

Introduction

“Historians and social scientists weave words together like nets to catch the truth; and, like nets, the words leave spaces into which parts of that past continually disappear. The life of a woman interviewed by Koh Sunhui, and the lives of uncounted others like her, are among the stories which have slipped unnoticed through conventional accounts of Japan’s migration history. Looking more closely at these accounts, we can start to see some of the linguistic holes into which they have disappeared.” Tessa Morris-Suzuki

The above quote is from Morris-Suzuki’s article “Invisible Immigrants: Undocumented Migration and Border Controls in Early Postwar Japan.” This course reader brings together Morris-Suzuki’s and seven other articles from *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* that illuminate the experience of Zainichi Korean (Korean residents in Japan) in modern Japan. As the quote shows, a number of discourses and policies in Japan have undermined or repressed the lives of Koreans, whether those Koreans were forcibly brought to Japan or came of their own free will. The Zainichi Korean issues illustrate broader problems of discrimination and of the Japanese propensity for essentializing “Japan.” The articles lay bare the contents of those discourses and policies, as well as the actual lives of Zainichi Koreans who have endured in such an environment.

Recent monographs by historians such as Jeffrey Bayliss, Takashi Fujitani and Ken Kawashima have shed light on the history of Koreans in Japan before and during World War II. The articles here cover the same issues and also extend the story to postwar Japan, when they legally became foreign residents by becoming deprived of their Japanese citizenship. The articles articulate the multiple origins of Zainichi Koreans: Koh-Sunhui and Kate Barclay’s article discusses Jeju Island history, providing a background on colonialism, and explaining why many islanders migrated to Japan during the twentieth century. Morris-Suzuki’s and Mark Caprio’s articles study how the bungled policies of the immediate postwar Japanese government and the GHQ permanently marginalized this community. They explain quite persuasively how the past and the present predicaments of Zainichi Koreans materialized.

Morris-Suzuki’s words also shows the need to look at the accounts of Zainichi Koreans themselves. Included in this reader are articles written by Zainichi scholars such as Kang Sang-Jung and Sonia Ryang, who offer fresh and original thoughts based on their experiences. Drawing on their own lives, they counter hegemonic views on Japan and its modern history that constantly undermine or sideline minorities, such as Zainichi Koreans. They show that Korean ethnicity and origins were significant factors in determining the lives of many people and communities in Japan. Zainichi Koreans provide the major case history in this, as they were the largest minority group in Japan for many years.

According to the article by Sonia Ryang in this reader, there were about 590,000 Koreans in Japan as of 1948. Sixty years hence, the number of Korean nationals in Japan has remained similar as many Koreans opted to become a Japanese national. As Erin Aeran Chung writes, Zainichi Koreans were the largest minority group in Japan until 2007, the

year that the Chinese nationals in Japan overtook them. There were 589,239 North and South Korean nationals plus about 300,000 naturalized Koreans in Japan of 2008.¹

Some other articles critique not only the totalizing narratives of the Japanese nation-state but the notion of homogeneity that many Zainichi Koreans imposed on themselves; some Koreans understood Zainichi Koreans to be a singular, homogenous entity. John Lie argues that what he calls “Zainichi ideology” came to be articulated as a reaction to the hegemonic Japanese narrative that claimed Japan was mono-ethnic. He writes that this ideology, which became a point of identification for many Zainichi Koreans in the early postwar years, came to carry a negative connotation in that it functioned as a prism through which Zainichi Koreans felt it necessary to evaluate their own lives. As a result, certain kinds of Zainichi lives and life choices came to be privileged over others. Lie argues that with the evolution and transformation of Zainichi Korean lives, there is no longer a singular Zainichi Korean identity that subsumes all other identities. His article shows that the efforts to recognize and accept variances among the Japanese should also be extended to Zainichi Koreans.

Morris-Suzuki also writes: “These ordinary everyday voices of the migrant experience, by contrast, can speak to the present day in a way which, I hope and believe, may help to redress, rather than to compound, the intrusive and dehumanizing process through which they were recorded.” Together with the discussion of Zainichi Korean lives in the past, some articles here foreground their present. Rumi Sakamoto article is an alarming but important study on contemporary nationalism in Japan, expressed online in particular, that has taken an anti-Korean or anti-Zainichi Korean stance since the 1990s. The fact that these and other *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* articles make an online counterargument at the very time when racism is raising its head anew among the Japanese in cyberspace merits special attention.

Furthermore, Zainichi Koreans and the authors here look ahead to our common future. The second Kang Sang-Jung article refutes xenophobic nationalism based on the author’s experiences as a Zainichi Korean. Precisely because he himself and his own community have pondered and identified with their own version of ethnic nationalism, he sees a crucial need to relativize or tame such an impulse through constructing a different ideal and an object of identification. He envisions such an ideal to be a transnational East Asian collective.

Taken together, the articles here provide information that is fundamental to understanding Zainichi Koreans. They employ the methodologies of various disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and history, to address issues such as ethnicity, social class, migration, nationalism, multiculturalism, racism, and regionalism in and outside Japan. Through recognizing and accepting Zainichi Koreans, all Japanese, Zainichi and non-Zainichi alike, can mold and transform themselves further, just as Korean migrants came to transform themselves through being Zainichi. Thinking about Zainichi Koreans can help the

¹ Erin Aeran Chung, *Immigration and Citizenship in Japan* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 5, 85.

whole East Asian region connect itself more fully and accurately to its past, its present, and its future, and hence further evolve in a peaceful, friction-less manner.