

Decolonial Possibilities of Transnationalism in Contemporary *Zainichi* Korean Art

Hiroki Yamamoto
(The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

Abstract

This study discusses the works created by three contemporary *zainichi* Korean artists—Oh Haji, Kum Soni, and Chong Ri Ae—after the 2000s. These artists have addressed the issue of *zainichi* Korean identity and the history of *zainichi* Koreans. This study also deals with two exhibition-making projects led by young *zainichi* Korean and Japanese artists in the 2010s: *Zainichi Genzai Bijutsu* and *Totsuzen Me no Mae ga Hirakete*. These exhibitions shed light on the presence of *zainichi* Korean art on the global art scene. Through these case studies, this article examines the different ways in which these artists embody the notion of transnationalism in their works and projects. By way of conclusion, this article points out three ways that the ethos of transnationalism articulated in the practices of *zainichi* Korean artists could contribute to the process of decolonization in the context of postcolonial Japan: first, it creates a new expression of ethnic identity by emphasizing the notion of hybridity in the place of homogeneity; second, it challenges the nationalized narratives of modern history by highlighting a form of transnational historicity; third, it promotes multiethnic dialogue on postcolonial issues by forging alternative platforms.

Keywords: *zainichi* Koreans, contemporary art in Japan, transnationalism, decolonization

Introduction

This article examines the concept of transnationalism in relation to the works and projects of contemporary *zainichi* Korean artists to assess the possibilities it offers to push forward the work of decolonization. The term “*zainichi* Koreans” in this article refers to Koreans living in Japan as long-term or permanent foreign residents. *Zainichi* Koreans currently constitute one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Japan. Distinctly Korean neighborhoods in Japanese cities such as Shin-Ōkubo in Tokyo, Ikuno in Osaka, and Shimonoseki in Yamaguchi epitomize the multiethnic and multicultural character of life in contemporary Japan. However, the history of *zainichi* Koreans and the political problems they face are not understood properly in Japan. The fact that the *zainichi* Koreans are often misunderstood indicates that present-day Japanese society is not yet sufficiently prepared to accept its multiethnic reality in an increasingly complex age of globalization.

The majority of *zainichi* Koreans trace their roots back to colonial Korea, when the country was under Japanese rule. From the late nineteenth century up to the Second World War, Japan was an imperial power which invaded and dominated other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan colonized Korea from 1910 to 1945 in the process of its imperial expansion. During the colonial period, Korean language and culture were harshly suppressed. According to Sonia Ryang, more than two million Koreans were residing in Japan when the war ended, and some 600,000 decided to remain there due to the geopolitical turmoil across postwar East Asia.¹ The postwar history of *zainichi* Koreans is however a long history of oppression. Whereas Koreans were forcibly incorporated into the body of imperial Japanese subjects and were mobilized for wars of aggression under colonial rule, *zainichi* Koreans abruptly lost several citizenship rights, including the right to vote, following the end of the Second World War.² As soon as Japan regained independence under the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951, the government unilaterally deprived *zainichi* Koreans of their Japanese nationality, which the Empire of Japan had previously imposed on them.³ *Zainichi* Koreans who had chosen to stay in Japan were effectively rendered “stateless,” at least until 1965 when diplomatic relations

between Japan and South Korea were normalized.⁴ Moreover, *zainichi* Koreans have long suffered from widespread prejudice and violence against them. According to literary scholar Melissa Wender, *zainichi* Koreans have been “more often objects of discrimination or ridicule than of envy or fascination” in postwar Japanese society.⁵

This article explores the understudied topic of post-2000s *zainichi* Korean art. The early 2000s witnessed a constantly changing relationship between Korea and Japan. The year 2002 was momentous in the context of Japanese-Korean relations. As some sociologists and cultural anthropologists pointed out, two events that took place in 2002 strongly affected the feelings of the Japanese and Korean people toward each other, contributing to growing anti-Korean sentiment in Japan.⁶ One is the FIFA World Cup co-hosted by South Korea and Japan. The first World Cup in Asia was successful in attracting numerous visitors from all over the world. However, unexpected occurrences, such as the little quarrel over the tournament’s name and several controversial victories of the South Korean national team, left behind psychological tension between the Japanese and South Koreans. The other influential event of 2002 was the first-ever Japan-North Korea summit conference. In September 2002, Japan’s Prime Minister Koizumi Jun’ichirō visited Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, to hold summit talks with North Korea’s Supreme Leader Kim Jong-il. In the meeting, the North Korean government officially admitted that its agents had abducted a number of Japanese citizens during the 1970s and 1980s, and apologized for the state-sponsored crime. These scenarios played a pivotal role in heightening distrust of North Korea among the Japanese public. Accordingly, as the activities of the right-wing ultra-nationalist group “Zaitokukai” have borne out, hostility directed toward resident Koreans has become increasingly conspicuous in Japan since the early 2000s.⁷

Zainichi Transnationalism

The different ways in which the ethos of transnationalism is embodied in the works and projects of contemporary *zainichi* Korean artists is the subject of this article. As cultural anthropologist Steven Vertovec

observes, the perspective of transnationalism has circulated widely across diverse academic disciplines since the 1990s, including sociology, anthropology, economics, geography, and media studies.⁸ This perspective helps us comprehend more fully the free movements of people, goods, money, technology, and information in the globalizing world. For instance, as early as the late 1990s, Manuel Castells rightly foresaw that the new technologies would be the central element in the configuration of today's transnational network society.⁹ In a similar fashion, Leslie Sklair viewed transnational corporations as the key to understanding the rapidly integrating global economy.¹⁰ Although the meaning of "transnationalism" varies depending on the context in which it is used, for the purposes of this article, I define the term as the phenomenon of trans-border interconnectedness among different nations and ethnicities. The cross-national interconnectedness in the identity and history of *zainichi* Koreans, hitherto largely neglected, deserves special attention. At a more practical level, multiethnic collaboration as an attempt to generate alternative knowledge and insights also touches the core of transnationalism. The idea of transnationalism, however, should not lead us to ignore or downplay "the continued significance of the national."¹¹ Instead, as Lisa Yoneyama points out, transnationalist thinking should always attempt to shed new light on "the presence of excess" rendered invisible within the national frameworks set by "the hegemonic post-World War II/Cold War epistemic and material formation."¹² The existence of *zainichi* Koreans can thus be understood as "the presence of [the] excess" generated by Japan's imperial project in East Asia.

I contend that the concept and experience of transnationalism articulated in the practices of *zainichi* Korean artists play an integral role in the process of decolonization. To advance this still-incomplete project is one of the most pressing tasks in our current postcolonial times. I will elaborate this assertion in the final section, in which the meaning of "decolonization" is reframed in Japan's postcolonial context. I would like to emphasize that my intention is by no means to draw a generalized picture of "contemporary *zainichi* Korea art." As the processes of globalization continue to intensify in Japan and the country

grows more multicultural, the ways in which *zainichi* Koreans confront their own ethnicity have become further diversified and complicated.¹³ One manifestation is that the younger generations of *zainichi* Koreans are more willing to apply for Japanese citizenship.¹⁴ This type of tendency can be seen in the realm of contemporary *zainichi* Korean art: whereas some refuse to be categorized merely as “*zainichi* Korean artists” and try to move toward more universal identifications (which is never equal to repressing their ethnic origins), others consciously attempt to explore their ethnic identity in their artistic practice.¹⁵ Discussing specific works under the label “*zainichi* Korean art” may entail the risk of overlooking its true diversity and enforcing the categorical exclusivity implied by the term. Nonetheless, I still believe that unearthing the possibilities of transnationalism in contemporary *zainichi* Korean art, which often go unacknowledged, is a significant undertaking in understanding the postcolonial situation of Japan.

Hybridizing the Expressions of Ethnic Identity

Oh Haji is a third generation *zainichi* Korean born in Osaka in the late 1970s. While studying textile design at a university in Kyoto, she mastered a wide range of techniques for weaving, dyeing, and stitching. Her comprehensive knowledge of textiles has played a vital role in her artworks.

In the beginning of the 2000s, Oh began to create art-works by using different techniques for textile-making as a way to search for new expressions of her ethnic identity. In *Wedding Dress for Minority Race* (2000), she deconstructed a Japanese *kimono* and then reconstructed it into a Korean *hanbok* dress typically worn at wedding ceremonies (Figure 1). This visually intriguing piece thus possesses the characteristics of both the Japanese *kimono* and the Korean *hanbok* in a single garment. Moreover, the red undergarment that can be seen beneath the dress was remade from *nagajuban*, the conventional underwear for *kimono*. Cutting, stitching, and re-styling a *kimono*, Oh artistically transformed the traditional Japanese garment into a symbol of cross-national hybridity that highlights the presence and contributions of an ethnic minority.



Figure 1. Oh Haji, *Wedding Dress for Minority Race*. 2000. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Seiji Tominaga.

of the white *chima jeogori*-like dress, meticulously stitching it to the cloth (Figure 2). In *Roots*, Oh visualizes the transnational ancestral connection associated with *zainichi* Korean identity by excavating her own roots through her textile making.

Oh further developed this alternative heterogeneous identity in her installation work, *Scattered Flowers* (2005), which contained a transparent organdy curtain surrounding a red gown with many pieces of petal-shaped silk scattered on the ground. On these petals are printed lyrics from an old Korean song in *katakana* (a Japanese syllabary primarily used for the pronunciation of non-Japanese languages), while a television monitor repeatedly shows the hands of the artist weaving the dress (Figure 3). This installation was created in pursuit of a new ethnic costume that, in the words of the



Figure 2. Oh Haji, *Roots* (detail). 2000. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Seiji Tominaga.

As an attempt to create a unique garment that represents cross-national ethnic identity, she made another textile piece, *Roots* (2000). In this work, Oh addressed the subject of ethnic identity through the exploration of her own personal family history. *Chima jeogori*, a traditional Korean outfit for women that pairs a skirt and jacket (*chima* is a type of skirt, whereas *jeogori* is a short jacket), was used as the basic motif of the piece. Oh printed the family tree of her paternal side on the surface

artist, “may exist or might have existed somewhere in the world.”¹⁶ The textile piece integrated into the installation was also a dress composed of a jacket and a skirt-like Korean *chima jeogori*. However, the dress possesses several noticeable features that set it apart from the typical *chima jeogori*: first, it has a style drawn from the Japanese *kimono*, and, second, it has a distinctive collar that is Chinese in inspiration. The dress used in *Scattered Flowers* accordingly encapsulates multiple characteristics that draw from the traditional clothing of different nations, as if to envision “the existence of the people who live on the borders among plural societies and cultural backgrounds.”¹⁷

The idea of ethnic homogeneity remains influential in Japan. However, the discourse that “Japan is an ethnically homogeneous nation” per se is a recent historical product. As sociologist Eiji Oguma asserts, the belief that Japan is a nation that consists of one ethnic group is by no means old, nor traditional. He persuasively demonstrates that it is only after WWII that this so-called “the myth of ethnic homogeneity” became common in Japan.¹⁸ Through a series of innovative textile pieces, such as *Wedding Dress for Minority Race*, *Roots*, and *Scattered Flowers*, Oh has created works of art that can represent and celebrate the remarkable hybridity within *zainichi* Korean ethnic identity.



Figure 3. Oh Haji, *Scattered Flowers*. 2005. Installation view. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Riichi Yamaguchi.

Contesting Nationalized Narratives of History

Kum Soni is a third generation *zainichi* Korean who was born in 1980 and raised in the North Korean community in Tokyo. Through her politically charged practices, which are deeply informed by critical feminist theory, Kum has challenged the master narratives of nationalist history, bringing light to those marginalized in the process of modern nation-building. Before going into detailed discussion, it is relevant to look at the social conditions surrounding female *zainichi* Koreans around the mid-2000s when she made *Beast of Me* (2005)—the video piece I shall now analyze in this section.

With the rise in anti-Korean sentiment during the early 2000s, there were several cases in which female students of Korean ethnic schools [*Chōsen gakkō*]—foreign schools located in Japan where Korean students can receive ethnic education—became targets of extremist nationalist violence in Japan.¹⁹ The *chima jeogori*, traditionally adopted as a uniform for female students at *Chōsen gakkō*, functioned as a visual indicator identifying the “Korean-ness” of the victims. Under such circumstances, one of the central aims of Kum’s *Beast of Me* was to foreground the everyday vulnerability of *zainichi* Korean women. To do this, Kum uses *chima jeogori* as a motif to represent their vulnerability.

The video has five parts, and its totality is configured in the complex entanglement of these separate yet interrelated segments. Within the composed totality, the common thread throughout *Beast of Me* emerges. This thread, in my view, draws together the varied modalities of colonial and neo-colonial violence and their long-standing influences in the postcolonial world.²⁰ However, I focus on its second scene, which deals with the everyday experience of discrimination and bigotry among *zainichi* Koreans, to examine how Kum harnesses the concept of transnationalism in *Beast of Me*. I am specifically interested in analyzing how transnationalism can function in rewriting dominant historical narratives that have been constructed on nationalist foundations.

The second segment of *Beast of Me* is a long shot of Kum herself wearing *chima jeogori* (Figure 4). The artist is seated in a grassy field. In this scene, Kum speaks about, almost in a whisper, in Japanese how *zainichi* Koreans have been historically marginalized, discriminated,



Figure 4. Kum Soni, *Beast of Me*. 2005. Video still. Courtesy of the artist.

and abused in Japan. The bilingual voiceovers in English and Korean, voiced by the artist, are additionally superimposed. In the same scene, she confesses her own harrowing experience of being an object of sexual desire in a crowded train when she commuted to an ethnic Korean high school in Tokyo wearing *chima jeogori*.

The traditional Korean dress for women encloses a dual meaning here. On the one hand, it highlights the social vulnerability of female *zainichi* Koreans. On the other hand, it also symbolizes resistance against the assimilation policies of the nation-state, taking into account the post-war history of Japanese Korean schools. The Japanese government, after the war, has consistently suppressed Korean ethnic education by “reinvigorating the notion of a single-ethnic nation.”²¹ *Zainichi* Koreans have struggled against such an enforced conformity and tried to protect their own culture—including the dress *chima jeogori*—and language through ethnic education.

Chong Ri Ae was born in 1991 in Kanagawa and studied art in Korea University in Tokyo. Her video, *The Story of One Person at a Time in a Place and Its Narrative* (2015), is based on the true story of her grandfather, who is a first generation *zainichi* Korean. Her work consists of videos documenting her grandfather’s trip to South Korea to visit his parents (Figure 5).

All the video footage was filmed by Chong’s mother because

Chong was not able to receive permission to enter South Korea at the time when she was making this work. When the Japanese government deprived *zainichi* Koreans of their Japanese nationality, the *zainichi* were compelled to identify as either North Korean or South Korean. Since Chong possesses “North Korean status” [*Chosen-seki*], she was not allowed to enter South Korea at that time.²² As So Kyon-shik, a representative post-war *zainichi* intellectual, points out, Chong’s plight is a striking instance of how the ideological divide between North and South Korea serves to constrain the lives of *zainichi* Koreans.²³

The purpose of Chong’s grandfather in traveling to South Korea was to trace his parents’ roots and to visit their graves. He originally came to Japan from a southern province of Korea to escape the persecution of leftists by the US-supported anticommunist regime of the South. Since his departure, he never once returned to his hometown and thus could not pay his final respects to his parents when they died. In *The Story of One Person at a Time in a Place and Its Narrative*, Chong vividly portrays her grandfather’s journey to compensate for the lost time, splicing together the fragmented images taken by her mother. It depicts an intensely personal undertaking in which a first generation *zainichi* Korean tries to come to terms with his tempestuous life.



Figure 5. Chong Ri Ae, *The Story of one Person at a Time in a Place and Its Narrative*. 2015. Video still. Courtesy of the artist.

Tani Barlow, a specialist on the history of modern China, claims that colonialism and modernity are “indivisible features of the history of industrial capitalism.”²⁴ The concept of “colonial modernity” for her conveys the close connection between the birth of modern nations and the practices of colonialism. This idea is also helpful in considering the transnational elements of Japan’s modernity, the construction of which was mediated through colonialism. In fact, the existence of *zainichi* Koreans symbolizes the transnational historicity of modern Japan.

However, as Oliver Dew observes, “[w]ithin the post-colonial discourse of Japanese monoethnicity, Koreans were invisible, taboo.”²⁵ For instance, *zainichi* Koreans who greatly contributed to the so-called “miraculous” economic reconstruction of post-war Japan have been ignored and forgotten by its historic narrative. In other words, the dominant historical narrative of modern Japan has neglected the transnational and postcolonial history of the *zainichi* Koreans, remaining a largely “nationalized” account of events. Hence, Japanese philosopher Ukai Satoshi contends that what is required now is to produce “alternative, vivid ways of recollecting history detached from the concept of the national.”²⁶

Kum emphasizes the multiethnic aspects of Japan’s postcolonial modernity in *Beast of Me* by inserting the presence of *zainichi* Koreans into the dominant narrative of contemporary Japan. Similarly, Chong’s *The Story of One Person at a Time in a Place and Its Narrative*, which sheds light on the condition of transnational historicity through the memory of her grandfather, acts as a poignant counter-narrative against the nationalized historiography of postwar Japan.

Exhibition as a Platform for Multiethnic Dialogue

Chong took part in two exhibitions, “Zainichi, the Present, and the Art” [*Zainichi Genzai Bijutsu*] in 2014 and “Suddenly, the View Spreads out Before Us” [*Totsuzen Me no Mae ga Hirakete*] in 2015. These exhibitions were organized by young *zainichi* Korean artists, including Chong, with the cooperation of a contemporary art gallery or in collaboration with their Japanese counterparts. *Zainichi* Korean artists of this new generation

are highly active in group exhibitions, which could be reckoned as a strategy to increase their visibility in the Japanese art world.

Zainichi Genzai Bijutsu was held at the eitoeiko, a contemporary art gallery in the Kagurazaka neighborhood of Tokyo from April 18, 2014 to May 17, 2014. The exhibition showcased the paintings of five *zainichi* Korean artists (Jong Yu Gyong, Lee Jong Ok, Chong Ri Ae, Lee Chongfa, and Jo Chang Hwi). It was curated by Jong Yu Gyong, a *zainichi* Korean artist who received his art education in Tokyo in the early 2010s. He contacted several art galleries in Japan to explore the possibility of mounting an art exhibition showing the works of ethnic Korean artists. At first, few galleries showed interest in his proposal. Only Kibukawa Ei, the owner of eitoeiko, was interested in Jong's idea, leading to the realization of *Zainichi Genzai Bijutsu*.

The exhibition was intended to examine the identity of *zainichi* Koreans in the current and historical contexts of Japanese art. The exhibition was publicized in a newspaper interview with Lee Jong Ok, one of the participating artists. In *Korea News* [*Chōsen Shinpō*], Lee stated how meaningful it was for her as a *zainichi* Korean artist to challenge the homogeneity and exclusivity of the contemporary Japanese art world.²⁷ She declared that organizing such a politically conscious exhibition was a major challenge, as it sought to render visible the presence of *zainichi* Korean artists who have been commonly treated as “intruders,” or at best as “outsiders,” to the Japanese art world.

For Jong, who curated the exhibition, and the other participants, the purpose of *Zainichi Genzai Bijutsu* was not to unilaterally make their opinions on *zainichi* Koreans heard. Jong emphasized that views on contested matters regarding *zainichi* Koreans varied among the exhibiting artists, in the same way that their methods of making art were all different. In the works displayed in *Zainichi Genzai Bijutsu*, the audiences could discover the surprising diversity of their painting styles, ranging from classic realism to “pop art” (Figure 6). This wide range of styles and themes epitomizes the heterogeneity of contemporary *zainichi* Korean artists.



Figure 6. Installation view of *Zainichi Genzai Bijutsu II*, July 22–August 13, 2016. eitoeiko; Tokyo. Courtesy of Kibukawa Ei.

One of the principal objectives of the exhibition was, in the words of Jong, to “construct an alternative platform” through art.²⁸ He hoped that the exhibition would encourage dialogue on neglected issues of national and ethnic identity. Their creative attempt at forging a new platform for multi-ethnic discussion was continued in *Zainichi Genzai Bijutsu II*, which took place at the eitoeiko in 2016.

In addition, *Totsuzen Me no Mae ga Hirakete* included five exhibiting artists. Two of the participants were *zainichi* Korean artists who were students at Korea University (Lee Jong Ok and Chong Ri Ae), and three of them were Japanese artists who were students at Musashino Art University (Haibara Chiaki, Ichikawa Akiko, and Tsuchiya Michiko). The universities were used as the venues for the exhibition, which was held from November 13 to November 21, 2015. Despite the short duration of the exhibition, *Totsuzen Me no Mae ga Hirakete* attracted extensive attention due to the unusual multiethnic collaboration between *zainichi* Korean and Japanese artists.

The exhibition began as a collaborative project carried out by the five

students at Korea University and Musashino Art University. The original goal of the project was to build a “bridge” over the wall that separates the two adjacent colleges (Figure 7). Consequently, *Totsuzen Me no Mae ga Hirakete* was exhibited at the two buildings connected by this symbolic passage.

The collective act of building a bridge to connect the two institutions, instead of simply removing the wall, has a crucial meaning at a metaphoric level. All the participating artists were conscious that psychological and realistic—that is, institutional and legal—gaps between the Japanese and *zainichi* Koreans must be filled if they are to understand each other.²⁹ Both groups knew that overcoming these long-standing gaps would not be easy. In my view, the bridge built over the wall symbolizes their willingness to embark on dialogue while remaining aware of the often deep-seated gaps between them. The archival space, integrated as part of the exhibition, may lend support to my interpretation. A substantial archive of the dialogue between Japanese and *zainichi* Korean artists was displayed in the space. Numerous conflicts and discrepancies manifested themselves in the debates among



Figure 7. Students making a bridge between the two colleges, 2015. Courtesy of Haibara Chiaki.

the artists. In this regard, the most emblematic “work” that shows the significance of *Totsuzen Me no Mae ga Hirakete* is a trans-ethnic dialogic undertaking that made this challenging exhibition possible.

Coda: Decolonization through Transnationalism

I have discussed how the ethos of transnationalism is exemplified in differing ways in the works of contemporary *zainichi* Korean artists and their exhibitions. In this final section, I would like to advance my analyses further by considering how these different manifestations of transnationalism could contribute to the process of “decolonization.”

The term “decolonization” is usually understood as the act or process of eliminating the remnants of institutional colonialism or overcoming an internalized colonial identity. Numerous struggles for liberation from colonial occupation have been waged in different places and at different times throughout modern history. Robert Young, a scholar of postcolonial theory, divides the history of decolonization into three stages:

There were, broadly speaking, three phases of decolonization as follows: (1) the colonies in the Americas, for the most part during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; (2) the colonies of Europe that date from the nineteenth century up to the first quarter of the twentieth; and (3) the colonies of the global South in the period from 1945 to the end of the twentieth century.³⁰

However, the meaning of “decolonization” in our contemporary postcolonial world needs a fundamental modification because almost all former colonies worldwide are “officially” independent today. These include the ex-colonies of the Empire of Japan during WWII, such as Taiwan and Korea. Nevertheless, the problematic legacies of colonial domination remain active all over the world, even after the official termination of colonialism as an ideology. Indian thinker Ashis Nandy insists that one of the paramount concerns in the postcolonial world is to fight against a second form of colonialism. What he calls “the second

form of colonialism” is what strongly “colonizes our minds in addition to bodies.”³¹

With regard to the fight against this new form of colonialism, the arguments regarding the concept of “decolonization” advanced by Taiwanese cultural studies scholar Chen Kuan-Hsing and Argentine literary theorist Walter D. Mignolo are worth pursuing. These two influential scholars of the non-Western world reframe, in different ways, the notion of “decolonization” in the current postcolonial world. For Chen, decolonization is “the attempt of the previously colonized to reflectively work out a historical relation with the former colonizer, culturally, politically, and economically,” and it may comprise “a painful process involving the practice of self-critique, self-negation, and self-rediscovery.”³² Crucially, Chen maintains that decolonization is necessitated by “the desire to form a less coerced and more reflexive and dignified subjectivity.”³³

Mignolo extends the scope of the project of decolonization in elaborating the concept of “decoloniality.” The significant point here is that “decoloniality” is cognitive, implying that the concept is closely related to the production of knowledge itself: “The focus [of the concept of decoloniality] was on epistemology rather than on taking the state. The focus became the decolonization of knowledge rather than expelling the colonizer from the territory, and delinking from the colonial matrix of power.”³⁴ For Mignolo, to decolonize is to interrogate the logic of colonialism that continues to dominate our minds. Moreover, the ultimate purpose of decolonization is to disconnect colonial logic from our way of thinking.

In addition, Sakai Naoki’s reflections regarding the “colonial imagination” is particularly instructive in making the case for the significance of decolonization in the lives of *zainichi* Koreans. Sakai identifies the “imaginary relationship between Japanese and Koreans” as a salient manifestation of the colonial imagination.³⁵ He affirms that this imagined relationship has constituted “Japanese and Korean identities in terms of the binary configuration after the loss of the Japanese Empire,” and it persists at the core of the ethnic discrimination against *zainichi* Koreans that prevails in Japanese society. In my view,

this problematic imagination has nurtured a false sense of superiority over Korean residents in Japan and also enhanced mutual mistrust between the Japanese and *zainichi* Koreans. Sakai then recounts that the postcoloniality of Japan is marked by the impossibility of constructing identities prior to the experience of colonization:

Postcoloniality, therefore, has little to do with what comes after the demise of the colonial reign. It indicates how decisively and irredeemably the fantasy of the colonial relationship is etched in our identities, regardless of whether that fantasy adequately summarizes the collective experience of the past or not. This is to say that the *post* of postcoloniality means the irredeemability of the colonial experience due to which it is impossible to posit some original identity prior to the colonial reign: a collective identity not yet contaminated by the violence of the colonial power relationship.³⁶

The arguments advanced by Chen, Mignolo, and Sakai enable us to recognize the importance of identifying new representations of identity in postcolonial Japan. Just as critical is the construction of alternative discourses that narrate the colonial history of modern Japan in ways that challenge mainstream nationalist accounts.

The textile works created by fabric artist Oh Haji propose a possible new expression of ethnic identity in a “post-national” world, which is achieved by visualizing the heterogeneous elements at the core of transnationalism. In Oh’s artworks, the homogeneity that has served to determine our ethnic identity is always called into question. It is then replaced with a vision of heterogeneity and hybridity, symbolized by the amalgamation of traditional costumes from different parts of the world.

Kum Soni and Chong Ri Ae question the “nationalized” mode of narrating history, pursuing their own historiographies through the experiences of their families. These artists challenge the established historical narratives conceived from the perspective of ethnic homogeneity by unmasking the transnationality embedded in the history of modern Japan. Innumerable stories and memories expressing

a transnational outlook were forgotten, or even deliberately repressed, in the process of constructing the national historiography. Kum and Chong, albeit in different ways, carefully reassemble forgotten stories in their videos, such as *Beast of Me* and *The Story of One Person at a Time in a Place and Its Narrative*.

The two contemporary art exhibitions held in Japan in the 2010s, *Zainichi Genzai Bijutsu* and *Totsuzen Me no Mae ga Hirakete*, suggest that organizing exhibitions could serve as a valuable platform for multiethnic discussion and dialogue between artists and audiences. In addition, these exhibitions that directly address the perspectives and experiences of *zainichi* Koreans were successful in raising public awareness about issues that are not widely known in Japan. Such undertakings are particularly significant in Japan, where discussing the lived experience of *zainichi* Koreans is considered taboo. Furthermore, the process of mounting exhibitions through cross-ethnic collaboration, like *Totsuzen Me no Mae ga Hirakete*, brings to light the concealed power relations and inequality among different ethnic groups.

It is telling that Japanese artist Haibara Chiaki, a core member of *Totsuzen Me no Mae ga Hirakete*, confessed that she felt strongly the precariousness of her own identity by participating in the exhibition. Haibara said that such a feeling urged her to ask her grandfather about his wartime experience and to reflect on Japan's modern history regarding the war in Asia.³⁷ I consider this type of reflexive thought integral in the process of decolonization, which would compel us to interrogate critically the historicity of our own ethnic identities. For the "Japanese," including myself, this process inevitably engenders the necessity to confront what historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki called our "implication in the past." It reveals how we are "enmeshed in structures, institutions and webs of ideas which are the product of history," in relation to the colonial history of the country.³⁸ We should remind ourselves of Chen Kuan-Hsing's assertion that decolonization might be "a painful process involving the practice of self-critique." However, the push toward decolonization is a pressing concern in Japan, where major postcolonial issues remain unsettled and exclusive nationalism has recently surged in gaining more favor among the public. Furthermore,

as I have discussed in this article through examining the concept of transnationalism in contemporary *zainichi* Korean art, artistic and cultural practice can contribute to the process of decolonization in significant and surprising ways.

Acknowledgments

This article is based on a paper prepared for *Transnational Cities*—an international conference hosted by Tate Research Centre: Asia and University of the Arts London Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity, and Nation, which was held in London in September 2017. I would like to thank Professor Toshio Watanabe (The University of East Anglia) for inviting me to the conference. Partial support was also provided by Asia Culture Center, Korea.

Notes

¹ Sonia Ryang, “Introduction,” in *Koreans in Japan: Critical Voices from the Margin* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

³ Naoki Mizuno and Gyongsu Mun, *Koreans Living in Japan: History and the Present* [在日朝鮮人：歴史と現在] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2015), 125-26.

⁴ It should be emphasized that the 1965 treaty left unchanged the stateless status of *zainichi* Koreans who identified themselves with North Korea. See Kazuko Suzuki, *Divided Fates: The State, Race, and Korean Immigrants’ Adaptation in Japan and the United States* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 74-75.

⁵ Melissa L. Wender, ed., *Into the Light: An Anthology of Literature by Koreans in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 1.

⁶ See, for instance, Fumiaki Taka, *Dissecting Racism: Prejudice against Zainichi Koreans and the Internet* [レイシズムを解剖する：在日コリアンへの偏見とインターネット] (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 2015), 10 and Tomomi Yamaguchi, “Xenophobia in Action: Ultrnationalism, Hate Speech, and the Internet in Japan,” *Radical History Review* 117 (2013): 101.

⁷ “Zaitokukai” is an abbreviation of “Zainichi Tokken o Yurusanai Shimin no Kai” (Citizens against the Special Privileges of Koreans in Japan). This xenophobic political association, set up in 2007, has strenuously and violently denounced a number of “privileges” that, according to its members, Korean residents of Japan enjoy. It has turned out that there are no such privileges. See Yamaguchi, “Xenophobia in Action,” 103. See also Kōichi Yasuda, *The Internet and Patriotism: Chasing the “Darkness” of*

Zaitokukai [ネットと愛国：在特会の「闇」を追いかけて] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2012) and Yasumichi Noma, *Lies about “Zainichi Privileges”: Hate Speech that the Internet Space Produced* [「在日特権」の虚構：ネット空間が生み出したヘイト・スピーチ] (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2013).

⁸ See Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 2009).

⁹ See Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

¹⁰ See Leslie Sklair, *Sociology of the Global System*, 2nd ed. (London: Prentice Hall, 1995).

¹¹ Brenda S. A. Yeoh, Michael W. Chaney, and Tong Chee Kiong, “Introduction,” in *Approaching Transnationalisms: Studies on Transnational Societies, Multicultural Contacts, and Imaginings of Home* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 2.

¹² Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 7.

¹³ Mizuno and Mun, *Koreans Living in Japan*, 213-14.

¹⁴ Kaori H. Okano, “The Dialectic of Globalisation, Identity, and Local Activism: Multicultural Education Policies in in Japan,” in *Nation-Building, Identity and Citizenship Education: Cross-cultural Perspectives*, eds. Joseph Zajda, Holger Daun, and Lawrence J. Saha (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 103.

¹⁵ For example, in 2014, photographer Kin Mizuki—she is a Japanese citizen of Korean descent—started a project photographing three international airports in Germany to explore a broader notion of “migration.” Subsequently, in 2017, she launched an on-going photographic project collaborating with Vietnamese immigrants who work at flower shops in Berlin. Although Kin does not deal with political issues directly related to *zainichi* Koreans, she told me that her personal ethnic background substantially shaped her interest and sensitivity that resulted in these projects. Mizuki Kin, in discussion with the author, December 6, 2018.

¹⁶ Haji Oh, email message to the author, September 7, 2017.

¹⁷ Haji Oh, *Textile as Metaphor: Discussing “Memory of Silence”* [メタファーとしてのテキスタイル：＜沈黙の記憶＞をめぐる] (PhD diss., Kyoto City University of Art, 2012), 73.

¹⁸ Eiji Oguma, *The Origin of the Myth of Ethnic Homogeneity: The Genealogy of the Self-Portrait of the “Japanese”* [単一民族神話の起源：「日本人」の自画像の系譜] (Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 1995), 363.

¹⁹ A similar phenomenon took place before the 2000s. Sonia Ryang writes: “In 1994—when North Korea’s nuclear weapons program was increasingly attracting Japanese media attention—a total of 154 incidents of abuse toward Korean school students was reported between April and July alone.” Sonia Ryang, “Visible and Vulnerable: The Predicament of Koreans in Japan,” in *Diaspora without Homeland: Being Korean in Japan*, eds. Sonia Ryang and John Lie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 73.

²⁰ For a detailed analysis of *Beast of Me*, see Yasuko Ikeuchi, “Her Narrative and Body: Discussing Kum Soni’s Video Works” [彼女の語りと身体：琴仙姫の映像作品をめぐる]

て] in *Sound of a Scar: Toward the Future of "Asia, Politics, and Arts"* [残傷の音: 「アジア・政治・アート」の未来へ], ed. Chonghwa Lee (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009), 238-75. In my doctoral thesis, I also considered *Beast of Me* as a whole in the context of postcolonial East Asia. See Hiroki Yamamoto, *The Art of Decolonisation: On the Possibility of Socially Engaged Art in the Postcolonial Context of East Asia* (PhD diss., University of the Arts London, 2018), 126-31.

²¹ David Chapman, *Zainichi Korean Identity and Ethnicity* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 28.

²² Korea had not been divided between North and South when the Japanese government decided to treat *zainichi* Koreans as “foreigners” in 1947. Therefore, all *zainichi* Koreans were unilaterally regarded as *Chosen-seki*. When South Korea was established in 1948, the Japanese government allowed *zainichi* Koreans to change their nationality to “South Korea status” [*Kankoku-seki*] if they wished. Those who did not change their nationality into *Kankoku-seki* at that time continued to retain their identity as *Chosen-seki*. Therefore, more precisely, it can be argued that *zainichi* Koreans who regard themselves as *Chosen-seki* identify with “Korea prior to its division.” See Yasuaki Ōnuma, *Nationality and Human Rights of Koreans in Japan* [在日韓国・朝鮮人の国籍と人権] (Tokyo: Tōshindō, 2004).

²³ Kyon-shik So, *Living in Division: Beyond “Zainichi”* [分断を生きる: 「在日」を超えて] (Tokyo: Kage Shobō, 1997), 110.

²⁴ Tani E. Barlow, “Introduction,” in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 1.

²⁵ Oliver Dew, *Zainichi Cinema: Korean-in-Japan Film Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 10.

²⁶ Satoshi Ukai, “Renan’s Forgetfulness, or Between ‘Nation’ and ‘History’” [ルナンの忘却あるいは<ナショナル>と<ヒストリー>の間] in *Beyond National History* [ナショナル・ヒストリーを超えて], eds. Yōichi Komori and Tetsuya Takahashi (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), 265.

²⁷ Yura Kim, “Young *Zainichi* Korean Artists’ Challenge” [若き在日朝鮮人アーティストたちの挑戦], *Chōsen Shinpō*, May 19, 2014.

²⁸ Yu Gyong Jong, email to the author, March 3, 2017.

²⁹ Japanese art critic Sawaragi Noi observes that it was “an asymmetrical relationship between them (Japanese and *zainichi* Korean artists)” that was most evident in the exhibition. Sawaragi goes on to point out that the uneven power relation between the Japanese and *zainichi* Koreans, that is, between the majority enjoying societal privileges and the minority incurring material and immaterial oppression, are inevitably associated with this asymmetry. Noi Sawaragi, “Does this Bridge Have Two Sides?” [この橋に端はあるか], *Bijutsu Techō*, January 14, 2016, accessed April 14, 2017, <https://bijutsutecho.com/series/262/>.

³⁰ Robert J. C. Young, *Empire, Colony, Postcolony* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2015), 103.

³¹ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xi.

³² Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 54.

³⁵ Naoki Sakai, "Asia: Co-figurative Identification," in *Shaping the History of Art in Southeast Asia*, ed. Yasuko Furuichi (Tokyo: Japan Foundation Asia Center, 2017), 55.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Totsuzen Me no Mae ga Hirakete Production Committee ed., *To the Other Side of the Boundaries* [境界を跨ぐとゝ] (Tokyo: Totsuzen Me no Mae ga Hirakete Production Committee, 2017), 8-9.

³⁸ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History* (London: Verso, 2005), 26.