

Citizenship and North Korea in the Zainichi Korean Imagination: The Art of Insook Kim 郷愁 キム・インスクの作品 における在日朝鮮人の表象

Young Min Moon

Young Min Moon with an Introduction by
Sonia Ryang

Introducing Young Min Moon's Reflection
on the Photographic Art of Insook Kim

Sonia Ryang

An article in the *Hankyoreh* a few months back caught my attention. The story is about Ko Kang-ho and Ri Mi-oh, a married couple of Zainichi Koreans living in Kyoto. Recently Mr. Ko had filed a lawsuit in Seoul City Court requesting that his South Korean nationality be annulled. Ko had become a South Korean national upon his parents' acquiring that nationality after the 1965 normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and the ROK. Now he has chosen to become stateless, the option which in theory is available to Zainichi, who were completely stateless between the years 1945 and 1965. Thereafter, only those who acquired South Korean nationality (including Mr. Ko's family) obtained permanent residence in Japan, leaving a large number of Zainichi continuing to be stateless, the situation only to be addressed in the 1990s. In 2012 this unprecedented request was denied in the Supreme Court of South Korea. Mr. Ko's action was inspired by his wife, Ms. Ri, who has lived all her life stateless: she has no nationality, retaining only the *Chōsen* identification in her Japanese alien registration. Excerpts from the *Hankyoreh*:

In the heart of Kyoto, Japan's capital for a

thousand years, many traditional homes can still be found in the narrow alleys around Nijo Castle, a World Heritage Site where Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu is believed to have stayed. The house, bearing a nameplate reading "Ko Kang-ho/Lee Mi-o," was built about 90 years ago[....]

"Welcome." The voice that rang out was high and gentle. This was Kang-ho's wife Ri Mi-oh, 55. A doctor of respiratory medicine, she treats patients with terminal cancer at a hospital in Kobe, a city in nearby Hyogo Prefecture. The date of the visit happened to be a national holiday: National Foundation Day, commemorating the accession of Japan's first emperor Jimmu. Other holidays include Showa Day, which honors the birthday of the late emperor Hirohito, and the Emperor's Birthday, for current emperor Akihito. Kang-ho, who has run a dental clinic for over two decades in Otsu, a city in Shiga Prefecture, did not take the day off for holidays connected with the Japanese imperial family.

Similar round faces, similar friendly smiles - the couple even had similar jobs. They almost looked like brother and sister. About ten years ago, a swollen-faced Ri was recommended to Kang-ho's clinic by a friend after a bad tooth diagnosis. The treatment was good, but he didn't seem to know much about making money. He didn't recommend expensive treatments like implants that aren't covered by insurance. He didn't accept payment from fellow Koreans, and he offered patients some of his own homegrown vegetables. On Jan. 1, 2000, just three months after they met, they

were married. It was a wedding between two foreigners living in Japan.

Ko Kang-ho knows hardly any Korean. His father hadn't wanted to send him to one of the Chosun Korean schools operated by the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (pro-North Korea Chongryon). But the boy with the Korean name didn't spend much time with Japanese friends either. Mostly, he just read books and newspapers. He considered going to university in his father's country, but the household wasn't well-off financially. In 1976, he enrolled in an engineering college to study ship-building. His plan was to get a job at a South Korean shipyard after graduating and join the labor movement. But caring for his widowed mother and younger siblings left him unable to study for the six years after he enrolled. He wondered if there was anything he could do for the Zainichi Korean community. Finally, he changed course and went to dental school.

Mi-oh does speak Korean well, having attended a Chosun school. Her father was a Korean from Jeju, while her mother was Japanese. Her mother had been resolute enough to leave home where her father insisted, "women don't need to go to university." Her fateful encounter occurred one day while she was studying at the house of her brother, an exchange student in Tokyo. In the yard of a friend's house, she saw a shabby clapboard home, barely fit for a dog. Inside lived a poor Korean teenager. This was the young man who would become Mi-oh's father. The grandfather objected, but Mi-oh's mother went ahead with the wedding. Since they were of two different nationalities, they decided to give their first child Japanese nationality and their second Chosun nationality. Mi-oh was the second daughter. Proud and assertive, she had hopes of leaving Japan someday to live elsewhere. If she left the land where she was born and raised, maybe, she imagined, she could be free. Was there something she could do that would let her

become self-sufficient right away, something she could do outside of Japan? A job where she could help others. She finally settled on becoming a doctor.

"Chosun" isn't a recognized nationality. Mi-oh has no passport, and people without passports have a difficult time traveling from one country to another. One substitute for a passport is a document from the Japanese Ministry of Justice permitting "reentry," which serves as the necessary identification for border crossing. Any overseas travel requires at least two or three months to prepare the necessary documents. But it's a process that has allowed her to visit the US and the United Kingdom, although she was unable to travel to Ireland.

Traveling to South Korea is also a tall order. She has to obtain a "travel certificate," a temporary passport issued by the South Korean government. It was not until 1996, during the administration of President Kim Young-sam, that she was able to set foot in the country. The authorities had permitted her visit after she explained that she wanted to visit her father's grave in Jeju Island. After he passed away in 1991, it had taken four years for his remains to make their way home. Under the brutal military dictatorship, it was inconceivable for her relatives in Jeju to try to contact the family. Her father had once been a member of Chongryon, though she claims he was forced out.

In 2010, with the Lee Myung-bak administration in office in South Korea, Mi-oh and a friend paid a visit to South Korea. [In 2014], Mi-oh was prevented from making another trip. She made two consulate visits for the necessary procedures, but her efforts were in vain. "The employee at the consulate told me, 'You've been there ten times now. If you've seen what a good country South Korea is, why don't you change your citizenship? All it takes is one procedure and you won't have to come here every time anymore,'" she recalled. "And I said, 'I'm willing to come to the consulate

twenty or thirty times if it means I can go to South Korea." (Park 2014; English original)

I read it with particular interest, because the wife in this story, Ri Mi-oh, is my old school mate from Chongryun's Korean high school. Mi-oh always had integrity and I could see that even in marriage, or perhaps precisely in marriage, she exercised her integrity. While her husband, Mr. Ko, is trying to assert his identity by renouncing his nationality, she is asserting her own statelessness by not adopting South Korean nationality. In fact, she is even more consciously doing so, given that she is eligible to acquire Japanese nationality without a problem because her mother is Japanese. This option would have made her life, including professional life as a physician, much less cumbersome. Yet, she is insisting on being stateless, being Zainichi of her own making. From within this rather unprecedented quest for statelessness emerges a Zainichi ontology, the state of being stateless. Their South Korean nationality is not really a nationality – while testifying to the South Korean consulate that they would not exercise any rights as a resident of South Korea, including voting, they are exempt from taxation and other duties of citizenship including military service for males eighteen years and above. Only after fulfilling such rituals and on these conditions, are they granted South Korean nationality, that is to say, it is not a birth right in either the sense of *jus sanguinis* or *jus soli*.

The fact that South Korean nationality held concurrently with permanent residence of Japan is inadequate as a nationality has long been a contentious issue in Zainichi public discourse, especially during the intense confrontation between North Korea and South Korea against the backdrop of the Cold War. More recently, Zainichi's South Korean nationality, concurrently held with a Japanese permanent residence, was viewed with grave suspicion, to say the least. A Zainichi writer of rightist-inclination, Tei Tai-kin, insists, for

example, that all Zainichi Koreans renounce their South Korean nationality and apply for Japanese nationality, given that their life exists in Japan (see Ryang 2004). Stated with irony, such a view bears a modicum of validity in that it is true that no Korean residents whose parents and grandparents came from southern Korea to Japan during the colonial period would permanently return to live in South Korea, although recently there has been a notable increase of Zainichi younger generations going to study, work, and travel in South Korea. Yet to this day acquiring Japanese nationality, at a time when 10,000 to 15,000 Zainichi Koreans are being naturalized as Japanese annually, carries political and a certain emotional weight beyond techno-legal meaning. Unlike, for example, the US green card, the permanent residence to which Zainichi Koreans are entitled does not automatically provide a basis for naturalization. While, culturally speaking, and laden with problematic racial inequalities, US public discourse may embrace being an American of other ethnic origins, Japanese public discourse regarding national identity is premised on the mono-ethnic presumption of Japanese being Japanese and nothing else. Thus, Korean Japanese, as opposed to Korean American, is not a possible category in ethno-national identifications in Japan. Given the combination of the colonial past and contentious postcolonial involvement with Cold War politics by Zainichi Koreans, which virtually split the expatriate community into the North Korea-supporting camp and the South Korea-supporting camp (despite the fact that the majority of first generation Zainichi Koreans originated from southern provinces), naturalization continues to carry a certain weight as a litmus test of one's allegiance and integrity.

Mr. Ko's request was rejected by the South Korean high court on the ground that the condition of statelessness should not be created. For its part, the Japanese government was unconcerned about the mass production of

stateless people, hundreds of thousands of them, in the aftermath of the San Francisco Treaty of 1952 when Japanese citizens of Korean origin lost their Japanese citizenship. By this Treaty, Koreans and Taiwanese, Japan's former colonial subjects, who remained in Japan at that time became stateless overnight, as the Treaty's specification that Japan no longer held any influence over its former colonial territories was interpreted by the Japanese government as meaning that Japan was relieved of any civil and legal responsibilities toward formerly colonized populations. Fast-forwarding four decades, by the early 1990s, all Koreans who could trace their residential origin to Japan during the colonial period were granted special permanent residence, the stipulation of which has been modified several times, making it more secure for Koreans to stay in Japan as quasi-citizens of some sort. The qualification of the last phrase is significant, in that they are not Japanese citizens in the full sense of international law or Japanese nationality law: permanent residents do not qualify for public service jobs, are not entitled to receive national health insurance (open only to Japanese nationals), and do not receive national pensions, in addition to their having to acquire re-entry permits each time they travel with their own passport outside Japan. However, Zainichi Koreans with permanent residence in Japan do acquire a measure of security, including extended property ownership, entitlement to certain social security benefits offered by the local governments, and nearly no possibility of being deported to South Korea. The point, however, is that security should not be equated with nationality or citizenship. Japanese nationality continues to be obtained either by birth or by naturalization; not even marriage with a Japanese gives a spouse Japanese citizenship; not even multiple generations of residence in Japan (as in the case of Zainichi Koreans) makes them Japanese.

The insecurity of residential rights, or more

broadly put, the insecurity of being human for Zainichi, because they are merely humans, as in the words of Hannah Arendt (Arendt 1972), has long been part of the Zainichi identity. In my 1997 book, the first extended account in English of Chongryun, the pro-North Korea organization of Zainichi (Ryang 1997), I interpreted their self-identification as ideological identification, while their legal status was unequivocally precarious, i.e. they were stateless, being bearers of *Chōsen* identification in their alien registration certificate, as in the case of Ri Mi-oh above. In itself *Chōsen* does not mean the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or North Korea; it simply denotes "Korea," this being the terminology that was deployed during the colonial period (1910-1945), although this very name comes from one of the ancient states that existed in the northeastern part of the Korean peninsula and extending to what is today part of northeastern China. Whereas *Kankoku* identification, which is another option for Zainichi, clearly designates the carrier as a national of the Republic of Korea, or South Korea, *Chōsen* is an ersatz creation of the postwar Japanese immigration system, a bastard child of postcolonial haphazard clean-up. As stated, it was only in 1965 that *Kankoku* nationality became available for Zainichi, as a result of the normalization of relations between Japan and South Korea. Amidst intense Cold War confrontation, the North Korea-supporting Zainichi declined this option, along with the permanent residence privilege that accompanied it, thus, self-consciously remaining stateless. In the early 1990s, both *Kankoku* and *Chōsen* identifications in Japan's alien registration earned the carriers special permanent residence, which was granted only to the descendents of colonial immigrants. This basically erased differences in residential stability that had existed between the Zainichi of the two camps.

Yet, one clear difference remained, that is, the possession of South Korean nationality. Those

who have it acquire a South Korean passport and can travel with it, albeit with an important caveat—they still need to apply for a re-entry permit to Japan, since they are not "returning" to South Korea, where they have established no residence or social connection. Moreover, their South Korean nationality is only semi-valid: for example, the 13-digit national resident identification number that all South Korean citizens are given, and is required when applying for most civic registrations including an internet account or bank account, is not given to Zainichi South Koreans. In other words, their South Korean nationality may function in Japan as a proof that they are *not* Japanese, but it does not function in South Korea as proof that they are South Korean. On the contrary, as the holder of a Japanese re-entry permit concurrent with a South Korean passport, the Zainichi South Korean nationality functions to prove that they are *not* South Korean citizens. Hence Mr. Ko's plight described above. Still, holders of this passport may enter South Korea, while individuals without it, including Ri Mi-oh, require a special petition and repeated visits to the consulate for that privilege. The statelessness of the latter is complete: they are stateless in Japan, South Korea, and globally.

In the following article, Young Min Moon captures this ephemeral nature of Zainichi existence through his reading of Insook Kim's photography. Moon's article is moving, yet evasive, in that, while asking the reader many questions, it offers few clear answers. The same is true of the photographs of Kim, a Zainichi photographer: eyes (some smiling, some not), half-smiling mouths, motions, colors, and poses ask the reader to reflect on why the Zainichi exist to this day as stateless people. Through Moon's encounters with Kim's photographs, statelessness of Zainichi reaches the reader in dense expression, leaving the interpretation lucid, yet at the same time demanding that the reader think about them not as fellow humans but as someone who is

merely human-nationality-less, nation-less, and state-less. Are they insisting on presenting themselves as testimonials to the colonial past, postcolonial turmoil and decades of ethnic discrimination, and more recent scenes of globalization, which almost appear to have left Zainichi Koreans behind or in a space where time flows differently, given their continuing statelessness, to the extent that, as in the case of Mr. Ko, their disenfranchisement does not even allow them to attain statelessness of their own design?

I have written elsewhere that Zainichi Koreans will cease to exist in less than forty years, given that currently about 400,000 Koreans in Japan hold the afore-mentioned special permanent residence on the basis of their colonial past and that currently each year 10,000 to 15,000 Koreans in Japan are naturalized as Japanese citizens. The latter statistics may include Koreans from Korea who immigrated after the 1988 liberalization of overseas travels for South Korean citizens, but most are Zainichi (Ryang 2010). While I did not mean to say that the end of this population would mean the end of research on a group with a distinctive history, Moon's article reminds us that as far as we intellectuals have not figured out what it means to be human and yet not being merely human, the inquiry into Zainichi ontology cannot be considered complete. At the same time, I often wonder why we are still talking about Zainichi – after all it is almost twenty years since my first book, which sought to capture the last years of Chongryun's strengths; since then, numerous Chongryun schools have closed and Chongryun even lost its headquarters building, while the newspaper office building that I worked in for three years in the 1980s was sold, moving journalists to a two-room rented office. If this is a lingering death, it surely is lingering long given that the heart of Chongryun Koreans is there no more; I have not sensed for some time that anyone, even among the current Chongryun workers that I encountered, truly supports North Korea. And, needless to say,

North Korea is no longer the same as it was in the 1960s and 1970s. If their existence is guaranteed only by the negative pressure from the Japanese government and its rightwing allies, by forcibly associating them with North Korea, as has been witnessed in repeated raids in Chongryun offices in recent decades, what is there to represent or interpret? Or perhaps, as Moon's article does below, perhaps we can continue asking questions: what did this do to them and how do we start talking about redress and then, hope?

Yearning for Home: The Representation of Zainichi North Koreans in the Work of Kim Insook

Young Min Moon

Let us imagine the following situation: One day you learn that you have three fathers. Each of them insists that he is the true and only father, and demands that you choose him over the other two. The status of Zainichi, or Koreans in Japan, may be compared to such an unlikely and even absurd situation, but this scenario of having three fathers may be a plausible condition that will enable us to articulate the multiple identities we find in the work of Kim Insook, a third-generation Zainichi Korean artist who now divides her time between South Korea and Japan.

The important context of Kim Insook's early work is Chongryun, which is the Korean abbreviation for the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan. Chongryun, founded in 1955, is its own umbrella organization that oversees a multitude of Korean ethnic organizations in political, social, commercial, and educational sectors. Among its myriad functions is to operate its own schools, from kindergarten to university. In contrast to Mindan, the pro-South Korean organization Chongryun has made public its allegiance with North Korea, and taught children about North Korea as their fatherland and Kim Il Sung and

Kim Jung Il as their leaders. Kim Insook has attended Chongryun schools, and is intimately familiar with their environment.

But why Zainichi Koreans, especially Zainichi North Koreans in Japan? I am compelled by the profound paradox of their existence. To begin with, the term itself is a contradiction. North Koreans living in Japan consider themselves "overseas nationals" of North Korea, when in fact the vast majority of Koreans in Japan were born in Japan. Moreover, virtually all of those who originally came from Korea during the Japanese occupation trace their roots to what is now South Korea. As the Chongryun- and Cambridge-trained scholar Sonia Ryang succinctly puts it, "There can be no North Koreans in Japan, for the Japanese government makes no diplomatic acknowledgment of North Korea,"¹ and "North Korean identity in this sense is not geoculturally pre-given; it is Chongryun's political projection."² The Japanese government sees Chongryun Koreans as resident aliens, rather than North Korean nationals. Moreover, in case of an emergency, Chongryun Koreans could not expect protection from North Korea.³

Zainichi Koreans have undergone a radical transformation, from being stateless, having overnight lost their citizenship in the 1952 postwar peace treaty and being subject to pervasive discrimination for decades, to assimilation and successful integration into mainstream Japanese society today. Although Koreans in Japan continue to face discrimination in both legal and civil matters, the identities of the younger generation of Zainichi have become rather diverse.

Kim Insook's photography articulates identities other than those of her predecessors, who faced constant systemic discrimination or found themselves vulnerable under the threat of deportation. Her work represents the postcolonial identity of Zainichi Koreans in its diversity and individualities that are "fractured

and even ephemeral," set in the context of diasporic nationalism and a yearning for the homeland. She portrays the subjects in her photographs not as victims of ideology, but rather as ordinary people whose lives are full of ambiguities and complexities.⁴ Indeed, the lives of the third and fourth generations of Zainichi cannot be explained simply in terms of the first generation's experience of "bare life" in the colonial period and during the Cold War. Instead, their lives and identities were always complex and in flux. Thus, Kim Insook resists reception of her work solely in terms of her identity as a Zainichi, or as a Japanese woman, as some Koreans tend to see her, for she considers the "three fathers" of Japan and two Koreas to be equally important parts of her complex identity.

In some sense, Kim's work is a yearning for home, however provisional that may be. The succession of her projects reveals the artist's increasingly sophisticated awareness of the intricacies of diasporic subjectivity. Her work seems to follow a complex trajectory in correspondence with her own changing understanding of diaspora: initially as a celebration of her Chongryun school as what she regards to be her true and only home, then as a way "to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement," or "the condition of terminal loss"⁵ of home when she fails to locate home in her journey, and, subsequently, reflecting on the Zainichi society from a long distance after having settled in South Korea. In short, the sense of loss of homeland gradually changes into a recognition that one simply moves on, making home where one can. This enables her to reassess her home left behind. And it appears that she would like to move again.⁶

sweet hours (2001-)

sweet hours, an ongoing project the artist began in 2001, takes place at Kita Osaka Korean School, one of many Chongryun schools. The context of the work may be

characterized as an "outsider's school," which has been sustained in part by aid from North Korea, at the same time subject to trepidation and even contempt from mainstream Japanese society. The students, however, are primarily descendants of South Koreans. In the case of Kim Insook, her mother is Japanese and her father is a second-generation Zainichi whose homeland is Jeju Island, South Korea. Most third-generation Zainichi, including Kim, learn "our language,"⁷ which is the Chongryun version of Korean, but speak Japanese as their mother tongue. Since their inception, Chongryun schools have implemented a curriculum that prioritizes North Korean ideology and history. Within Kita Osaka Korean School, there are students with nationalities of South Korea, North Korea, as well as Japan. The first two are descendants of Koreans who came to Japan during the colonial era, and hold the status of Special Permanent Resident. The latter, although not too common, are children whose parents are either naturalized or ethnic Japanese. Thus there coexist multiple ethnic origins as well as cultural, linguistic, and ideological elements of Japan, North Korea, and South Korea. It is precisely for this reason that Kim identifies the school as the true and only "homeland." That is, her origins are diverse, and for many Chongryun students, like her, to be coerced to choose a single motherland or nationality would be nothing short of absurd.

As Kim emphasizes, photography for her is "an act of connecting" with others. She shuns what she considers the ethically irresponsible mode of "documentary" photography in which representation of human subjects can easily result in their exploitation, especially when they are vulnerable. Instead, she steadfastly maintains her principles: she makes photographs only through empathic solidarity with others. While sustaining *sweet hours* for the past thirteen years, Kim has been documenting the young students at Kita Osaka Korean School during relaxed, ordinary moments of the everyday.

Kim Insook intends to show her photographs in the form of installation art, in which she will present multiple images of many students simultaneously, as if to underscore the significance of individuals who make up a "community," that is, if somewhat literally, as an accumulation of individualities.⁸ Presented as accumulations of memories, they are an invocation of collective memory, a "gift" of *collected* memories to be offered to the next generation.

Interestingly, Kim Insook for the most part represents the children in upbeat moods in their daily life at the Chongryun school. She does so despite the fact that the double portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il dominate the front wall of the classroom. Her intention is to portray the children as ordinary school kids who exude an enthusiastic sense of curiosity and wonder and like to play with their friends, rather than as victims of ideology and racial discrimination.

If there is an aspect that was initially challenging for me to accept in Kim's work, it is her representation of the children almost exclusively in a positive light. But because of the negative image of North Korea pervasive in the media and in the public psyche, it is refreshing to encounter the positive images of children in a North Korean school in Japan. Universally shared experiences of childhood bliss must also exist in Chongryun schools. It is through Kim Insook's photographs that we finally get a glimpse of children's genuinely cheerful personalities. The image of happiness one sees in Kim's work is quite different from the contrived look of happiness one finds in picture-perfect children in Pyongyang.

But, then, there still remains the risk of exploiting the children, for children are actually not innocent. Most people would agree that school experiences are not always happy; bullying, for example, is common in Japanese schools. In the case of Chongryun schools, Kim

Insook recalls no significant fights or bullying during her school years. However, Kim admits that there may have been fights with students in Japanese schools that she was not privy to. If the Chongryun students are like children elsewhere, they must also experience at least some challenges and pain. The Chongryun schools are ghettoized, and, as such, insulated from outside pressures, which can also yield negative experiences. It is well known that Chongryun teenagers, especially female students donning traditional Korean dress as their uniform, were targets of violent attacks in 2002 after North Korea's admission of the abduction of Japanese citizens. Hence, *sweet hours* appears to romanticize the long-ago years of childhood memories.

Thus, the complexities of historical and political contexts seem understated in Kim's work, to say the least. In fact, the artist adamantly rejects reading of her images in terms of politics and ideology.

But in this age of nationalism, is it possible to see portraits of people completely free of their ethnicity, nationhood, and the social context in which they are taken? I think not. As Étienne Balibar writes, "All identity is individual, but there is no individual identity that is not historical or . . . constructed within a field of social values, norms of behavior and collective symbols," and one never obtains an "isolated identity." Balibar then suggests, "[T]he real question is how the dominant reference points of individual identity change over time and with the changing institutional environment."⁹

So how do we interpret the artist's insistence that her images be viewed without politics? In some sense, she is asking for the impossible: to see the children under the Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il double portraits but free of North Korea and to see them simply as children when the school teaches them that they are overseas nationals of North Korea.

One can speculate about factors that may have

informed or influenced the way Kim represents the children. For example, her position may be symptomatic of the third-generation Zainichi Korean's (dis)regard for her tie to North Korea, or of its weakening, and may reflect the diverse individualities that are formed in negotiation with tidal changes.

As it turns out, the children in Kim's photographs were not officially taught to be Kim Il Sung's loyal children.¹⁰ Importantly, after four decades of strict dogmatism in instilling the Juche ideology of North Korea, from 1993 to 1995 Chongryun schools initiated a major curriculum reform, which coincided with the death of Kim Il Sung. The new curriculum broadened the knowledge base by incorporating subjects other than Chongryun and North Korea, such as spoken Korean language, Chinese folklore, Japanese fairy tales, American literature, and Greek mythology.¹¹ In the shifting geopolitical climate, the near simultaneous loss of Kim Il Sung and the Chongryun decision to deemphasize his legacy not only meant "the sense of social loss," but also brought about identity crises among Chongryun Koreans, who began to express skepticism about the relevance of Chongryun ideology in Japan.¹² In short, the de-emphasis of Kim Il Sung signaled the loss of fundamental values of Chongryun identity.

The new curriculum helped students prepare for Japanese universities and integration into Japanese society. In addition, now Chongryun schools' implementation of ideological indoctrination is much more lax than it had been. They have stopped screening propaganda films in praise of Kim Il Sung, they now control students only within school, no longer interfere in after-school activities, and even take Japanese holidays.¹³ But that is not to say that Chongryun schools halted their nationalist fervor. Indeed, while they have downplayed the Juche ideology and the glorification of the two Kims, the schools continue to inculcate a sense of pride and patriotism for North Korea.

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In the end, it may be Kim's internalized diasporic nationalism, or long-distance nationalism, that explains her representation of children always in a positive light. Believing in national history allows people to establish a radically different form of "reality" in the midst of dire hardships, so as to redeem themselves through faith.¹⁴ For Kim, whether or not she accepts it, North Korean national history and curriculum seem to have performed such a role. The Chongryun school was the "homeland," a haven removed from the tyranny of prejudiced and at times hostile Japanese mainstream society - which is also, paradoxically, part of her home - that enabled such a mechanism to materialize. Kim seems to have found empowerment, even if inadvertently, through national history.

Journey Home

Letter to you (2004) comprises hundreds of photographs and a video, documented and presented in a diary-like, somewhat confessional, even "selfie"-like manner. In 2004, Kim Insook embarked on a journey to locate the "essence" of her motherland by visiting her parents' hometown in Jeju Island, as well as Yanbian, in Northeastern China, and the demilitarized zone that bisects the two Koreas. Not surprisingly, she failed to locate an "essence" of Korea.

For a person who has long regarded the two Koreas and Japan as her homeland, one can imagine the palpable sense of her disillusionment when she confronted the brutal reality: the divided homeland, which she has of course "known" cerebrally but witnessed and felt in person as her schizophrenic self.

But I must ask: Is it not possible to regard South Korea, North Korea, Yanbian, and Zainichi society in Japan - however imperfect

and incomplete each of these may be - as variants of the "essence" of the motherland she longed for?

Sonia Ryang offers an insightful comparison of the Chongryun generations. For members of the first generation, there was a sense of *kohyang* and *choguk* separation: that is, between homeland and nation. Even if their hometown was in a southern province, they regarded North Korea as their nation proper, as they saw South Korea as a collaborator with and protectorate of US imperialism, hence deemed not legitimate as the rightful fatherland. The first generation harbored a utopian dream of repatriating to North Korea after reunification.

Indeed, one of the truly extraordinary but relatively little known tragedies of the Cold War is the repatriation of over 93,000 people, most of them ethnic Koreans living in Japan, to North Korea from 1959 and onward. Promoted to the world as a humanitarian endeavor and executed under the auspices of the International Red Cross, the scheme was actually the result of political stratagem involving the governments of Japan, North Korea, the former Soviet Union, and the U.S. Though most left willingly, persuaded by propaganda that a better life awaited them in North Korea, the historian [Tessa Morris-Suzuki's work on recently declassified documents in the International Committee for Red Cross in Geneva](#) reveals how the Japan government and Red Cross pressured to hasten the departure of this unwanted ethnic minority in Japan. While those who left for North Korea were welcomed and given special treatment, most of them faced poverty and hardship, while thousands were subject to brutal persecution and death. In short the massive migration amounted to "exile to nowhere." The repatriation signals the significant ruptures in the continuation between nativity and citizenship in the era of modern nation-states.

However, the *kohyang-choguk* separation, or hometown-nation dichotomy, failed to have significant meaning for the next generation. "It was simply impossible," writes Ryang, "for the second generation to think of Kyongju, Seoul, Pusan, or Jeju in South Korea as their hometown when they were actually born in Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka."¹⁵ The second generation saw a clear distinction between North Korea as the fatherland and Japan as their living space. Today, most Chongryun Koreans who consider themselves "overseas nationals" intend to remain overseas.¹⁶

For Kim Insook to set out on a journey to locate her homeland in South Korea, then, may be considered unusual in that her generation has little interest in returning to either Korea; they regard Japan as their home. But Kim voluntarily migrated to South Korea and has been living in Seoul for more than a decade, thereby giving up the psychological stability that comes with being part of her generation. Kim has explained that her decision to live in South Korea was to "redress the balance of Korea and Japan inside me."¹⁷ The founding premise of Chongryun may be likened to "diasporic nationalism," that is, to uphold North Korea as overseas nationals.¹⁸

Kim's journey, however, was a search for home, or homeland. For her, the distinction between the two, *kohyang* and *choguk*, or nation and homeland, was not so clear cut. What she was looking for, perhaps, was for her true diasporic self. But "[w]hat is the true self of a diasporic subject?" asks Ryang. "Is there such a thing as an authentic diasporic subject?"¹⁹

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SAIESEO (in between), 2008-2012

The emotionally shattering awakening brought on by her initial journey eventually helped Kim realize that the "essence" of her motherland is to be found in the everyday, the immediate

surroundings, without relying on the master narrative of the Korean race or reunification of the peninsula. Sometime after her journey, Kim Insook began to document Zainichi Koreans in their private spaces, that is, outside the influence of the Chongryun sphere. These portraits are of individuals, or of family gatherings, in their everyday situations, as well as on traditional Korean holidays. Whereas *sweet hours* was set in a space isolated from mainstream Japanese society, in *SAIESEO* (in between), the effects of both Korean and Japanese cultures and customs permeate and influence each other. Sometimes one sees culturally specific objects - a tatami (mat), a Korean screen, or traditional garments, for example - but one cannot always tell the ethnicity of the homeowners simply by looking at the décor and the objects that occupy the space.

Indeed, the photograph entitled *Great-grandmother and I* shows a modest and spare interior that is almost exclusively Japanese, and it is the little girl's *hanbok* outfit that underscores the subjects' ethnic identity. The photograph of five men dressed in white garments before or after the Confucian ritual of Jesa is revealing: By focusing on the traditional Japanese décor, one may assume there is a tatami beneath the Korean-style bamboo floor mat, which they have placed for the commemorative occasion. In another photograph entitled *Everyday life*, which shows an old woman sitting in the center, a Japanese wardrobe and a stack of Korean-style bedding occupy the geometric spatial divisions often found in Japanese architecture. The kitsch comforter on the floor bears an image of two tigers, unmistakably derived from an anonymous folk painting from the Joseon dynasty, effectively turning the woman into a stand-in for the missing deity who oversees the beasts. In yet another photograph with the same title, a map of the Korean peninsula hangs on the wall. The boy is wearing a jersey with the emblazoned logo of Kita Osaka Korean

School. In *Sisters and I*, the sleeve cuff of the black *hanbok* is noticeably colorful. While the cuff may have been devised to lighten up the *hanbok*, and the visual accent given to the cuff is a distinct feature of *hanbok*, but such colorful cuff is unusual for black *hanbok*. The detail registers as culturally Korean but also seems somewhat contrived to accentuate the ethnicity of the garment

On the day of the *Seijinshiki*, or Coming-of-age Ceremony, Japanese women who turn age 20 don traditional *furisode*, a type of kimono with extra-long sleeves and exquisite patterns in bright colors. In the photograph *Coming-of-age Ceremony*, the young woman dons what appears to be western dress instead. In reality she is wearing a "dress-jogori," which is a westernized, hybrid version of *hanbok* made in Japan. Her mother's *hanbok* bears floral and geometric patterns that appear to be closer to Japanese than Korean. This is certainly not exactly the most common image of coming-of-age to be found in Japan. In the past, some *hanbok* used to be made out of garments imported from North Korea, some of which would be worn for the occasion of Japanese ceremony such as *Seijinshiki*. If the children depicted in *sweet hours* seem to be carefree despite the ideologically charged space they inhabit, *SAIESEO* presents Zainichi Koreans situated between cultures as they negotiate what it means to be Korean in Japan. In *SAIESEO*, Kim seems to explore whether a hybrid identity is possible for Zainichi Koreans.²⁰

Diaspora and "True Home"

Simone Weil, in 1943, made a prescient observation about exile that is especially relevant to the experience of Chongryun Koreans: "To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul."²¹ Edward Said reflects on this and elaborates: "[Although] most remedies for uprootedness . . . are almost as dangerous as

what they purportedly remedy . . . the state is one of the most insidious, since worship of the state tends to supplant all other human bonds."²² As mentioned earlier, Kim's practice begins as a way of connecting with others, and her photographs emerge out of long-term relationships. It is human relationships that Kim is committed to represent, beyond the confining frame of nationality and ideology, and to position them within what she regards as her homeland, in lieu of the state worship she had learned in her Chongryun years.

Edit Delete

Sonia Ryang posits that there are two models of diaspora. The first is the politico-classical model - the Jewish and Armenian diasporas, for example-in which ethnic persecution, and, in many cases, annihilation, results in the loss of a homeland. The second model, the personal-modern, arises, Ryang says, from "ontological insecurity and an ongoing crisis of identity." In reality, though, these models are not entirely distinct, and most diasporas have components of both.²³ The plight of the first generation of Zainichi Koreans in Japan may perhaps be considered to be the politico-modern type; the journey of Kim Insook exemplifies the personal-modern model, representing voluntary transnational migration.

However, people continue to move from one place to another, voluntarily or due to circumstances that necessitate a move, and never cease to *evolve* as human beings. The trajectory of a diaspora, or narratives of transnational itinerant lives, cannot be mapped out neatly in conventional cartography.²⁴ Diasporic subjects continue to oscillate between their yearnings for homeland and their desire to make their current place home. In the process, they develop multiple identities, and learn to feel at home with themselves and how to live with uncertainties and all the complexity and ambiguity that life in

diaspora entails.

The homes that Kim depicts in *SAIESEO* are never "authentic," rather they bear indices of what I will call cultural impurities. Writes Ryang: "Singular authenticity is a luxury that only people with a secure homeland can afford . . . People without a homeland by contrast are forever in exile, wandering, in search of home, land, and security."²⁵ Diaspora, she writes, "is an ongoing search for self, and as such, the journey of self-creation knows no end."²⁶

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Young Min Moon is an artist, critic, and Associate Professor in the Department of Art at University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His work has been exhibited in the U.S., Canada, and South Korea. He has published numerous essays on contemporary Korean art, and was Guest Editor of [Issue 3.1 of the TAP Review](#), entitled *The Aftereffects of War in Asia: Histories, Pictures and Anxieties* (Fall 2012).

Social anthropologist **Sonia Ryang** is the director of the Chao Center for Asian Studies and T.T. and W.F. Chao Professor of Asian Studies at Rice University. She is an editor of the *Asia-Pacific Journal*. Her books include ["North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology and Identity,"](#) ["Writing Selves in Diaspora: Ethnography of Autobiographies of Korean Women in Japan and the United States"](#) and ["Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry"](#).

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Notes

¹ Sonia Ryang, "Introduction," in *Diaspora without Homeland*, Sonia Ryang and John Lie, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 9.

² Sonia Ryang, *North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology, and Identity* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴ John Lie, *Zainichi: Diasporic Nationalism and Postcolonial Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008)

⁵ Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 173.

⁶ In August 2014, during a conversation with the artist after she returned to Seoul from a three-month residency in Germany, she expressed her desire to move to another country to live for a period of time. I interpret this wish to be not only her desire to develop her artistic career but also to gain deeper insight from living in places away from her adopted "home," encountering other diasporic subjects

⁷ The artist explained that the reason it is appropriate to call the language Zainichi taught at Kita Osaka Korean School "our language"- as opposed to Korean - is that it is a hybrid language of South Korean, North Korean, and that which has been used for translating Japanese

⁸ Kim Insook, "The Start of Individuality," in *Go-Betweens: The World Seen Through Children* (Tokyo: Mori Art Museum, 2014).

⁹ Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 94.

¹⁰ Ryang, *North Koreans in Japan*, 205.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

¹⁴ *Pride and Prejudice: Dialogue between Naoki Sakai and Jiehyun Lim [Omangwa Pyungyeon]* (Seoul: Humanist, 2003), 373.

¹⁵ Ryang, *North Koreans in Japan*, 172.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁷ Kim Insook, "The Start of Individuality."

¹⁸ Here I borrow the title of John Lie's book, mentioned above.

¹⁹ Ryang, *Diaspora without Homeland*, 13-15

²⁰ Ryang, "Introduction," in *Diaspora without Homeland*, 18. In the same volume, see Youngmi Lim's chapter, "Reinventing Korean Roots and Zainichi Routes," which probes the micro-politics of everyday life of naturalized Zainichi

²¹ Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 183.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Ryang, *Writing Selves in Diaspora: Ethnography of Autobiographics of Korean Women in Japan and the United States* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), xv.

²⁴ Ryang, *ibid.*, 164.

²⁵ Ryang, *Diaspora without Homeland*, 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14

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