiment resulting from the gap between the welcome they receive in the DPRK and the lack of understanding, outright discrimination, and xenophobic policies they are faced with in Japan as Zainichi Koreans. According to one of the students:

It suddenly came to my mind when we were driving through Pyongyang on our bus, “Wow, everyone here is Korean, just like me.” That gave me kind of a funny feeling. I felt comfortable and relaxed because I realized that I can be a Korean here without really asserting myself like, “Hey, I’m Korean!” (male student on the 2014 tour)

When asked what made them feel that the DPRK was indeed their “homeland,” the students explained using words such as “the comfortableness of not being forced to explain myself,” “being accepted as a Zainichi Korean,” and “being welcomed warmly as a Zainichi Korean.” These are what made them feel they are in their “homeland” and “at home” on their very first visit. Such remarks, conversely, could also be highlighting how badly the Japanese society treats Zainichi Koreans.

For Zainichi Korean children, Chosŏn schools are a place where, at the very least, their ethnic roots would never be denied. It is a protected place (“a safe home”) where they can come to grips with their ethnicity. This is something that Japanese public education can never offer.

The students spend the greater part of their daily lives in the safe environment of their schools, surrounded by Korean friends, teachers, staff members, and parents. Therefore, despite the recent spread of blatant discrimination (hate speech) targeting Koreans both online and in the streets, the students usually have little first-hand experience of discrimination in Japan. Nevertheless, they still are subjected to the discriminatory gazes directed at Zainichi Koreans from the Japanese society. Because they experience such gazes in their day-to-day lives, I assume, being welcomed so warmly as “*tongpo*” in the DPRK is such a moving experience for them.

It holds me tight. That’s why it’s my homeland. (From an interview on August 3rd, 2015)

These are the words of Hwang Yong-chi, a second-generation Zainichi writer. His words just seem to summarize it all. When he first visited the DPRK as a part of the unification movement which started in 1990, he also felt that the DPRK “accepted [him] unconditionally.” When he visited the country for the first time, he was already in his early thirties. Joining the Korean ethnic movement while in university, he had severely criticized the political regime of the DPRK. Nevertheless, he still feels that the DPRK is his “homeland.” I asked him what could be at the root of such a feeling:

That’s just how much we struggle in Japan. I mean, the Japanese government as well as the society are always desperate to erase us, and the Koreans are also desperate to assert [that we do exist] in such a situation. But in Pyongyang, they greet us with open arms. Of course, we do have arguments with the local folks. But still, we [the existence of Zainichi Koreans] are a given to them, right? That’s already enough to make me tear up. (June 22nd, 2020 over dinner)

What Hwang says resonates with what the student quoted earlier described as the “comfortableness” of not being forced to “explain” themselves.

However, when I provide such an analysis, I always expect a certain type of negative commentary coming my way: “but the students have only seen the good side of North Korea!”

It turns out that similar words are often directed at the students themselves. One student teared up as she told me, “I don’t tell my [Japanese] friends in university about the homeland visit because that would mean having my precious memories tainted” (from an interview on 3rd

May 2017 with a sophomore student at a Japanese university who went on the homeland visit in 2014 on which I accompanied students). She stated further: “You know, my friends in university know nothing about *uri-nara*. They have only seen stuff in the Japanese media, and the media here is one-sided. But it’s just so hard to explain everything from scratch just so that I can talk to them about the homeland visit. I don’t think it’s really worth making all that effort just to tell them [about the DPRK].”

At the same time, there also is a certain level of sobriety about the students. During the tour, there is not a moment that the guides leave their sides. There also are places that are off-limits to the students as overseas *tongpo*. The two-week tour is scheduled and carried out based on the state’s intent which is to make the students understand the DPRK according to its official narrative. The students are well aware of these things. When the Japanese majority negatively comments on their experiences, the students say, “we won’t deny that there are such aspects [to the DPRK].” In other words, they also know that whom they meet and what they see are subject to certain restrictions. Still, the students tell me:

But *sōnsaengnim*, you understand because you were over there with us, right? That the people aren’t lying to us. That they truly welcome us, and that they’re sincerely inviting us to do the best we can together for our homeland. You’ll know when you look into their eyes. They’re not acting that way because someone told them to. (male student on the 2013 tour)

Moreover, even if the state of the DPRK intends to show “only the good side” of the country, the hardship faced by the regular people is plain from inside the bus as we go from place to place. Especially, once we step out of Pyongyang city, the lack of infrastructure development becomes apparent. The students of course do notice such things. The inconveniences are sometimes narrated as hilarious memories: the bumpy bus rides rocking them so hard that their heads scraped the ceiling, the long power-outage at a hotel in the Paektu Mountain region, and the hot shower water suddenly turning cold, forcing them to wash away all the soap with freezing water. However, after laughing and joking about these instances, they say:

But *uri-nara* is persevering, even though it’s underdeveloped from the Japanese standard. For example, there’s no doubt that it’d be great for the people if they could have running water 24 hours a day. But as you know, while they don’t have such conveniences, they do have a lot of pride in their hearts. I mean, *uri-nara* is observing a truce with America of all countries. I feel like I understood how tough that is through my visit to *uri-nara*. That’s why I think we shouldn’t diss them too much. (From an interview on July 7th, 2017 with a student I accompanied on tour in the same year)

Thus, the students see the same things that are reported in Japanese media but interpret and evaluate them from different angles. While certainly acknowledging there are many problems in the DPRK, the students say there is another aspect to the “reality” of the country. The DPRK they (and I) have seen, heard, and experienced is also true, as are the people we met, talked with, dined with, and sang and danced together with.

During the two weeks in the DPRK, the students also face internal conflicts, discomfort, and impulses to reject what they see. They discuss their feelings almost every night with their classmates, teachers, and local instructors. I learned in an interview that a student said during one of the discussions, “What the people practice here is just a cult!” Hearing this student’s remarks, the local instructor refuted him, “I am angry to hear such words. I am not angry at you, but at the Japanese society that makes you say such things.” The student who told me this story explained how it ended as well as how he felt:

Someone said such a thing in the discussion session, and I thought, “man, take a hint!” [laughs]. The instructor ended up talking non-stop for four hours straight. He told me how much the people take pride in and treasure the *uri-nara* they have today. So, um, I didn’t necessarily agree with everything the instructor said, but I also kind of understood where he was coming from. At the same time though, I can also understand the guy who snarled at the instructor because, naturally, there were a lot of moments when I had my doubts. (From an interview on February 27th, 2014 with a student I accompanied on tour in 2013)

Another graduate told me:

When the Japanese media covers the issues of [excluding Chosŏn schools from high school] tuition waivers and subsidies, they say stuff like we [Chosŏn school students] “pledged loyalty to the leader” without thinking for ourselves. Of course, we sometimes do stuff like that over there [in the DPRK]. But we think and hesitate a lot ourselves before doing so. It really annoys me how Japanese people just say “brainwashing” without even giving a thought to why the people of the DPRK respect their leaders like that. I know that there are lots of problems [in the DPRK]. No, *uri-nara* isn’t going to get a 100% mark. There probably are nasty things that we just don’t see. But *uri-nara* isn’t the single worst country on earth, you know. Japan, America, Britain, all other countries are awful, too. Also, we don’t accept everything we’re told in *uri-nara* and in school without questioning them. We’re not that stupid. But we at least visit *uri-nara*, meet the people there, and talk to them. Building upon these [experiences], we grasp in our own way what *uri-nara* is. (From an interview on September 15th, 2015 with a fourth-generation male born in 1992)

Through such a process of sincere thinking, the students start to mold their own views on the “homeland.” The students’ narratives show that this is not a process driven by blind devotion.

Concluding Remarks: People, “Homeland,” and Nationalism for Zainichi Koreans

So far, I have depicted the relationship between Chosŏn schools and the DPRK – often criticized in Japan as a manifestation of “ideological indoctrination,” a personality cult,” or “enforcement of loyalty” – through my participant observation of the “homeland visit” tours for third-year Chosŏn high school students.

From parents to students and probably the teachers, those involved with Chosŏn schools have various opinions and outlooks with regards to the DPRK. The parents especially hold a wide array of views ranging from positive to negative. Nevertheless, the parents think that “the children are to consider and decide for themselves as they grow up” how they should position themselves against the DPRK.

From my field notes, we can see how most of the students who set their foot on their “homeland” DPRK for the first time as 17- or 18-year-olds form their own views of the “homeland” through visiting a variety of establishments and historical landmarks as well as meeting local students and soldiers of similar ages. The students sharpen their senses and undergo internal conflicts, think hard, and struggle so that they can “grasp” their homeland, to borrow their own words.

The Chosŏn high schools’ “homeland visits” are not just “propaganda tours” as the Japanese majority superficially describes them, nor are the students simply “brainwashed” there. While encountering various conflicts and contradictions during their trip, they get a first-hand experience in the warmest welcome the local people offer them as “*tongpo*,” and thus come to declare that the DPRK is their “homeland.” Since these students are still around 18 years old, we cannot deny their naiveté to some extent. Their views on the “homeland” may change as they grow up to be adults. Still, they graduate high school as *Chosŏn high school* students with love for their “homeland” in their hearts.

Throughout their history of over 100 years, the lives of Zainichi Koreans have become truly diverse. According to some, Zainichi pupils and students who go to Chosŏn schools only account for about 10% of the primary and secondary Zainichi students.

Since the 1970s when returning to the Korean Peninsula became an unlikely prospect for Zainichi Koreans, a position commonly called *zainichiron*, which calls for Zainichi people to live “*as Zainichi*,” has become prevalent within their community. Proponents of this position stress either that they see no difference between the North and South or that they want to bring the two together, while arguing that Zainichi people should, “as Koreans living in Japan,” try not to bring the division of the mainland into their communities. It is in this context that Chosŏn schools’ views on the “people” and “homeland” are often criticized as essentialist and monolithic from fellow Zainichi as I mentioned earlier.

Nevertheless, Chosŏn schools still stick to their framework of the “people” and the “homeland.” This is because the reality that Zainichi Koreans face in Japanese society still forces them to tackle the issues of nation and state head-on. In a world where the Peninsula is still divided, where Japan remains unaccountable with regards to the colonial rule and post-war compensation, where “North-Korea-phobia” is prevalent, and where xenophobia, exemplified by the recent cases of hate speech, is rampant, Zainichi Koreans – especially those affiliated with Chosŏn schools that have close relationships with the DPRK – have no choice but to come face to face with the issues of nation, state, and homeland in their everyday lives. People who have moved across state borders are referred to as a “diaspora.” Studies in the West have elucidated that people in the diaspora have negated the notion of nation and state to create something new

through a process called “re-creation of culture.” If we contrast this with the situation that Zainichi Koreans are in, one may say that the Zainichi have yet to begin such a process of “re-creation.”

This further reinforces the need for Chosŏn schools to call the DPRK “home” and to uphold seemingly dated views on the nation and nationalism. These are necessary practices for Zainichi Korean survival in Japanese society and are not something forced from above but rather what the students have actively made their own.

I once asked a local instructor accompanying the students: “what strikes you the most when you are teaching the students on their homeland visit?” She immediately answered: “*Choguk* [the homeland].” Then she continued with “the students touch, hug, smell, and take little bites out of the homeland. Our homeland is just a given for me, but every time I see them *Choguk-ül chaba alchago hanŭn mosŭp* [trying to get to know their homeland], I am deeply moved” (28th March 2019, in Pyongyang Hotel). “*Choguk-ül chaba alchago hanŭn mosŭp*” – Curiously enough, the students used the same expression to describe how they face the “homeland” head-on during their “homeland visit.” The words of this instructor seem to denote the reason why the students seem so full of energy and joy when they are in the DPRK.

Seeing how the students treasure their encounters in the “homeland” as they grow into adulthood, I cannot help but feel that what they experienced is something more than just “*uri-nara* magic.” Singing *uri-norae* (our songs) at the top of their lungs and speaking *uri-mal* (*our language*), the students feel for the first time in their life that they also “do have *uri-nara*” and find their connection with the “homeland” take concrete shape in Pyongyang. Such experiences which allow them to reconfirm their identity “as a Korean” become their firm footing as they, to borrow the words of Park (2018), “look for the missing parts of the puzzle between [them and] the homeland.”

Notes

1. What should we call the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea? When we look at the division of the Korean Peninsula, we find that this question is in fact political. The name “North Korea (*kita-chōsen* in Japanese)” has become common in Japan across many fields, but the DPRK itself does not recognize this name. Those affiliated with Chosŏn schools who appear in this paper do not prefer this name either, since the term “North Korea” is often used in Japan with a strong sense of contempt and discrimination, especially in the current societal climate. While I generally use either the full name of the country or its abbreviation “DPRK,” in this paper, it should be noted that my interviewees advocated for using either “Korea (*Chosŏn*)” or “the Republic (*konghwaguk*),” and I thus do the same in Japanese. In some instances, however, I intentionally use the term “North Korea” to describe how Japanese society views the DPRK. Also, I use the word Korean, as a translation of the Japanese *chōsenjin*, to refer to people from the whole Korean Peninsula. The words *Korea/chōsen/chosŏn* and *Korean/chōsenjin/chosŏnnin* are sometimes used in a derogatory manner in both the ROK and Japan, but among Zainichi

Koreans, Korea/*chosen*/*chosŏn* could denote “a unified homeland” or their “roots.” The word “Korean” in this article, as the translation of both *chōsen* (the Korean language) and *chōsenjin* (the Korean people), has the same connotation. Additionally, it should be noted that there is no definitive answer on whether the term *zainichi chōsenjin* is truly appropriate as a blanket term for Koreans in Japan. While I have used different Japanese terms such as *zainichi kankoku-chōsenjin* or *zainichi korian* so far, in this paper I am using Zainichi Korean, as a translation of *zainichi chōsenjin*, considering my interviewees’ beliefs, feelings, and identities.

2. Officially named “Act on Free Tuition Fee at Public High Schools and High School Tuition Support Fund Program,” this piece of legislation was one of the centerpieces of the policies put forth by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) administration at the time. The act covered “Article 1 schools,” i.e. public and private schools as defined in article 1 of the School Education Act of Japan (students in private schools are provided with subsidies that equate to public high school tuition), specialized training colleges, and *gaikokujin gakkō* (“schools for foreigners”) legally recognized as “miscellaneous schools.” However, among these miscellaneous schools, only Korean schools were excluded from the waiver program. Five of the ten Chosŏn high schools in Japan responded with lawsuits, but apart from the July 17th, 2017 Osaka District Court decision, Japanese courts have all ruled against the schools. The schools in Tokyo, Osaka, and Aichi lost their cases in the Supreme Court (August 27th, 2019 for Tokyo and Osaka, September 2nd, 2020 for Aichi), while those of Hiroshima and Fukuoka are fighting in the high court after losing at the district court level.

3. Ch’ongnyŏn, short for *chaellbonchosŏninch’ongnyŏnhaphoe* (The General Association of Korean Residents in Japan), is an ethnic organization for Zainichi Koreans that advocate for the justifiability and legitimacy of the DPRK. The organization is deeply connected to Chosŏn schools.

4. Since Chosŏn school students speak Japanese as their native language, Chosŏn schools run the in-school “100% *uri-mal* [“our language,” referring to the Korean language]” campaign which encourages the students to speak Korean in everyday life

5. As of 2020, it is practically impossible to travel out of Japan due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The DPRK has also closed its borders on 21st January 2020 to prevent the spread of the disease. With the measure still in place as of November 2020, the “homeland visits” for 2020 were canceled.

6. *Chōsen-seki*, literally meaning “Korean Register,” is how the Japanese government, upon signing the 1952 Treaty of San Francisco, marked the Zainichi Koreans after stripping them of their Japanese nationality. Later, following the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the ROK, some Zainichi Koreans have decided to register themselves as ROK nationals (*kankoku-seki*). Obtaining ROK nationality is a stronger trend since *chōsen-seki* holders are subject to restrictions when traveling overseas. Nevertheless, there are those who choose to maintain their *chosen-seki* status from an ideological standpoint (see Nakamura, 2017).

7. *Raengmyōn* is a noodle dish known as a Pyongyang specialty. Also called *naengmyōn* in the ROK, its name translates to “cold noodles.”

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