Zainichi Korean Identity and Ethnicity

David Chapman

Routledge Contemporary Japan Series

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Shedding light on contemporary Japanese society in an international context, Japanese–Korean relations and modern-day notions of a multicultural Japan, this book addresses the broad notions and questions of citizenship, identity, ethnicity and belonging through investigation of Japan's Korean population (*zainichi*).

Despite *zainichi* Korean existence being integral to, and interwoven with, recent Japanese social history, the debates and discussions of the Korean community in Japan have been largely ignored. Moreover, as a postcolonial context, the *zainichi* Korean situation has drawn scant attention and little investigation outside of Japan.

In *Zainichi Korean Identity and Ethnicity* David Chapman seeks to redress this balance, engaging with recent discourse from within Japan's Korean population. By taking a close look at how exclusion, marginalization and privilege work, the book brings insight into the mechanisms of discrimination, and how discourse not only marginalizes individuals and groups, but also can create social change and enhance the sense of self.

This book will be of interest to students and scholars of Asian studies and of Japanese and Korean politics, culture and society, but also to those with a broader interest in migration studies and the study of identity and ethnicity.

David Chapman is coordinator of Japanese studies at the University of South Australia in Adelaide. He is presently conducting research at Waseda University in Tokyo as a Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science Postdoctoral Fellow.

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1 Introduction

In 1976 a group of young second-generation Korean residents of Japan gathered for an informal roundtable discussion (*zadankai*) to consider the future from the younger generation's perspective. The meeting was organized by the editorial board of *Kikan Sanzenri*, a journal published by the Korean community in Japan.[1] During this meeting, in a personal account, one of the discussants revealed the complexity of his family context. Lee Un-ja described what had happened when he decided to change from a Korean ethnic school in Japan, which he had attended until the end of middle school, to a Japanese senior high school. He spoke of how breaking this news to his parents had caused tense division in his household. This was because his mother's political affiliations lay with North Korea, his father's with South Korea. Lee's mother was emphatically opposed (*daihantai*) to her son's decision. His father, however, agreed (*sansei*) with his choice. Lee chose to attend the Japanese senior high school, but did so under his *honmyō* (Korean name) and laments that he was unable to break free of the stigma that a Korean name held at this time. After graduating from high school and working for a short period, Lee was drawn to the Korean 'homeland' in hope of discovering something about himself, only to be disappointed that the experience provided very little (Lee *et al.* 1976: 46–57).

In a similar context, but almost three decades later in 2001, Meiji University student Lee Yong-gyu, a third-generation North Korean resident of Japan, was surprised to be given approval to change his nationality from North to South Korean by his patriotic North Korean relatives. Lee changed his nationality to avoid what he saw as the inevitable discrimination he would have to face when applying for employment as a North Korean national in Japan. He explains that, 'as all my relatives have strong pride in North Korea I was expecting them to oppose my idea of switching nationalities, even to that of South Korean'. The suffering that his relatives have had to endure as North Koreans in Japan, he believes, helped them to accept his proposal (Matsubara 2001).

These two scenarios clearly demonstrate on a micro-level the complexity of life for many of the *zainichi* (resident Korean) population living in Japan.

Although only snapshots, they paint a picture of historically situated political division, intergenerational tension and discrimination by Japanese state-controlled institutions that have spanned decades. Since the end of the Second World War these and many other factors have shaped the way in which the *zainichi* have perceived themselves and their life in Japan. For many, Japan is their place of birth, Japanese is their first and, in many cases, only language and they have been educated in Japan. In many ways, the majority of the *zainichi* population is indistinguishable from the so-called 'mainstream' Japanese population. However, in spite of this apparent invisibility, for the most part *zainichi* have lived in post-war Japan with a continual struggle for reconciliation of identity and a fight for recognition as 'full' citizens of Japan. As past colonial subjects living in the former Imperial metropolis, they have been treated as an unwelcome legacy of Japan's wartime Imperial ambitions. Compounding influences such as the ubiquitous notions of homogeneous Japanese national identity and indivisible links made between Japanese nationality and ethnicity have been successful in marginalizing the *zainichi*.

Critiques of such treatment and its effects have long been at the center of the various genres of *zainichi* writing, writing that reveals a great deal about the mechanisms of discrimination. Some of these writings have been in the form of literary works, whilst others have been non-fictional public comment disseminated through books, academic papers, the publication of roundtable discussions such as the one mentioned above, and community journals. Despite the abundance of this type of material and despite *zainichi* existence being integral to, and interwoven with, recent Japanese social history, the comments and views of this community have largely been marginalized within Japan. Unlike the aftermath of British colonial rule in India and Africa, the *zainichi* Korean situation is one postcolonial context that has drawn scant attention and little investigation outside of Japan. Moreover, because this material is written mostly in Japanese, much of it has been inaccessible to non-Japanese readers.

My purpose therefore in writing this book is twofold: first, to outline and provide critical comment on the debates and discussions contained within these writings for a wider readership;[2] and, second, to demonstrate how, since the early 1970s, the *zainichi* have resisted discourses and conditions that have attempted to shape their lives, and how new and different discourse has played a considerable role in bringing about significant social change.[3] This social change, amongst other things, has been in terms of improved material conditions and an enhanced sense of self. In much of *zainichi* contemporary intellectual and social critical discourse the search for a sense of self is dominated by the theme of identity. Identity is central to many discussions, as is the search for its location within a milieu of contingent spatial and temporal factors such as intergenerational differences, affiliations to the North or South Korean homeland (*sokoku*), the legacy of Japanese and Korean

nationalism, Japanese colonialism and patriarchy. These factors all exert pressures on individuals and raise questions on where they should or should not locate themselves. This ubiquitous reference to identity necessitates that this concept be given a central position in this book. Furthermore, the recent interest in identity as a focus for research in many studies of marginalized communities also demonstrates its widely recognized importance.

The *zainichi* population today

Overlooking social complexity, many still incorrectly view the *zainichi* community as a collective and homogeneous whole. As Sonia Ryang vividly points out, this uninformed view obscures 'the temporal and spatial intra-group diversity of Koreans' (1997: 10), dismissing the multigenerational reality, multidimensional political affiliation and social circumstance of this population. This view, in turn, often leads to erroneous assumptions and harmful stereotypes. Official demographic figures are woefully inadequate and unhelpful in capturing diversity and complexity. Figures from the Japanese Ministry of Justice show that, as of the end of 2004, there were over 598,687 *zainichi* living in Japan (Ministry of Justice 2005). This statistic, however, needs clarification because *zainichi*, as defined by the Ministry of Justice, includes any permanent resident holding Korean nationality and includes both 'new-comer' and 'old-comer' Korean migrants.[4] Also, the figure does not distinguish between Japan-born and Korean-born *zainichi* permanent residents nor does it reveal if a person is a descendant of the original Korean diaspora of pre-war and wartime Japan. Moreover, because the Japanese government does not include the ethnic background of individuals in its population statistics this number does not include the many naturalized *zainichi* holding Japanese citizenship, many of whom may have naturalized parents or one parent who is 'ethnically' Japanese. In a recent study, Asakawa Akihiro provides a figure of 243,762 for those *zainichi* who have naturalized between 1952 and 2000 (2003: 14–15). This group represents a number equal to almost one-third of *zainichi* who do hold Korean nationality.

Furthermore, although the number of *zainichi* permanent residents with Korean nationality has not changed over recent decades there has been a steady decline in 'special' permanent residents (*tokubetsu eijūsha*).[5] These special permanent residents include not only the 'old-comer' *zainichi* Koreans but also 'old-comer' Chinese and Taiwanese migrants and their descendants. Their number in 2005 was 451,909, down from 465,619 in the previous year (Ministry of Justice 2005). This decline is due to natural attrition through death and also because approximately 10,000 *zainichi* per year are choosing to naturalize as Japanese citizens.

Further complexity can be seen in the nomenclature used to describe the Korean population in Japan. This nomenclature has varied over time, reflecting some of the more dynamic and salient historical and political contexts.

Descriptive conventions have been used to designate political affiliation, for example *zainichi chōsenjin* (referring to those affiliated with North Korea), *zainichi kankokujin* (referring to South Korean affiliation), *zainichi kankoku chōsenjin* (encompassing both North and South Korean affiliates) and *zainichi korian*. *Zainichi korian* is a term that developed widespread use from the early 1980s through contact with other Koreans abroad (Yoon Keun-cha 1992: 194).[6] Use of this romanized and non-nation-specific '*korian*' indicates a move towards a neutral position independent of North or South affiliation. More recently, the term *kankokukei nihonjin* (Korean-Japanese) is increasingly being used (refer to Chee Tong-uk 1997; Ha Byung-uk 2001; and Kaneko Hiroshi 1996).

The term *zainichi* has also attracted some debate in relation to potential bias and prejudice. Harajiri (1998: 3), a Japanese researcher, contends that the term *zainichi* refers to a temporary residential status (*ichiji taizai no imi*) that precludes total membership in Japanese society. However, Fukuoka (1993: 18–19) has argued that, although the term originally had connotations of 'not belonging in Japan' (*nihon wa hansumai*), nowadays some resident Koreans use the term to emphasize the distinction that they are not Japanese but at the same time they are not Korean either, that is, the phrase *zainichi* emphasizes place of residence rather than bloodline. Fukuoka's account here is backed up by a number of statements that clearly indicate that the term *zainichi* is symbolic in representing a sense of permanency in Japan. For example, since the late 1970s, the younger generation used the term to emphasize their different approach to living in Japan to that of the first-generation *zainichi* (refer to Yoon Keun-cha 1992: 3).

Nomenclature describing the *zainichi* is not only complex but also controversial. An outspoken *zainichi* academic, Jung Yeong-hae (1996: 16), rightly takes issue with the labeling of the *zainichi* and poses the question 'Who belongs to this collective?' She asks whether those of 'mixed blood' (*konketsu*), those who have chosen to become naturalized Japanese (*kikasha*) and those who are Japan-born Koreans living abroad should also be included. Jung's question highlights the homogenizing effects of such labeling and uncovers the porous nature of social constructs such as nationality and ethnicity, exposing, in many ways, their innate fragility. Elsewhere, in further confronting stereotypes and essentialized notions of *zainichi* identity and emphasizing *zainichi* individuality, Jung has argued that all humans are at once individual and multiple (1996: 13–14). In opposition to this, however, others have argued for the importance of group solidarity in representing the *zainichi* in Japanese society and that solidarity in numbers means a more powerful representation. The risk here, however, lies with how these groups are represented and how the categories in which individuals are placed are determined. As Mackie has described for other contexts, the danger lies in 'reinforcing the very categories which have marginalized particular groups' (Mackie 2001: 1215).

Despite all labels having the potential to exclude or marginalize, I have chosen to refer to the 'Korean' population in Japan as *zainichi* for two reasons. First, it is a pragmatic choice to avoid other types of confusing and complicated nomenclature as described above and because the term is now widely accepted and used.[7] Also, I use the term *zainichi* because it avoids the inclusion of nationality as a defining element in identifying this community. As I will explain later in this book, the homogenizing effect of both Japanese and Korean national identity have played a significant role in marginalizing many *zainichi*.

Identity, discourse and power

For most *zainichi* the sense of self, as demonstrated in the opening snapshots and the various labels used to describe this population, is characterized by numerous conflicting and contesting notions of identity. These are chiefly discussed in terms of powerful binaries such as Korea and Japan, North and South Korea, colonizer and colonized, younger generation and older generation and men and women. Consequently, some *zainichi* writing has taken the form of anti-colonial, anti-racist resistance discourse directed towards Japanese nationalism and imperialism whilst other writings are related to political developments on the Korean peninsula. Through exploring the work of *zainichi* intellectuals the political motivations and implications of approaches framed in such dichotomies have become clear to me. However, I have also become abundantly aware of how the limitations and exclusivist nature of some resistance discourses have negatively impacted on *zainichi* lives. In many cases it is these very limitations and the difficulties they create for individuals and groups in the *zainichi* population that have been instrumental in initiating new and different discourses that have challenged persistent orthodoxies.

Although political action has been influential in social change, social change for the *zainichi* population can also be significantly attributed to discourse. By discourse, I mean discourse in the form of debates, social commentary and social critique. For the most part I focus on written discourse or spoken discourse that has been recorded in written form. I argue that, to date, the influence of discourse on *zainichi* life has been insufficiently recognized and that the complexity of *zainichi* life can be more thoroughly understood by exploring the dynamic relationship between discourse and identity. In making this argument I borrow from the work of Michel Foucault. Although postmodernists and poststructuralists have since built upon Foucault's studies and added to his insights, his original explanations still provide valuable interpretation of how discourse relegates and controls the individual subject. Furthermore, Foucault has demonstrated through studies of power how the subject in turn can resist the hegemonic control of discourse. He argues that:

> Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, anymore than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable processes whereby discourse can be both instrumental and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.
>
> (Foucault 1990: 100–1)

This explanation is useful in recognizing that, at the same time that identity is discursively constructed, it can be discursively resisted and reconstituted, just as the *zainichi* population has done over several decades and continues to do today. Foucault's thoughts have been crucial in developing an argument against structuralist notions of fixed and determined identity. For Foucault the subject is not fixed but 'is able to choose among the discourses and practices available to it and to use them creatively' (Sawicki 1994: 355). Moreover, Foucault thought of human beings not as helpless objects but rather as individuals, 'constituted as subjects by governmental practices of power and normalization', who 'can choose to respond to, or resist, these practices' (Danaher *et al.* 2000: 128). This approach is helpful and relevant in exploring how the *zainichi* resist discourses that work to construct homogeneous and unitary identities.

Discourses that sustain and promote notions of Japanese national identity as pure and homogeneous have been the focus of recent research on marginalized communities in Japan. The various forms of these homogenizing discourses essentially reject diversity and exclude alterity whilst trying to define and contain Japanese identity. A large number of accounts produced in both Japanese and English focus on debunking and critiquing many aspects of this type of discourse by referring to the plurality and cosmopolitan reality of Japanese society. The arguments are often, but not exclusively, based on ethnic and cultural diversity represented by the existence of various ethnically marginalized communities in Japan. The claim is that the existence of such ethnic communities is concrete evidence against declarations of homogeneity.

In a similar fashion, the *zainichi* Korean population has relied on discourses of solidarity that underscore their ethnic and national identity as Koreans in fighting discrimination and exclusion. In the early stages of resistance many *zainichi* held strong beliefs of a return to the Korean peninsula and because of this they considered themselves Korean and were not interested in notions of permanency as residents of Japan. Such a position also opposed any further attempts at assimilation that, during the wartime occupation of Korea by Japan, involved efforts at linguistic and legal-institutional assimilation as well as cultural assimilation (Kashiwazaki 2000a: 17).

For the *zainichi*, their Korean identity needed protecting and this was achieved through maintaining and encouraging a strong sense of Korean nationalism. As demonstrated in the nomenclature used to describe political affiliation above, the idea of a Korean national identity was further complicated around 1950 with the advent of the Korean War and subsequent division of the peninsula into North and South Korea. In Foucauldian terms, this development brought about new discursive pressures on the *zainichi* community, as identity was further divided into those affiliated with the North and those with the South. Suddenly, Korean identity in Japan was divided through political affiliation with different organizations and in turn these organizations opposed each other in struggling for power and control. Over time the intense political alliances with the two Koreas have dissipated, and political activism, such as the rallies and protests of the 1980s and early 1990s, have been directed at inequitable social conditions. As I will further explain in Chapter 4, the 1980s were dominated by protests against fingerprinting laws and alien registration and the 1990s were characterized by demands for the right to suffrage (Yang 1996: 147–54, 178–85). In more contemporary contexts, since the 1990s *zainichi* mass rallies and well-attended protests have tapered off. However, the discourse that has been produced by the *zainichi* population since has added new depth and insight into *zainichi* life better understood through the problemitization of *zainichi* identity.

Since Foucault, postmodernists and poststructuralists have clarified the multiple nature of subject location, demonstrating a contrary position to structuralist and modernist conceptions of identity as unitary, rational and stable. A poststructuralist position enables us to see how identities are socially constructed and dynamic. It also assists us in realizing that identities interact with social circumstance and are influenced by historical context. Spike Peterson (2000: 56–7) further clarifies this approach, explaining that 'the study of identities must be historical, contextual and dynamic: asking not only how identities are located in time and space but how they are (re)produced, resisted and reconfigured'.

One of the most well known of contemporary *zainichi* intellectuals is Kang Sang-jung. Kang's discussion on *zainichi* identity demonstrates the importance of such negotiation and reconfiguration. He states that from the moment *zainichi* are born they are negatively represented in Japanese society. The struggle for a context in which to develop a positive sense of self or identity then, he argues, involves a difficult process of self-repudiation and recapture (*jiko hitei to dakkan*) (Kang Sang-jung, in Kang and Suzuki 1993: 11). This recapturing and reconstructing of identity can be seen throughout *zainichi* discourse. However, compounding this process are other factors and other sources of power and control that marginalize in other ways which are not limited to the negative representations produced by Japanese society. Pressures and

control that have conspicuous influence on *zainichi* identity are also apparent within the *zainichi* population. This study reveals the influences on where *zainichi* identity is located by various discourses of power and control from within as well as outside the *zainichi* communities.

In considering how identity is constructed and the workings of exclusion, Stuart Hall, informed by Foucault, lucidly illustrates the connection between discourse and identity and includes the important consideration of how identities are produced through the marking of difference.

> Identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse . . . they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical naturally-constituted unity.
>
> (Hall 1996: 4)

Thus, identity is better thought of as in a state of constant flux in which it moves between any number of locations in a constellation of possible sites where difference is represented variously in terms of nationality, gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, religion, able-bodiedness and numerous other such categories. Approaching the study of discrimination and marginalization by looking at identity in a poststructuralist/postmodernist framework has had an enormous impact on the social sciences and how we understand the processes of advantage and disadvantage. However, although the study of identity and the possibilities that poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches offer are extremely helpful, some caution and further examination are necessary before such methodologies can be successfully and satisfactorily applied.

Identity politics

The unpacking of *zainichi* ontology involved in this study requires the examination of the complex nature of identity and, as demonstrated by the political interests of various groups within and without the *zainichi* population, the contentious and highly divisive politics that surround it. Identity politics began with the social movements of the early 1960s, such as those for black rights, the rights of gays, civil rights, women's rights and peace movements. Group activism in these movements was based on shared common characteristics such as ethnicity, sexuality or sexual preference. The politicization of identity by these movements and others since have brought into focus metaphysical questions of identity. For example, at the same time that political movements based on solidarity and shared group characteristics have been empowering and liberating, the essentializing of identity that may emerge in such contexts

has disturbing consequences for ideas of self, marginalization and oppression. The problem lies with the political struggle in resisting the exclusivist and normalizing tendencies associated with essentialism. Essentialism is guilty of homogenizing whole groups based usually on a single shared and enduring quality. Such essentialism often creates a dichotomy of identities that are commonly considered as binary opposites and work to contain identity. For example, as mentioned above, resistance to Japanese notions of national identity by *zainichi* Koreans has often been framed through the binary of Japanese ethnicity/nationality and Korean ethnicity/nationality. Struggles in defining *zainichi* identity based on such dichotomies often mirror the same homogenizing notions of Japanese identity (often referred to as *tan'itsu minzokuron* and *nihonjinron*) that are being critiqued.[8] As Judith Butler (1991: 13–14) has described, 'identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression'.

Reflecting the contentious nature of identity politics, some theorists have, in contrast to avoiding essentialism, embraced it in a modified form suggesting that the strategic use of essentialism enables political effect. For example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued for a 'strategic essentialism' where unitary 'identity is used *strategically* to achieve interim political goals' (1996 [1985]: 211–16, italics in original). Lloyd argues for a continuum on which a 'plurality of essentialisms' can be placed because, she says, in the case of feminism, 'essentialism cannot and should not be avoided' (2005: 59). Indeed, supporters of identity politics advocate for at least a strategic acceptance of group or community identity upon which to build political solidarity. I conditionally agree with Spivak and Lloyd in as far as recognizing the influence on social change that a strategic employment of group identity can achieve. However, the danger in this approach is still the possibility it opens up for political manipulation, the overlooking of, or at the very least distraction from, the multiplicity of differences that exist at any one time. This, as seen in many political and social rallies, can lead to the privilege of voice for some and a silencing of others.

This dilemma has been debated extensively in the field of gender studies. Feminists have long fought against the implications and effects of social constructions of masculinity and femininity in society and in particular the lack of gender neutrality evidenced by ubiquitous discursive representations of androcentric and masculine identities. In struggling against such inequities, some feminists have raised the question of whether a universalized and unitary female identity can be representative of all women as proposed in the notion of a global sisterhood. Women of color have critiqued this approach for using gender as the primary basis of oppression and ignoring the dimensions of ethnicity, class, religion and sexual preference (for example see Alexander and Mohanty 1997).