

Specters of East Asia: Okinawa, Taiwan, and Korea

Choi Jinseok with an introduction by Brett de Bary

The essay “Specters of East Asia” is the contribution of playwright, actor, and scholar Choi Jinseok to the volume *Still Hear the Wound*. It is based on a presentation made by Choi in March, 2007, at the Sakima Art Museum in Okinawa, whose courtyard faces directly onto the U.S. Marine Air Station Futenma, itself bordered by winding roads and chain-link fences. While protests over construction of a new airstrip in the coastal fishing village of Henoko swelled and continued in Okinawa, protests which continue in 2016, the museum hosted workshops in 2004 and 2007 as part of a series of events organized by the Asia, Politics, Art Project founded by poet/philosopher Lee Chonghwa of Seikei University, Tokyo. Its members were scholars, critics, and young artists dedicated to exploring, through art, often marginalized and suppressed memories of colonial violence shared across national boundaries in East Asia.

With the image of “specters of East Asia,” Choi links past to present, calling attention to occluded but deeply etched and persistent traces of a history of Japanese colonization shared by present-day Okinawa, Taiwan, and Korea. The earth and even the dramatic cliffs of today’s Okinawa, for example, are still dotted with unmarked graves of Korean colonial subjects, conscripted as porters, laborers and soldiers by the Japanese Imperial Army, who perished in the clash between U. S. and Japanese forces there. In trying to restore these anonymous Korean dead to memory together with countless Okinawan victims of the Battle of Okinawa, Choi seeks to activate a politics of East Asian redress and mourning that might go around and beyond the rituals appropriated by

postwar states and nationalisms.

In this vein, and recalling a visit to the site of the former Japanese Jintong Coal Mine in Taiwan, Choi notes that in Taiwan, too, the lives and deaths of laborers from different parts of the Japanese Empire converged and intertwined. Yet, here as well, structures of division and hierarchy were imposed on the daily lives of these workers. Japanese engineers, Taiwanese minders, Taiwanese indigenous peoples, and Koreans were housed in different residences whose building names ranked them in a hierarchy from higher to lower. (Japanese engineers resided in “Kōgu” or “Imperial Palace,” the Taiwanese miners in the “Tokyo” residence, indigenous Taiwanese miners in “Hokkaido,” and so on.) Choi cites passages from Okinawan thinker Arakawa Akira, who warned that as a result of colonial Japan’s assimilation policies (*kōminka*), peoples of East Asia had competed with each other to “become Japanese,” rather than seeking common ground as neighbors.

Through these and other examples, Choi calls on readers to envision an East Asia still criss-crossed by the traces of the movements of formerly colonized subjects—not only those killed or abandoned on the battlefield by the Japanese army, but the many others who lost their lives working in mines, dams, railroads, and reclamation projects. The essay thus seeks to shed light on those whose lives and deaths unfolded on the backstages of East Asian politics and history, and who call out to be remembered and mourned. Choi notes that their differences, once hierarchized under Japanese Empire, were only re-entrenched

when territorial borders of the nation states of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan were redrawn in the wake of the Pacific War, and under the geopolitical boundaries of the Cold War order. For Choi, it is only by confronting the psychic barriers to mourning East Asian “others,” instilled by postwar nationalisms, that the energy for a new activism challenging the omnipresence of the U.S. military in East Asia can be born.

One element that makes this collection of essays and artworks unique is that scholars working in a range of disciplines were asked to engage in conversations with practicing artists: academics working with the written word and artists working in a range of materials and media including textiles, film, and performance art were challenged to

express themselves in new ways. Taken together, essays and artworks reproduced in the volume beautifully elucidate the view that in a region still haunted by divisive politics, art has the potential to provide a bridge that can enable us to rethink or reimagine interconnected histories in East Asia. As a reflection of this focus on intersections between humanities-based research and the works of contemporary artists, this volume includes a number of images and a DVD of interviews with the artists which are ideal for classroom use. Artists whose work is represented in the volume are Kinjō Mitsuru, Ito Tari, Oh Haji, Soni Kum, and Yamashiro Chikako. Visuals representing the work of three of these artists accompany Choi’s essay reproduced here.

We are grateful to the artists and Yumiko Chiba Associations for their generous permission to use the images shown here.

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Yamashiro Chikako, *Seaweed Woman*, Lambda Print, 2008

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Chapter 4

Specters of East Asia

Okinawa, Taiwan, and Korea

Introduction

Among a cluster of underground air-raid shelters that made up the former Okinawa Army Hospital in Haeburu, in the city of Naha, is a cave where the character for the Korean surname “Kang” has been carved three times into the ceiling. As the Battle of Okinawa raged, workers and patients at the former hospital had fled the center of the city, moving repeatedly until they finally arrived at Haeburu’s underground shelters. Here, wounded soldiers received surgery and medical treatment alongside military porters working with pickaxes to hew out a tunnel about 6 feet high and 230 feet in length.

I came upon the place where the name “Kang” had been engraved, after walking alone through pitch darkness, about midway through the tunnel. The characters had been carved, it appeared, by a *chōsenjin* soldier hospitalized for some kind of injury to his lungs.¹ Judging from their position on the ceiling, I could surmise that the soldier had carved them while lying on the upper bunk of a makeshift hospital bed inside the tunnel. Perhaps, trying to escape the flames of war, the soldier had fled until his physical strength was depleted, and had carved these characters with the foreknowledge that he would die there in the underground shelter. Although it was clear that the three characters had been produced by the hand of the same person, the size and depth to which each one had been carved were different. In their differences, they seemed like a record of the last days of someone striving desperately to leave behind some trace of his existence, while dying in a distant place called Okinawa. One could say I had come across his grave.

What could that soldier possibly have felt as he carved the three characters of the name “Kang” here, in a distant land, I wondered. Whatever his feelings were, they defied my imagination. Yet as someone living in the present, I felt obliged to use at least the physical sensations I was experiencing here to understand, to a small extent, the unimaginable. To meet a “faraway death” means to carve your own name in stone three times, with diminishing levels of strength. And, lest we forget, to meet a faraway death can also mean to die with no grave at all, without even being able to carve one’s name in stone.²

My Experience in Taipei

I went to Taipei in January 2007. At that time, I visited the now closed coal mine-turned-sightseeing area in Jingtong in the Pingxi area near Taipei. While there I had the opportunity to listen to the local people talk about the mine.

Jingtong Mine, which had thrived in the 1920s,

allegedly hired Japanese engineers together with Taiwanese, indigenous, and *chōsenjin* miners. It goes without saying that these four groups of workers were not treated on an equal level but had been organized around a clear-cut hierarchy. In the ranking of Japanese, Taiwanese, indigenous people, and *chōsenjin*, the *chōsenjin* occupied the lowest place. Below the Taiwanese were the indigenous people, and then, below them, were the *chōsenjin*. It is not hard to imagine that, based on the hierarchy existing between the empire and colony and among colonized territories themselves, day-to-day practices of discrimination took place in the mine, as the violence of colonial oppression was transferred from one group to another. This situation must have intensified under the extreme conditions of war.

The mine is now a small museum called the Jingtong Coal Mine Museum, where historical records of the Jingtong mine such as chronological records and photographs have been retained. I found, however, absolutely no records relating to *chōsenjin* miners. Not only were the records therefore incomplete, but in general materials concerning the Japanese colonial period were displayed in the museum quite haphazardly, memorializing only those aspects of Taiwan’s mines that put Taiwan’s mining industry generally in a good light.

Preserved in the area surrounding the coal mine was also the dormitory for the Japanese engineers who had worked there. The actual dormitories of the Taiwanese, indigenous, and *chōsenjin* miners had long since disappeared, but their former locations and names bluntly conveyed a hierarchy with Japanese at the top. For instance, if we consider the names of the dormitories, we find that the dormitory where the Japanese engineers lived was called Kōgu, or Imperial Palace. This dormitory took the form of a traditional Japanese home, and the building has been carefully preserved to maintain the look of the times. Even now, it retains its name from the colonial period, and is

being used as a teahouse called Kōgu. In fact, when I went inside to have coffee I felt as if I had slipped back in time to the colonial period; time seemed to flow differently inside and outside the building. Ironically, I had never experienced such a feeling in Japan. I had the sense that for the first time here in Taiwan I was encountering the refinement of a traditional Japanese home. Shamisen music played inside the teahouse, sounding more Japanese than any music that I had heard in Japan, while its interior had been decorated with a stronger sense of Japaneseness than anything one could find in Japan today, giving me a very strange impression. Here there seemed to exist a Japan that was more Japanese than Japan—a case of “reverse Orientalism”? According to the brochure for those who visited the teahouse, the dormitory for the Japanese engineers faced the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, symbolizing that their hearts were turned in the direction of Mount Fuji and their homeland. Indeed, in those days, ordinary people were not allowed to approach the Japanese engineers’ dormitory.

Let me return to the matter of the dormitories’ names. The dormitory housing the Taiwanese miners was given the name Tokyo, and the one where the indigenous miners stayed was called Hokkaido. Did this signal that Hokkaido, although on a lower rung than Tokyo in the order of buildings, was highest among all of imperial Japan’s colonies? The dormitories themselves were no longer standing, but here and there in the streets of Pingxi one could find signs saying “Tokyo” and “Hokkaido.” Although the signs designated tourist inns, they gave me a sense that the memory of those places still lives on in the area today, even if in the form of a nostalgia from which the bitter memories of the colonial past have been excised.

But what about the *chōsenjin* miners who were lowest in status? Based on the ranking among Japan’s colonies at the time, one might think a dormitory called Ryukyu would be appropriate

for them. But the *chōsenjin* miners’ dormitory was not even adorned with a name like Ryukyu. Sadly enough, it had no name whatsoever. Moreover, one could figure out approximately where the dormitories called Tokyo and Hokkaido were located, but I was told no one knew where the *chōsenjin* miners had lived. I hope to learn more about this mine in the future. But upon hearing that the building for the *chōsenjin* miners had never been given a name, and that its whereabouts were completely unknown, I was quite overcome. “So that was the status of Chōsen ...” I thought, staring off into the distance.

I remember my experience in Taiwan vividly, to this day. I wonder if this is because I had already visited Okinawa before going to Taiwan. The air in Taiwan feels very much like the air in Okinawa. Geographically the two islands are close and belong to the same archipelago, so it is not surprising that they share similarities. The humid, subtropical air and soil feel the same in both places, and the attitude to life Okinawans call *chirudai* seems to link them in my mind. But what inextricably links the two places for me is the fact that *chōsenjin* died, away from home, in both places. *Chōsenjin* were killed during the Battle of Okinawa not just by Japanese, but also by Okinawans. Still today, beneath the runway of Kadena Airforce Base, lie the remains of *chōsenjin* porters who served as forced laborers for the Japanese Army. Their bones can still be found there.

For me, this connection between *chōsenjin* who met faraway deaths in Taiwan and Okinawa prompts thoughts of East Asia, Japan, Okinawa, Taiwan. This is an East Asia that rests on the sacrifice of the *chōsenjin* dead. It is an Asia that has already internalized these *chōsenjin* dead as Other. By this I mean that they no longer have any visible presence in East Asia. Unmourned and out of sight, the *chōsenjin* dead swarm over Japanese, Okinawan, and Taiwanese land. They cannot be seen, yet they

have never disappeared. I think of light and shadow. In terms of such a metaphor, one could say the *chōsenjin* dead are East Asia's shadows. A person surrounded by light cannot see that which is in the shadows. From the shadows, however, it is possible to make out that which is in the light as well as that which is in the deepest of shadows. An East Asia imagined by those who remain blind to the *chōsenjin* dead will not be capable of dismantling "modernity," "nationality," and "the state," and will merely repeat the violence inherent within them.

Dwelling With the Dead

In the Jeju Island Uprising, as well as in the civil war which arose from its escalation—the Korean War—people of Korean ethnicity slaughtered each other in the cruelest ways humanly possible, committing horrors even hell couldn't conceive of. This phrase, "horrors even hell couldn't conceive of" are the words of the elderly Yang We-h on in the documentary *Amano ryan san* (Grandma Yang the diving woman), directed by Haramura Seiki in 2004. In this film, which frames the awe-inspiring life of an elderly woman born on Jeju Island, who survived the uprising by escaping to Osaka as a stowaway, Yang responds to the interviewer's questions as to what the massacre was like with this phrase, and a pained expression. "Horrors even hell couldn't conceive of." Could humans know anything more tragic than what played out here?

Yet it is safe to say that among Japanese today—whether it is because the Korean War is only remembered for the economic boom the military procurements industry created for Japan, or simply because the war has been cleansed from memory—it is entirely unknown that these massacres and the war that followed can be precisely traced to Japanese colonial policies. Antagonism between the cunningly utilized pro-Japanese landowners and police, and the people of Chōsen whom they had continuously harmed and exploited, lay at the

very root of what caused these events, including those prompted by revenge, that preceded and succeeded it.

In addition to such preexisting internal conflicts within communities and villages, after the liberation from Japanese rule, there was also the confrontation between the Soviet Union (which thoroughly promoted land reform and punished the pro-Japanese collaborators in North Korea) and the United States (which in governing South Korea took full advantage of the negative legacies left by the Japanese colonial government, such as the Governor-General's Office and former pro-Japanese collaborators), in other words, the structure of the Cold War. Veiled within that structure, conflicts within the Korean Peninsula grew increasingly severe, until the Jeju Uprising of 1948 occurred, leading eventually to the Korean War, which was actually a civil war. The wartime situation changed at a dizzying pace, and every time it did so, the battlefield would be moved, so that revengeful massacres of increasing brutality were carried out over and over again.

Also, although a majority of the massacres of civilians in the Korean War were perpetrated by the South Korean army, we should remember that this army was an institution originally organized by pro-Japanese collaborators. These were people fully steeped in the militarist mentality of the Japanese army and its brutal ways. Throughout the Korean War, the army officers and police openly carried Japanese swords, which they used in the massacres of civilians. As the Korean sociologist Kim Dong-choon astutely grasped, "If we consider the fact that it was the pro-Japanese forces, cornered in a moment of crisis, who played a leading role in these massacres, following practices inculcated in them by the Japanese Imperial Forces, it is also possible to see the mass killings that took place during the Korean War as a direct legacy of the Japanese colonial rule."¹ If we do not grasp these

continuities with Japanese colonial rule, and only take into account the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, we will not be able to understand why this sort of massacre took place, and why the tragic “horrors even hell couldn’t conceive of” came to unfold. It goes without saying that the civil war we call the Korean War, and its massacres, cannot be seen as “someone else’s business” by the Japanese. The Japanese were involved in those deaths.

The Korean War has not yet come to a conclusion; the Korean Peninsula still carries the scars of those massacres. It is the same as with Okinawa, which still carries the scars left by the mass suicides that happened during the Battle of Okinawa. Even sixty years is not enough. The Korean War has not ended. The Battle of Okinawa has not ended. In a situation in which it is still not possible to solve the issue of pro-Japanese collaboration in South Korea, and in which the perpetrators of those massacres, as well as their surviving families and subordinates, continue to be in positions of power, our social structure remains incapable of punishing the perpetrators.

As is well known, Japan remains unwilling as a state to face the history of Okinawa’s mass suicides. But the situation in Okinawa is even more complex. That is to say, not only do Okinawans carry the all-too-enormous scars of the violence committed against them that was worse than anything “hell could conceive of” but they also retain similar memories of violence they themselves committed against former colonies, chiefly Chōsen.

Nevertheless, the relationship between Okinawans and *chōsenjin* should not be regarded as a dichotomy of perpetrators and victims. Should we speak in these terms, the existence of the dead will slip from view. This is because the violence perpetrated by imperial Japan and its mainland population was completely different in kind and quality from

the violence perpetrated by Okinawans in Okinawa. Before displacing it elsewhere, we need to unravel this vortex of oppression and violence that existed between the colonies of Okinawa and Chōsen. Moreover, we need to properly grieve for those *chōsenjin* who met faraway deaths in a land called Okinawa. What this would involve in concrete terms is to uncover the true circumstances surrounding their deaths, as would be the case with unearthing the dead who lie under the runway of the Kadena Military Base.

I catch my breath when some Okinawan friends, recalling the violence of the war, talk about the damage done to *chōsenjin* as if they themselves had been the perpetrators. This is extremely painful to hear. It is, of course, of primary importance to speak about these issues, but won’t the practice of Okinawans continually speaking about them from the standpoint of the perpetrators become dangerously commonplace? And doesn’t speaking from the point of view of the “perpetrators” force Okinawans to expel those other deaths, of Okinawans, that have long been internalized and held within? In other words, if this narrative of “perpetrators” and “victims” does indeed become a pattern, won’t we simply be dealing with abstractions? Perhaps this is the pitfall of any account that tries to be conscientious. But in this particular case, I think we can better understand the situation in Okinawa by considering how the history of violence toward *chōsenjin* is remembered in Japan.

One often sees on cenotaphs or in the archives of coal mines and dams in Japan the statement, “The number of forced laborers from Kankoku/Chōsen who died in Japan in the line of duty is still unknown.” The *chōsenjin* dead, their number, even their names, remain unclear, and at the present time in Japan the impetus to find this information is lacking. What this tells us is that, at the time that these dams and mines were in operation, Japanese

did not actually consider *chōsenjin* to be human beings. Occupying the very bottom rung on the social hierarchy, *chōsenjin* were not only made to work in the most degrading and dangerous of environments. Even when they died trying to perform these tasks, they were not treated as human beings. When the Japanese proprietors of the coal mines and dams had trouble disposing of the corpses, many bodies were simply burned or thrown away on the spot. Thus it has come to be that their number and their names went unrecorded. The word “discrimination” alone simply cannot describe a violence like this, which transcends our imagination. And if the word “violence” is premised on an understanding that it is something done to humans, then not even that word will do. If I may repeat myself: the Japanese did not treat *chōsenjin* as human beings.



Soni Kum, *Beast of Me*, 2005
Courtesy of the artist

It is a common practice in today’s Japan to refer to those who lived on the Korean Peninsula in the colonial era before it was divided into North and South, and before the Democratic Republic of Korea was established, as *kankokujin* or *kankoku/chōsenjin*. This, however, is clearly a historically erroneous appellation, a form of arrogance of the living who try to impose their will on the dead. The

polite term for “person” (*kata*) is also often used these days, as when the expression “*Chōsen no kata*” is used in place of *chōsenjin*. However, this politically correct mode of address is also a kind of hypocrisy, since it disguises the facts and obfuscates that history in which *chōsenjin* were not treated as human beings. While this way of speaking occurs when Japanese attempt to refer to the victimhood of *chōsenjin* from the position of the perpetrator, it results in an erasure of the dead. It is a kind of remembering- while- forgetting that, by dint of repetition, turns the existence of the dead into an abstraction, forces the dead to return to silence, and has meant that a palpable sensation of confronting those from the former colony who lost their lives has been lost. But if it is true that the very ground we are standing on contains—detectible to the naked eye—the bones of those who were abandoned, whose ground is it? We need to exercise our imaginations at least to this extent. We need to understand that this earth we now inhabit, before being a possession of the living, belongs to the dead. Isn’t this what is required of us? An ability to imagine the dead that is basic to our very existence as humans?

The Truth Commission on Forced Mobilization under Japanese Imperialism (established in South Korea in 2005 through the Special Law Supporting Fact- Finding on Forced Mobilization under Japanese Imperialism) is now carrying out the national project of having the remains of *chōsenjin* forced laborers returned to South Korea.² Even today these remains are scattered on the grounds of temples near mines and dams throughout Japan. Some Japanese, whether out of pangs of conscience or a fear of being cursed, saw to it that such remains were at least delivered to a temple. The South Korean government is now committed to having them transported home. Of course, since this is in every respect an undertaking of the South Korean government, set forth within the framework of the nation-state, it has inherent limitations. Investigations

will be carried out only in Japan (the territory of the former colonizer) and not in Taiwan or Okinawa. There is also the risk that the South Korean state will intervene in this history and use it for its own purposes. Nevertheless, it is a significant effort. It is especially so when we consider that contemporary South Korea has trodden a long path, from military dictatorship to democracy, in order to reach this point where it can come to terms with its past as its democracy matures. It is also significant when we take into account the fact that South Korea still cannot act independently of the U.S.- and Japan- led anti- Communist bloc in East Asia, starting first and foremost with the provisions of the peace treaty concluded with Japan during the quagmire of the Vietnam War, which was facilitated by South Korea's complicity with Japan and the United States in waging that war. And when we consider that the Cold War (and the Cold War era that posed so many obstacles for South Korea) has still not ended in East Asia, we could even say that the South Korean government has been prompt in moving to undertake this project. Why then, we might ask, has Japanese society remained unresponsive to, disinterested in, and ignorant of this project? These are, bear in mind, the very same Japanese who were inflamed over the kidnappings of Japanese citizens by North Korea. I hardly consider the repatriation project something of no concern to Japan.

A friend who is involved in the activities of the Truth Commission on Forced Mobilization told me this story: There are cases in which family members who are sent the remains of the deceased, once the whereabouts of the body have been discovered and the circumstances of death clarified, burst into tears and grieve, even after sixty years have passed. Yet in addition to that long- neglected grief, which indeed had already started to wither away, these survivors experience a second grief. This is the grief that occurs when they discover that the remains that are delivered are not bones but ashes. Normally, cremation does not take

place in Korean culture. This is also the case in Okinawa, where, unlike Japan, burial is done rather than cremation. Because burial is a Korean tradition, survivors who receive cremated remains of the deceased experience a second grief. What could it be like to experience this second grief, after the passage of sixty years' time?

Let us return the discussion to Okinawa. The Okinawan view of the relation between life and death is something like "dwelling together with the dead," as I understand it. As a matter of daily experience, the dead and the living dwell together. One can immediately tell that similar views of life and death have been held in Okinawa and Chōsen by looking at the shapes of the graves: we find burial mounds on the Korean peninsula, and turtleback tombs in Okinawa. In both places, graves are a ceremonial space where the dead and the living mingle—in a Korean cultural sensibility, the grave was a wide- open space or a yard, or *madang*. For instance, the series of artworks by Yamashiro Chikako that use the turtleback tomb as a stage seek to evoke the essence of such tombs, which are rooted in the Okinawan idea of "dwelling together with the dead." In the video art performance "Okinawa Complex" (2007), which was staged in a garden with a turtleback tomb, the legs of the performer appear from amid a bed of foliage, slowly opening and closing in a repeated pattern. The beautiful lines of her legs are themselves almost like flowers reaching up to heaven from the surface of the gravesite. They seem to waft pleasantly in the wind. Through the repetition of this exercise, a festive space opens up, in which the living and the dead mingle, so that the appearance of the tomb site is gradually transformed in a richly humorous manner. Looking at the intense, almost poisonous shadows, lights, and colors that appear one by one in this piece, the spectator begins to have a languid feeling, the feeling of *chirudai*.

"Dwelling together with the dead." Here in

Okinawa—a force field richly expressive of this view of life and death—should it not be possible to maintain the presence of the *chōsenjin* dead, too, as a sensation, even as an internalized Other, that is held and confronted within? I am not speaking of the dead as an idea here. Rather, I speak of the dead as existences upon which we can train our gaze precisely as what is unseen, yet has not disappeared from this world. I want to believe that the sensation of these graves, and the view of life and death prevalent in Okinawa, have the power to dismantle even the pressures of Japanese and American imperialism that have so far held Okinawans and *chōsenjin* apart.

Undoing/Resolving *Han*

To the Spirits of Our Brothers and Sisters who Perished on this Island

Why has this island become silent?

Why is it that it no longer tries to speak

Of the sorrow of the women

Of what happened to our brothers and sisters of the Korean Peninsula?

Oh, older brothers who were abducted, torn from your families

Who breathed your last in the suffocating heat of ships' hulls Whose hands and feet were blown off in this land of Okinawa Whose souls were trampled upon!

The war has ended, time has passed,

Yet the sound of soldiers' boots never fades from this island Stolen land, vanished villages, the cries of women, all continue The hearts of the people are still parched.

Oh, older brothers,

Unmourned to this day, buried in the crevices of these limestone cliffs

Are your bones, bones, bones

Even they cannot return to the grave mounds of your home- towns Our older brothers!

We, Okinawans,

Bow our heads, brothers and sisters,

Before the spirits of you who were trampled underfoot by soldiers' boots And left lying there.

We bow our heads before our sisters,

Who were violated as sex slaves by the Japanese army

Before our brothers, who became its victims as military porters

We believe that, before long, the hardened pods of the *tesangu* will burst open

And the seeds, scattered across the sea we share, will blossom as flowers.

Oh, brothers and sisters,

Never ceasing to tell of the hardships you experienced

We will banish war and armies from this earth To your spirits, to you, who perished in this land We vow it.

This poem is carved on the stone, Monument to Han, located in Yomitan Village in Senaha, Okinawa. Erected to memorialize *chōsenjin* military porters who died in Okinawa during the war, its unveiling ceremony took place on May 13, 2006. The monument stands in a deserted spot atop a small hill, looking out over the beautiful sea that borders Yomitan Village. Standing in front of it, surrounded by massive Ryukyuan limestone cliffs, one feels a wind that seems to have blown directly across the ocean from the Korean Peninsula.

In May 2008, I had the good fortune of visiting the Monument to Han, guided by Asato Eiko and Murayama Tomoko, who had played key roles in its construction. Asato Eiko is the person who had carved the inscription above into the stone. She informed me that the large Ryukyu limestone formations into which the monument had been set were themselves composed of bone—fossilized coral, to be exact. The Monument to Han itself, that is, rests within a massive bone.

Asato's inscription embodies the sentiments of those Okinawans involved in building the Monument to Han, and their determination to mourn the deceased *chōsenjin*. Implicit in this gaze of Asato, who in addressing the porters and women who were forcibly made into sex slaves as “older brothers,” “older sisters,” or “brothers and sisters” treats them as an inner presence or literally “family,” are what I might call the first stirrings of a new relationship between Okinawa and Korea. It is a new relationship that could become a means of working through *han*, which is the duty of future generations.

The Korean word *han* refers to a sadness that throbs, that has congealed and hardened; and also to something that “loosens” it. In the Korean expression “undoing *han*” (*hanpuri*), *han* refers to a congealed feeling that loosens and hardens again, loosens and hardens again—to a process of rumination that is repeated over and over. *Han* never disappears. It does not disappear, but *hanpuri* can also allow one to carry on with living—and without *hanpuri* one will become physically debilitated. *Hanpuri*, that is, could be called the very activity of human life itself. Nevertheless, the depths of *han* being what they are, it will be difficult to undo the *han* of those dead who have been neglected for over sixty years. Rather, we should try to keep them company as long as we live.

That the Okinawan people have a connection to

those killed in the Korean War should be a principle that sustains the antibase struggle in Okinawa, and can be a continuing intellectual resource for that struggle. Moreover, the antibase struggle is, properly speaking, a way of mourning the faraway deaths of *chōsenjin* who died in Okinawa during the Pacific War. This is the sense of the words carved by Asato Eiko: “Oh, brothers and sisters, never ceasing to tell of the hardships you experienced, We will banish war and armies from this earth, To your spirits, to you, who perished in this land, We vow it.” This vow, our determination in the here and now, can be the beginning of a rebirth of the bond between Okinawa and Chōsen.

Beyond the "Anti-Reversion Theory" of the 1970s

When I first read Arakawa Akira's essay, “Hanfukkiron” (Anti-reversion theory), developed around the time of Okinawa's reversion to Japan, I found it to be a form of thinking that was full of resonance for *chōsenjin* in Japan. “Anti-reversion Theory” has something universal about it that could be directly connected with the present historical situation of those who are called *zainichi chōsenjin*. Most especially, up until recently I have read “Anti-reversion Theory” as something concerning me (although I realize I may have misread many points). The work has the power to appeal to the singular existence. When encountering its words, I was able to grasp and historicize something I, too, had been subjected to in Japanese society: for Arakawa understands the violence of reversion as a form of assimilation—a form of “becoming Japanese.” Reading the essay, I had felt in the tangible presence of a continuing history, the violence of a past and present in which reversion also constitutes the form of assimilation known as “becoming Japanese.” In that violence that connects Okinawans and *chōsenjin* with each other—the violence of reversion as a form of the same assimilation that has been borne by both groups—I felt I

could discern how certain structures of Japan had come into being.

What is noteworthy about “Anti-reversion Theory” is that it is not simply a criticism of the nation, but rather that it takes up the problem of the state as a question of “totality versus singularity.” In other words, “Anti-reversion Theory,” while thoroughly basing itself on the perspective of the singular existence, takes aim at the totality, as a theoretical praxis critical of assimilation. In the essay “Okinawa as ‘Unpropitious Space’ of Antistatism,” Arakawa draws on his own editor’s foreword to the special issue of *Shin Okinawa Bungaku* (New Okinawan literature) published a year earlier, to define anti-reversion theory as “a matter that has to do with to what extent I, as a singularity, am involved with ‘Japan as a state.’” And he writes, “Insofar as this is a problem of singularity versus totality, it is not a question to be raised about others but directed inward, to the self.”⁴ Continuing, Arakawa writes of “Anti-reversion Theory”:

Thus, in the case of “Anti-reversion Theory” I am in no way referring to the institutional and territorial reconsolidation of a Japan and Okinawa that have been divided, which would be an external phenomenon. I am pointing to what might be called a spontaneous activity of thought whereby Okinawans, willingly and on their own, allow themselves to be subsumed by the state. In this sense, I would have no objection to referring to “Anti-reversion Theory” as a spiritual inclination, on the level of the singular, to thoroughly and continuously reject fusion with the state. To reformulate it even further, let me say that anti-reversion equals “Antistate” and “Antination.” It is a manifesto directed inward, whereby I ceaselessly position myself as a person without nationality.⁵

Moreover, “Anti-reversion Theory,” insofar as it manifests a “spiritual inclination, on the level of the singular, to thoroughly and continuously

reject fusion with the state,” is a critique of assimilation, or a critique of colonialism as a whole. Herein lies the universality of Arakawa’s theory, and the power of his writing to appeal to the singular. This is certainly an unforgettable work. But going beyond its theoretical argument, what is even more unforgettable is the way in which the very idea of anti-reversion theory is fraught with black humor. There’s a kind of virulent laughter in the work. I smile wryly, especially when reading descriptions such as the one below:

That is to say that, as I have stressed repeatedly thus far, it is by unrestrainedly flaunting Okinawa’s geographical and historical heterogeneity and its “otherness” that we can begin to grasp their potential. In other words, it is only when Okinawa puts forward everything that is decidedly different and “other” about itself that Okinawans will be able to both relativize and see in their own minds the “state,” which is at one and the same time an actually existing organ of repression and an uncanny, bewitching monster that defines our lives as a whole.

When this happens, we will be able to clearly put into perspective for the first time that the “state,” or “Japan as state,” is not simply an ideological concept, but instead is a lived sensation. Then, we will be at last able to liberate ourselves from the value systems of the nation, as well as from the curse of having our own lives defined in response to those values. For the first time, “Japan as state” will appear before us Okinawans in concrete form as something to be rejected.

It is truly only in that moment of realization, when “the state” takes shape before us as something to be rejected, that our existence (the existence of Okinawa itself) will become a poisonous arrow shot deep inside “Japan as state,” a kind of extremely malignant tumor. Like gangrene, Okinawa can become a region that has the potential to implode the very idea

of “Japan as state,” rotting it from the inside out. Okinawa’s historical and geographical situation for this very reason endows it with the good fortune of being an existence to be envied by every other region of Japan. In no way should we allow this privilege to be “detoxified” by an unquestioning espousal of the ideology of “reversion,” which is in fact a will toward assimilation.⁶

If I may put it this way, we see here in Arakawa’s “Anti-reversion Theory” a kind of black humor that contains a virulent laughter that is also a curse directed toward the nation of Japan. As a *chōsenjin* who has been “resident in Japan” (*zainichi*) since my birth in the year after Okinawa’s reversion, I must say I was bodily susceptible to infection by this curse. I could think of no greater pleasure. But I now realize it is not enough to simply define the virulent laughter that suffuses “Anti-reversion Theory” as black humor. To do this causes another feeling inherent in the work to drop out of sight. Although it is something that I have come to understand only recently, I would define that feeling—if I were to link it to Okinawan sensibilities—as *chirudai*. Here I would like to quote the words of the producer Nakazato Isao, referring to *chirudai*. Attempting to conceptualize the *chirudai* that is richly put into an image in the work of filmmaker Takamine Gō, Nakazato defines Okinawan *chirudai* as “a subtropical remainder/surplus that cannot be forcefully subsumed by the narrative of the nation and its people.” He writes:

Chirudai is an Okinawan expression that can mean “to be out of it” or “to become sick of it,” or “vacantly.” As such, *chirudai* could be understood as that unproductive idleness often associated with countries of the South. But Takamine’s work instills into it a second dimension that lacks these negative connotations. For him, *chirudai* is “a natural phenomenon that is rooted in the land and the blood of Okinawa, from which the Uchinanchu

cannot possibly escape, whether they wish to or not—one might say it is the very physical constitution of Okinawa.” If I were to make bold to reformulate this in my own words, I would say that *chirudai* is the subtropical remainder/surplus that cannot be forcefully subsumed by the narrative of the nation and its people. In other words, *chirudai* is not only something like the “Okinawan constitution” but can also be the means of producing a heterogeneous image that counters the patriarchal nature of the national narrative.⁷

Let me suggest that the feeling of *chirudai* that Nakazato conceptualizes here (so splendidly it takes one’s breath away) is similar to the feeling that forms the basic undercurrent of Arakawa’s “Anti-reversion Theory.” Let me suggest that we can sense that same feeling in the words, so typical of Arakawa’s manner of expression, used to describe the state of mind of those people who, in living out the philosophy of anti-reversion theory, live as “people without a country” or “stateless persons.” Arakawa writes, “The weapons of those who live as stateless persons are the philosophies of ‘having no homeland’ and of ‘idleness.’ Such ideas are like gangrene to the hypertrophic nation. We do not need to be impatient at all.”⁸ Moreover, today, a full thirty-four years after reversion, Arakawa still links anti-reversion theory—as a philosophy spun out of *chirudai* in precisely this idle, “no need to be impatient at all” way—to the vision expressed in Lu Xun’s “My Old Home”: “For actually the earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made.”⁹

Of course, we must acknowledge that, regardless of the existence of Arakawa’s “Anti-reversion Theory,” Okinawa thereafter reverted and continues to revert to Japan, as it is absorbed into Japan’s economy and politics. Moreover, at the present time, when we are experiencing both a “Korean Wave” boom and an Okinawan boom in Japan, Okinawa is

undergoing a kind of cultural absorption under the auspices of a touristic, Orientalist gaze. Films made by the director Nakae Yūji might be seen as an example of this tendency.¹⁰ And yet one wonders. Do these developments mean that anti-reversion theory has come to an end, or become outmoded? I can hardly think so. Rather, anti-reversion theory remains unassimilable by “Japan as state,” and as such it continues to curse that state. It is “that subtropical surplus/remainder that cannot be forcibly subsumed by the narrative of the nation and its people: *chirudai*.” If I think of Japan surrounded by an East Asia that includes Okinawa and Chōsen, or take a bird’s-eye view of a shabby Japan that is rotting from within because of the gangrene inside it, I feel convinced of this. And I am convinced that now, more than ever, “Anti-reversion theory” is not old, but very new.

Nevertheless, I feel there is something missing in “Anti-reversion Theory.” We need to write its “sequel” at the present time. I would therefore like to offer a critical rereading of the text, as a way of repaying my debt to it and expressing the highest form of respect to its author. I see my criticisms as a way of perpetuating its legacy.

To put it bluntly, what is missing from “Anti-reversion Theory” is a gaze toward the Other who dwells within. This is the result of a kind of dualism that an argument “against” something can fall into, and insofar as “Anti-reversion Theory” adheres to such a dualism, it will not be able to maintain a gaze toward the Other within. Arakawa’s argument needs to look forward. It goes without saying that at the time it was written Okinawa was directly confronting all-too-suffocating, gigantic pressures from Japan and the United States and did not, perhaps, have the luxury of anything other than dualistic thinking. But insofar as it lacks a gaze toward the Other within, even an Okinawa that resists reversion will be entangled in the logic of “modernity,”

“the nation,” and “the state.” Let me offer a reading of Arakawa’s essay “Modern Okinawa and Korea,” published in the winter issue of *Sanzenri Quarterly* in 1978, as a text that is suggestive of this problem.

Arakawa does not take up Chōsen directly in this article, published six years after Okinawa’s reversion to Japan, but he does allude to relations between Okinawa and the Joseon Dynasty in the premodern and modern periods. Given his stance in opposition to reversion, it is perhaps to be expected that Arakawa expresses criticism of certain developments that followed upon reversion, and took place against the backdrop of a collusive relationship between the Japanese and South Korean governments: for example, the establishment of a “Japan-South Korea Friendship Association in Okinawa Prefecture,” and the ongoing introduction, without heed for the sacrifices of the South Korean people, of South Korean laborers and South Korean physicians to help in the spheres of industrial and cultural production, or health and welfare, in Okinawa.

In the course of his argument, touching on the relationship between Okinawa and the Korean Peninsula in the modern period, Arakawa criticizes a form of discrimination that has existed in Okinawa, arguing that “Okinawans have rarely grasped how foolish they have been in choosing a narrow-minded way of life, whereby everything has been channeled into ‘becoming Japanese’ rather than becoming a good friend for those on the Korean Peninsula, let alone other neighboring peoples.” As Arakawa describes, the detrimental influence of Okinawans’ desire to become Japanese under the authoritarian *kōminka* (Japanization or assimilation) policies of the Japanese empire, meant that modern Okinawans deeply despised and vehemently rejected any association with others who had been discriminated against and oppressed by Japan (such as the Ainu, those on the Korean Peninsula, and Taiwanese), feeling that the greatest hardship was for their

“Japaneseness” to be questioned. However, we should bear in mind that the same discriminatory views were also present in the colony of Chōsen, and even, one would presume, in Taiwan and among the Ainu. As a result of the Japanese empire’s oppressive policies, the modes of interaction that had existed among regions in East Asia prior to modernity, as well as the ability of other East Asians to imagine a resistance to imperial Japan, were completely undone. It was precisely this division of East Asia that proved to be imperial Japan’s cunningly cruel design. Even today, under the pressure of Japanese/American imperialism, East Asia has yet to overcome its division.

This brings me back to my main point. In his essay, Arakawa criticizes a modern Okinawa that marched toward assimilation with blind faith (produced by its lack of a meaningful relationship with the modern Korean Peninsula), and he also speaks of the necessity to restore the memory of the interactions between premodern Okinawa, the Korean Peninsula, and Asia as an alternative path. Memory of premodern East Asia, in other words, offers for Arakawa an opportunity to do away with modern Okinawan discrimination and to “restore a rich openness” to postreversion Okinawa. He writes:

It is my sense that, were we to unearth and reaffirm within mainstream culture the thriving interaction that originally existed between the people of the Korean Peninsula, China, and the peoples of the regions in the South Pacific, our spirit would without doubt reclaim a rich openness for itself. With modernity, the Okinawan spirit has atrophied all too much due to the detrimental influence of its assimilation goals. Okinawa has been an imitator, chasing after the distorted spirit of a modern Japan that does not feel the pain of others as its own.¹¹

I empathize with Arakawa’s perspective. Particularly, I feel that interaction between

Okinawa and Jeju Island should be reestablished. As is apparent in the similarities between their intonation of words and their readings of Chinese ideographs, exchange between Okinawa and Jeju Island was once abundant. They are both islands that experienced similar tragedies, where “acts that even hell couldn’t conceive of” were committed under the pressure of Japanese/American imperialism. The Battle of Okinawa should be understood more broadly and placed within its East Asian context, with its connections to the Jeju Uprising recognized. Only then will our historical awareness become richer, and will we attain a perspective that can structurally account for why such tragedies occurred.

However, I also feel that the renewal of a relationship between Okinawa and the Korean Peninsula, before being based on any history of premodern interactions, should begin with a restoration to memory of *chōsenjin* in the Battle of Okinawa. Any recollection of a premodern relationship that fails to acknowledge this modern event will surely be limited to the conceptual level. In the essay I have been discussing, it is true that Arakawa does touch on modern Chōsen. But his gaze is on Chōsen as if it were something exterior to Okinawa, with no inner connection to it. This is because Arakawa does not touch on the bitter memories evoked by the presence of *chōsenjin* as an internal Other within Okinawa. In Arakawa’s gaze, the palpable sensation of *chōsenjin* as an internal Other of Okinawa is lacking. Can we not say that this remains a problematic aspect of anti-reversion thought as a whole? For, insofar as it is based on the binary logic of “anti”—in other words, as long as the fragmented “Okinawa” that returns to Japan is not in its turn fragmented—it cannot perceive Chōsen as an internal other. Herein we find the limits of the anti-reversion theory of the 1970s.

There is a scene described by the critic Okamoto Keitoku that I have not been able to forget. In his memoirs of the Battle of Okinawa,

in the essay “Gūkan” (Random thoughts) published the year before he died, Okamoto unexpectedly makes a reference to the presence of Koreans:

What the Japanese army called “provisions” were kept in storage in the neighborhood of a linen factory on the island of Miyako, along with the army’s military equipment. Sometimes I caught sight of *chōsenjin* military porters sneaking in to eat the raw rice grains, which made them sick to their stomachs. If discovered, they were severely beaten. All around the factory one could see trails of their shit, containing the grains of raw rice they could not digest. Looking back on it, it is clear there were many dramas unfolding around these *chōsenjin*, having to do not only with food but with the discrimination they faced. But, at the time, these things were totally beyond our ken.¹²

The kinds of scenes Okamoto witnessed were not restricted to Miyako Island. At the height of the Battle of Okinawa, they occurred throughout the various islands where *chōsenjin* military porters were deployed. As the surviving elders, or *halaboji*, who had served as porters to the Japanese army repeatedly recall when they tell us about that time, “The Japanese did not treat *chōsenjin* as human beings.”¹³ One survivor of the battle on Aka Island spoke of his memory (although it is a piece of history that can barely be conveyed in words) of Japanese soldiers executing twelve *chōsenjin* military porters for plucking rice plants on civilian agricultural lands and putting them in their pockets. Other porters were forced to dig a hole and bury the bodies. One can imagine that, in an atmosphere where not treating *chōsenjin* as humans prevailed, such executions must have taken place on other islands as the battle raged.

What could have possibly gone through the minds of the porters who were severely beaten for furtively stealing food? Were they, in fact,

able to be angry? If it is possible that—under the most extreme conditions in the Battle of Okinawa, and in that moment of execution and at that site—those who had not been treated as human beings were not even allowed to feel anger, then that pent-up anger of the dead who were executed, that festering *han* which has never been released is ours to revive and reflect on anew in the here and now. It needs to be expressed, as part of new politics that would overthrow the memory politics that consigns to oblivion *chōsenjin* who met faraway deaths throughout East Asia.

Okamoto Keitoku—I deeply admire how, in the days before his death, he took a moment to remember the *chōsenjin* who were in the Battle of Okinawa. It is essential for us to understand how meaningful this was. In the few sentences of that one passage, it seems to me that Okamoto, as his own body declined, foresaw how he could express a new kind of encounter with Chōsen by thoroughly dismantling his own Okinawan identity. It is even possible he had already achieved such a reencounter. Not through ideas, but through his bodily sensations. Through the smell, the color ... the streaks of shit on the earth with their raw, undigested rice. If it is possible, at the risk of impropriety, to pick up on those bodily sensations, let me propose that Okinawa exists on top of the shit of dead *chōsenjin* and, in this sense, Okinawa is Chōsen.

It seems to me that a gaze that regards the *chōsenjin* dead in Okinawa carries out a further dismantling of the “Okinawa” already dismantled by anti-reversion theory and takes us beyond it. Isn’t another revolution of the spirit demanded of us here today?

From “Minority” to “Multiplicity”

We are all familiar with the word “minority.” I have been called that in Japanese society and have defined myself that way. Before I ever faced the world, the sign “minority” had been prepared for me, since—whether it was being

used by people trying to reclaim the human rights of minorities, or by those seeking to consume minorities—this discourse flooded, and continues to flood, our environment. However, when I consider it now, I have been trapped in the cage of that word “minority,” which pared down my existence and imaginative power. As long as I allowed myself to be trapped by the term—was it for the sake of restricting my existence within a binary relationship that simply defined it as the opposite of “Japanese” or “the majority”?—I was unable to conceive of those *chōsenjin* who met faraway deaths in East Asia. It also now seems to me that, despite the fact that I am a scholar of modern Korean literature and an activist engaged with postcolonial theory, I had allowed myself inadvertently to be lulled into occupying the position of the minority, subsumed into a system that had come to be controlled and consumed by the majority. This constraint, which enfolded me like a fate, is the very essence of politics and the political.

I will therefore refer to myself not as a “minority,” but as “multiplicity.”¹⁴ Thinking of myself this way, I am ready to take revenge against the term “minority.” “Multiplicity” is not the logic of numbers that dictate who are the “minority” and “majority,” but a way of being, grounded in the magnitude of the existence of the Other that one internalizes. “Multiplicity” is the shadow one encounters when delving into and dismantling the self. To what extent can one dismantle the self and exist along with its shadows? “Multiplicity” is a way of thinking based on such a “dwelling together with the dead”; it is a will to express that which, although invisible to the eyes, will never disappear. I am not the minority, but multiplicity. On the basis of a “coming right of self-determination” I invoked at an earlier conference on anti-reversion theory convened here in Okinawa, I named myself in this way.¹⁵ Moreover, I, as multiplicity, am addressing one more multiplicity. That is Mr. Arakawa Akira, who eventually embraced a self who was once

“one of the enthusiastic advocates of reversion, whose eyes had been clouded by the grand proposal of reversion to the ‘fatherland,’ ” as an Other within.

“I am afraid of the Japanese people. As an Okinawan, I am extremely afraid of them.”¹⁶ These words of Mr. Arakawa in his interview in the quarterly magazine *Zenya* are very striking and have remained with me to this day.

Precisely because they were the words of someone who had committed himself to a life of anti-reversion that was already being spent in splendid isolation and surrounded by misunderstanding; Arakawa’s sensation of “fear” seemed to me deeply philosophical. I was lucky enough to be present at the time of this interview. Mr. Arakawa said those words not overdramatically, but frankly without hesitation.

I can understand his feeling. Living in Japan on October 2, 2006, after North Korea had carried out its atomic tests, I began, for the first time, to feel the bodily “fear of being stabbed in the back.” This was an event that changed my sense of history in a revolutionary way: in that instant I encountered the colonial Korea which was referred to in Japanese as *Chōsen*. And, although this might sound like a strange way of putting it, I could feel a bodily connection in that moment to the *chōsenjin* who had been attacked from behind by Japanese carrying bamboo spears at the time of the Great Kanto Earthquake—who had been stabbed and met their “faraway deaths” there. Or, at the very least, what was brought home to me at that moment was that nothing had changed in Japanese society since that time.

That truly painful, fearsome feeling that one could be attacked from behind is something I no longer harbor. I think this is because I have taken up the outlook of “dwelling with” those dead who perished far from home, and I have come to feel myself embraced by them, to use the words of Sakurai Daizō of the tent-heater

troupe Yasen no Tsuki Haibitsu. Within their embrace, I (and many other “I”s) are not “minorities.” We are multiplicity. This was the hope I was able to express and gradually embody while performing as an actor with that troupe, and standing with my feet planted on the earth beneath tents I had erected with my own hands.

Today, East Asia has become a vivid sensation for me, almost as though those *chōsenjin* who died in Japan, Okinawa, and Taiwan were calling out to me. I have an intense desire to know more about the circumstances of their deaths. What, I wonder, were the expressions in the eyes of *chōsenjin* who were stabbed to death with bamboo spears by Okinawans during the Battle of Okinawa? What did they see in that very moment? Moreover, this involves my facing an internal Other as well. His name is Saitō Hiroshi, and he is myself at the time when I adopted a Japanese name.

To explain—during my primary and middle school years, I went by the name Sai, the Japanese reading of my Korean name. Many *zainichi chōsenjin* lived in the ward of Adachi, in Tokyo, where I was raised, and people from Jeju Island were especially numerous. However, since most of them used Japanese names in their public lives, and because it is difficult to distinguish *zainichi chōsenjin* by their appearance, not knowing who was who was a routine matter at the time. By disappearing into the homogeneous and transparent atmosphere of Japanese society, we ended up supporting that homogeneity and transparency—or, more precisely, we were forced to support it.

During this period, because I had always been the only *zainichi chōsenjin* in my classes at school (although I later learned, through rumors that circulated after graduation, that some others had been so as well), a massive inferiority complex gripped my spirit. I was unbearably ashamed, not only because I was not Japanese, but also because I was the only

person with such a strange name. Although I never experienced the blatant discrimination endured by previous generations of *chōsenjin*, Japanese society at the time continued to be pervaded by an atmosphere that foisted “Japaneseness” on all its citizens, and as a child I was especially sensitive to that. The result was that I blindly believed in those days that if I could only become Japanese, I could be freed from my inferiority complexes and live a normal life. I settled on a Japanese name (Saitō Hiroshi) for myself when I entered high school, and ended up going through school under this name. Having at last become Japanese through my own doing, I could not at that point even fathom living my life as Choi Jin Seok.

For a while, perhaps for half a year, everything seemed rosy. But I was unable to completely repress the feeling that somehow or other I was living a lie. There were even times when, gripped by the illusion that everyone around me must surely have known that I was actually a *chōsenjin*, I could not get myself to go to school. Those were dark, bleak days. In fact, even now I find it difficult to recall this time in my life.

However, after graduating from high school, I came to the realization that I could no longer go on as Saitō Hiroshi, and that I could no longer think of myself as Japanese. Rather, the next step was to become South Korean. And so I studied abroad in South Korea for a year, and desperately studied the language. I had become a fervent nationalist by the time I returned and entered university in Japan, introducing myself using my actual birth name. I became “Choi Jinseok, South Korean.” But that phase did not last long either, because I could not adapt to being South Korean so suddenly. Either way of identifying myself seemed impossible, and as one might imagine, those, too, were dark days.

Just at the point when I had almost given up on trying to decide what to do with myself, a realization hit me like a bolt from the sky. I had

wanted to become Japanese, and then to become South Korean. Either way, I realized, I was on a path that left me harboring an unrequited desire to be part of a nation-state. It was at this very time that I had a similarly profound encounter with literature. From that moment on, I was finally released from the spell I had long been under. I gradually began turning my gaze, instead, toward the history of the Japanese colony Chōsen; toward the history of the Korean War; and toward the forgotten *chōsenjin* who had perished in Japan. At last, I had gotten my mind around the idea that I was, indeed, a *chōsenjin*.



Oh Haji, *Flower Spot*, 2007
Courtesy of the artist

This became a process of inner dismantling for

me, a spiritual revolution. Once I embarked on it, my life changed and became directed toward my own liberation. It was also a path of forgetting “Saitō Hiroshi” and separating myself from him. As I struggled to face my contradictions, “Saitō Hiroshi” came to feel like a foreign body I was harboring, with whom I could never be at peace. Now, however, I think of it thus: I have internalized “Saitō Hiroshi” as just one of the dead I harbor within me. The idea of “Saitō Hiroshi”—even his name—is a testament to that lonely time in my life when I lived rather desperately. I had been thinking that forgetting him would enable me to live, but I now wonder if his presence, as one of the dead within me, has not actually been what has kept me going. It seems it is my turn to accept him. This is how I will exist from this point on. I (together with many other “I”s) am not a minority, but a multiplicity.

To Conclude

Surely now is the time for all those who are called *zainichi* to begin to talk with each other about *who* are the *chōsenjin*, and to bring to bear on that question all the tension of our bodies that are in the here and now. As a beginning—and regardless of whether one is a *zainichi* with South Korean citizenship, a *zainichi* with Japanese citizenship, a *zainichi* registered as a Chōsen national, or a *zainichi* who is absolutely unable to talk about these matters because the words with which to do so have been stolen—as a beginning, we *zainichi* who are wavering in various crevices, having been scattered, strewn, and divided by the violence of colonial assimilation, should now once and for all, confront the gaze of the poet Kim Shi-jong, who scrutinizes “the shadowy term”—*chōsenjin* used with negative overtones—together with the word *zainichi chōsenjin*, a word which might function as a common denominator for all of us. The hope of *zainichi* truly lies in the rereading of these words at the present moment. Kim has put it like this:

Speaking as one called *zainichi*, my impulse would be to take the term *chōsenjin* (チョウセンジン), the shadowy term that has even become a kind of code for *zainichi* (i.e., with the meaning “born in Japan”)—and revive in it the very resonances that it shares with the written word *chōsenjin* (朝鮮人) as a call for pride, friendship, and love. As fellow members of the same ethnicity (at least insofar as some of us with South Korean citizenship are designated *zainichi chōsenjin*, while others who retained their prewar colonial designation are also called *zainichi*), we belong to the “sum of a sum total,” which we must retrieve from the midst of our shared *zainichi* existence.¹⁷

To echo the words of Kim Shi-jong, I also believe that anyone who feels their self-esteem as “Korean” (朝鮮人) has been damaged should seek to recover it in the sound’s consonance with *chōsenjin* (チョウセンジン), and that is precisely within these overlapping resonances that we can move forward together. My registration card denotes me as a person “of Chōsen nationality” or *chōsenseki* (朝鮮籍), insofar as I am registered in the category of *zainichi chōsenjin*. Following Kim Shi-jong’s notion, then, it is within that “sum” of the “sum total” of the *zainichi* population that can be called *zainichi chōsenjin* that I wish to locate myself ... and also to find something that lies beyond that. This is because, insofar as *zainichi* refers to those “in Japan,” *zainichi* identity cannot be absolute. *Chōsenjin* do not necessarily exist only within Japan. They are also in Okinawa, Taiwan, and Korea. Only when *zainichi* who live in Japan can feel how they are connected to the bodies of those *chōsenjin* who met faraway deaths in East Asia can they, together with other *zainichi*, transcend the designation *zainichi*. It is at this point that another word will come to meet us. I would like to think of this as a transition from *chōsenjin* to *joseon saram*. ...

Joseon saram. In the Korean language, *Joseon* refers to Chōsen and *saram* to 人 or “person,”

that is, *joseon saram* means a “a person of Chōsen.”¹⁸ It is a word every *zainichi* knows, and that no one except a *zainichi* would know. The young people of the generation after my own already find themselves in the same condition as the youth of present-day Okinawa. Youth who cannot speak the Okinawan language (*uchinānguchi*) are in a similar position to *zainichi* who did not go to an ethnic school and therefore cannot speak Korean. Every *zainichi*, however, even those who did not go to ethnic schools, recognizes the word *Joseon*. This is in much the same way that anyone who is Okinawan—young or old, man or woman—knows the word *uchinānchu*. The reason the words *joseon saram* and *uchinānchu* will not disappear is because they are the names for our very being.

I cannot help at this point but add that the word *saram* in Korean means “person,” but the word “love,” pronounced *saran*, is written the same way. In other words, in the Korean language, *saram* and *saran*, “people” and “love,” are homonyms, etymologically related, and similarly written. (Is it not splendid to think of “people” and “love” as having the same sound?) Therefore, I would like to impress on your minds this way of referring to the people of Chōsen, as *joseon saram*, which ends with the same sound as “love.” I would like to impress this upon you for a Korea to come.

In the near future, under the tide of present-day neoliberalism, it is likely that U.S.-North Korean relations will be restored, the Korean War will be formally concluded, and that, as diplomatic relations between North Korea and Japan are resumed, the Korean Peninsula will be reunified by forces of neoliberalism without any voices of protest being raised. It is not hard to imagine the desperate situation that will present itself at that point. The rich but untouched natural resources of the People’s Republic of North Korea, together with its highly skilled, low-waged labor force, will be wantonly exploited. These tendencies are

already visible on the economic level, but it is easy to foresee a situation in which the advances of American and Chinese industry will be followed by moves forward on the part of Japan, which will then result in the development of North Korean industry in a delayed fashion. Under such conditions, it is probable that the same types of disparities and discrimination that exist between the former East and West Germany will be produced in Korea. This would certainly confront us with a deeply hopeless scene. Yet even a state of despair need not mean the end of the world. Despair can be converted into the energy that will change the world; it is capable of serving as a force field for political expression.

A reunification of the Korean peninsula would effectively mean the end of the Cold War in East Asia. When this happens, all kinds of records and remembrances that we who live on one side of the Cold War divide have never come into contact with will emerge from the other side. The archives of land reform, for example. In these we may expect to encounter issues similar to those raised by the so-called Tibetan Uprising. But when the Tibetan problem is taken up, no reference is ever made to the archives of the land reform carried out by the Communist Party after entering Tibet and taking power, when land monopolized by Buddhist temples was forcibly taken away from them and distributed to Tibet's enslaved and completely landless population. Nor, when demands are made for "human rights" or to "Free Tibet," is the question ever raised of why it was monks who were the central force in that movement and exactly what kind of "freedom" they were demanding. These questions cannot be grasped by applying ready-made epistemologies from our side of the Cold War divide, an approach that simply results in further obfuscation of problems in the capitalist sphere. What exactly does "modernity" mean for China, and for Tibet? As the Chinese scholar Sun Ge astutely points out, this is where the essence of the Tibet problem lies. We should

not see it as merely posing a problem for others, but as "an epistemological challenge posed to all of us by the contemporary histories we are living through."¹⁹

Once reunification occurs, and we are faced with the society and politics of a People's Democratic Republic of Korea, which has its own archives of land reform, together with the scars of the Korean War and a history of continued struggle against American imperialism, it seems likely that a similar epistemological challenge will emerge, requiring the fundamental questioning of "modernity"—a problem which cannot become apparent by applying only the ready-made concepts of "freedom" and "human rights." We can expect such challenges to accompany us as we find ourselves swept across to the other side of the Cold War. And to the extent that the violence of neoliberalism is likely to become more apparent once reunification takes place, challenging questions will inevitably be raised about whether capitalism, progressing under neoliberal economic principles, is an economic system that can really offer "equality," along with "freedom," and what "freedom" actually consists of. Surely the aporia of "freedom" and "equality" (with "freedom" pursued by the capitalist world but unachieved by the socialist world, and "equality" pursued by the socialist world but unachieved by the capitalist world) will remain as a weighty "epistemological challenge" that the world has still not resolved. Indeed, it is just possible that the revival of Japanese interest in the proletarian author Kobayashi Takiji's *Crab Cannery Ship* is an indication that capitalism is already being challenged in this way. It is being challenged by a young underclass who have been passed the buck of neoliberalism's contradictions, and by alienated members of multiplicit(ies) who have been withdrawing themselves from the world. At any rate, it is perhaps because the concepts of "winners" and "losers," and the smokescreen of "personal responsibility," no longer hold sway among these groups that

these challenges are being raised.

Furthermore, there is even now something of great importance that concerns every person—as well as the “people” as a whole—who have been affected by the Cold War.²⁰ That is, the coming of the dead. When the Korean Peninsula becomes unified, the reality of the damage done to the North during the Korean War will become ever more real, and materialize before us. And when that time comes, we shall finally, as a collectivity, be able to mourn those who died during that war. Indeed, the *madang* awaits us where we may resolve the *han* of those dead and loosen its bonds. The Cold War began because of the division of the Korean Peninsula during the Korean War, and that war has continued to determine what life is like in the societies that were involved. In that sense, it is not just those on the Korean peninsula, but every person (and the “people” as a whole) who has been affected by the Korean War and the Cold War who are inevitably summoned to this *madang*. At such a time, it should follow as a matter of course that all core U.S. archives that pertain to the substantive supervision of the war by the United States, as well as to the process of its intervention, and especially facts related to the time immediately before and after the outbreak of the war, be declassified.

Then, for the first time, we may be able to investigate the true nature of the Cold War, to finally understand what U.S. imperialism in East Asia consisted of, and thus to piece together a more genuinely synthetic perspective on the Cold War.

But let me now shift attention away from the question of what historical and political paradigms will be at stake when reunification occurs, to the question of what reunification

will mean concretely, as an event that takes place on the level of everyday life. I think it will mean the arrival of *joseon saram*. The people of the Democratic Republic of Korea—its artists, its researchers—will appear before us. The day when they will join us under our theater tents, in research groups, symposia, assemblies, and drinking parties, will arrive. Who knows what name the Korean Peninsula will bear by that time? But whatever that name is, it will not change the fact that all those who join us will be *joseon saram*. In the near future, *joseon saram* will be among us. This is why I would like to impress that term on the minds of all of you who are here today.

Whether we think of them as part of our past or present histories, we must engrave in our minds what is conveyed by the term *joseon saram*. I have introduced the term because those who died in East Asia before 1945 did not think of themselves as *chōsenjin* when they were recruited as forced laborers, or when they died far away. Since we can surmise that few could speak Japanese as well as they could speak their mother tongue, it is likely that they would have referred to themselves with the words “Naneun joseon saram iya,” whether at the time when they arrived in Japan or at the time when they perished abroad. That is, the dead we bear within us were *joseon saram* before they were *chōsenjin*. I would like you to remember the term. Try murmuring it—you can pronounce it either as *joseon saram* or *joseon saran*—just once when you have a quiet moment to yourself.

Collaboratively translated by Ryan Buyco, Brett de Bary, Andrew Harding, Miyako Hayakawa, Hirano Oribe, Keiji Kunigami, Jillian Marshall, Andrea Mendoza, and Paul McQuade.

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Notes

¹ Translator’s note: Throughout this translation we will use the romanized *chōsenjin* and Chōsen whenever these terms appear, either written in kanji or katakana in Choi’s essay. This method of translation has been chosen both to demonstrate, and accord with, the argument developed by Choi in the course of the essay, which calls attention to the historical specificity of the word Chōsen, as used by the Japanese colonial regime (1910–1945) to refer to the entirety of its colony on the Korean Peninsula, inclusive of areas partitioned into North and South at the end of the Korean War in 1953. As Choi points out later in this essay, residents of

the Korean peninsula who were subject to forced mobilization as porters for the Japanese Imperial Army or laborers for mining, dam building, and other work in Japan, were called *chōsenjin* by the Japanese, although they themselves most probably would have continued to refer to themselves by the Korean-language term *joseon saram*. Throughout the postwar period, the terms *chōsenjin* and Chōsen have continued to be used in Japan. For example, although the political entity called Chōsen is now defunct, it is listed as a “nationality” (*chōsenseki*) on the Alien Registration Cards of those who remain stateless, i.e., those who did not declare South Korean, or any other, citizenship after the conclusion of the South Korea–Japan Basic Relations Treaty in 1965. While the terms *Chōsen* and *chōsenjin* both continue to carry some discriminatory overtones, in recent years both have been reclaimed by activists and progressive scholars. In the pages that follow, Choi argues that those “Koreans” who lived and died under Japanese colonialism should be referred to by the term *chōsenjin*, rather than the sanitized *kankokujin* (referring only to citizens of today’s Republic of South Korea) or even *zainichi kankoku/chōsenjin* that some have chosen as a more politically acceptable term today. Thus the memory of the suffering of *chōsenjin* under Japanese colonialism will not be erased. At the same time, as we will see later, Choi envisions that a reclaimed *chōsenjin* could be used as an umbrella term to bring together those in Japan who are now fragmented by loyalties to either South Korea (Kankoku) or North Korea (still often referred to in Japanese as Chōsen).

² Choi, like Lee Chonghwa in her introductory *taidan* with Takahashi Yūji, makes the trope of “faraway death” central to the rhetoric of this essay. Like Lee, he uses the archaic term *kakushi* (客死), literally, “to die while traveling” or “to die while a guest,” whose ideographs do not rely on a distinction between “foreign” and “native.” The term also evokes the ethical question of how to deal with anonymous or unmourned deaths.

³ Kim Dong-choon, *Chōsen sensō: Hinan, senryō, gyakusatsu* [A social history of the Korean War: Displacement, occupation, massacre], trans. into Japanese by Kim Mihye, Choi Deokhyo, Cho Kyong-hee, and Chong Yong-hwan (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2008), 236.

⁴ Translator’s note: The South Korean government of Roh Mo-hyun established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2003 to investigate human rights abuses and civilian massacres that occurred in Korea from the colonial period through the overthrow of the military dictatorship by the *minjung* movement in 2003. The Truth Commission on Forced Mobilization under Japanese Imperialism started its visits to former worksites throughout Japan in April 2005, against the background of state-level negotiations over the repatriation of the remains of conscripts known to be retained in Japan. With much of its work uncompleted, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and other groups linked to it were disbanded by the Lee Myung-bak administration when the commission’s first mandate expired in 2010.

⁵ “Undoing/Resolving *Han*” is a translation of the subtitle: 恨を解く、恨解き. The concept conveyed by the character 恨 in this section’s subtitle can mean “grudge” or “resentment” in Japanese, while in Korean it can also refer to “bonding based on suffering and hardship.” *Furigana* beside the second part of the title (恨解き) give it the gloss ハンブ^リ to evoke “*hanpuri*,” the Korean pronunciation for “loosening the bonds of suffering.”

⁶ This essay, “‘Han kokka no kyōku’ to shite no Okinawa,” was included in the book *Han kokka no kyōku* [The unpropitious space of antistatism] (Shakai Hyōronsha, 1971). Arakawa was editor of the special edition on the antireversion debate compiled by the quarterly magazine *Shin Okinawa Bungaku* [New Okinawa literature] 18 (December 1970).

⁷ Arakawa, “ ‘Han kokka no kyōku’ to shite no Okinawa,” 304.

⁸ Arakawa Akira, *Shinpan: Hankokka no kyōku: Okinawa, jiritsu e no shiten* [New edition: The unpropitious space of antistatism—a perspective on Okinawa and independence] (Tokyo: Shakai Hyōronsha, 1996), 136–137.

⁹ Nakazato Isao, *Okinawa: Imeeji no eiji* [Okinawa: The edge of the image] (Tokyo: Miraisha, 2007), 244.

¹⁰ Arakawa, *Shinpan: Hankokka no kyōku: Okinawa, jiritsu e no shiten*.

¹¹ The words of Lu Xun are from “My Old Home,” in *Selected Stories of Lu Xun*, trans. Yang Hsien-ji and Gladys Yang (Beijing, 1972), 63–64.

¹² For a discussion of the ways in which Japanese notions of Okinawa can be seen in the films about Okinawa produced by director Nakae Yūji, see Ōmine Sawa’s essay “Uragaesu koto, omotegaesu koto: 1999 nen ikō no Okinawa no hyōshō” [Inside out and outside in: Representations of Okinawa after 1999], in *Okinawa Eigaron* [Okinawan cinema], ed. Yomota Inuhiko and Ōmine Sawa (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2008), and the transcription, in the same collection, of the panel discussion on this topic convened at the symposium *Okinawa kara sekai o miru* (Seeing the world from Okinawa), held at Meiji Gakuin University in June 2007.

¹³ Arakawa Akira, “Kindai Okinawa to Chōsen” [Modern Okinawa and Chōsen] published in *Kikan Sanzenri* [Sanzenri Quarterly] (Winter 1978): 165.

¹⁴ Okamoto Keitoku, “Gūkan, 42” [Random thoughts, 42], *Keeshi Kaze* 4, no. 7 (June 2005), in Okamoto Keitoku, *“Okinawa” ni ikiru shisō—Okamoto Keitoku hihyōshū* [A philosophy of living in Okinawa: Critical writings by Okamoto Keitoku] (Tokyo: Miraisha, 2007), 248.

¹⁵ The Korean word *halaboji* (grandfather) is a respectful way of addressing older men.

¹⁶ The word “multiplicity” (*tasū*) was my stage name in the play *Hengen kasabutajō* (Shape-shifting scabrous castle) performed by the troupe Yasen no Tsuki Haibiitsu in Tokyo and Beijing in 2007, and is a poetic expression that the play passed on to me. It is a word connected in my mind to the playwright and actor Sakurai Daizō, as well as to the troupe that performed the play. And it is without doubt a word I myself came to embody as an actor in that troupe. Whenever I weave that word into my critical writing, I think of it as a kind of translation of the play and also an expression of my esteem for it.

¹⁷ “I am not a minority, but multiplicity.” This is something I determined for myself when I participated as a panelist in the symposium on antireversion theory, titled *Maakarawajiiga?! Kitarubeki jiko ketteiken no tame ni* (Where will the anger come from? Towards a right of self-determination to come) held at the Sakima Art Museum in Okinawa on May 18, 2008.

¹⁸ Arakawa Akira, “Hanfukkiron to dōka hihan—shokuminchika no seishin kakumei toshite ikkikan” [Antireversion debate and the critique of assimilation—on a spiritual revolution under colonialism], *Zenya* 9 (Fall 2006), 300.

¹⁹ Kim Shi-jong, “ ‘Zainichi’ no hazama de” [In the crevices of “zainichi”], in *Heibonsha raiburari* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2001), 457. Translator’s note: In our reading, when Kim Shi-jong refers to the way the terms *chōsenjin* and *zainichi* have become almost interchangeable, he does so as a poet who is himself called *zainichi*. Although he has lived in Japan for over sixty years, Kim Shi-jong was born on Jeju Island and holds South Korean citizenship. He searches for a way to give both the terms *zainichi* and *chōsenjin* new meanings which might overcome the divisions arising out of the different terms and categories by which the fragmented *zainichi* community is now known. Moreover, Choi here uses the ideograph 朝鮮人 for

chōsenjin by contrast to the prior katakana spelling of チョウセンジン (also read *chōsenjin*) to suggest that the discriminatory nuances that still cluster like shadows around the word might be replaced by a literal reading of it as “people of Chōsen,” in the same way that an American in Japanese is *Amerikajin* or a Canadian *Kanadajin*.

²⁰ The Korean peninsula was unified under the Joseon Dynasty from 1392 until the time of its annexation by Japan in 1910.

²¹ Sun Ge, “ ‘Sōgō shakai’ chūgoku ni mukiau tame ni” [Toward encountering China as a “synthetic society”], *Gendai shisō* 30, no. 9 (2008): 54-58.

²² Translators’ note: When Choi places “peoples as a whole” in apposition to the plural of “persons” (人々), he uses the character 人民 to clarify that he does not mean “nation” or “people” in the nationalistic sense.