

## Korean–Japanese? Shifting Perceptions of Belonging among Koreans in Japan

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Paper prepared for the First World Congress of Korean Studies, Seongnam, Republic of Korea, 18–20 July 2002

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Koreans in Japan have been a socially excluded minority group in Japan for much of the last 80 years. Incremental changes over the past couple of decades, including changes in their legal status in Japan, generational changes among Koreans as well as Japanese, and shifts in social attitudes towards things Korean and towards cultural difference within Japanese society more broadly, have brought Koreans into greater integration within Japanese society.

The debate on belonging among Koreans in Japan since the end of the Pacific War has been structured around three alternatives to dealing the contradictions arising from life in diaspora in a society in which their cultural difference was stigmatized and treated as a target of erasure: repatriation, maintenance of Korea identity and nationality as "zaiNichi" Japan–resident foreigners, and naturalization. The first, after three to four generations of settlement in Japan, is no longer considered a serious option. Many Koreans continue to opt for the second alternative of maintaining foreign nationality. Those choosing naturalization, however, have increased from the mid–1990s, and now amount to about 10,000 per year.

Through generational processes assimilation and inter–marriage, boundaries between Koreans and Japanese based on exclusive categories marked by nationality, lineage, language and culture have become blurred. In this paper, following an outline discussion of the shifting contexts in which Koreans have had to negotiate their positions between Japan and Korea, I discuss two manifestations of an emerging discourse on Korean belonging in Japan and the boundaries of "Koreanness." The first is the

novel *GO*, written by Kaneshiro Kazuki, which has also been made into a hit film. The second is a group of books authored by Koreans who discuss in positive terms the option of Koreans in Japan acquiring Japanese nationality. This, I claim, is a new position in the debate among Koreans on belonging. Both of these, I believe, represent a challenge to heretofore dominant conceptualizations of the boundaries of "Koreanness," as well as "Japaneseness" within Japanese society.

### Shifting contexts, emerging orientations

Since August 1945, when Korea was liberated from Japanese rule, Koreans in Japan have had choices thrust upon them regarding how to position themselves in terms of belonging between Japan and Korea. In referring to "choices," I mean to suggest the shifting context of constraints and possibilities those of Korean background face in positioning themselves in terms of political agency and identity between three states, and as "non-mainstream" within dominant Japanese notions of social belonging. These are choices which those Japanese for whom nationality, place of residence and understanding of heritage are in conjuncture do not have to face. These choices, of course, arose within the contradictions of colonial rule, and have been constrained by its legacies. Over the years, however, shaped by generational shifts and changes in the legal and social environment, the character of these choices has changed. Put schematically, I believe these choices have developed in three successive stages, roughly corresponding to, though not reducible to, generational changes among Koreans in Japan, and reflecting as well shifts within Japan, in Japan-Korea and inter-Korean relations, and in the postcolonial world more broadly.

The first set of choices thrust upon Koreans in Japan involved the very basic question of where to build their lives. Of the nearly 2.5 million Koreans in Japan at the end of the Pacific War, the great majority repatriated to the peninsula, leaving behind some 600,000, whose descendants form the great majority of the present Korean population in Japan. "Return to the homeland" was also the choice of nearly 93,000 Koreans and a number of their Japanese spouses who made the passage to North Korea during the repatriation movement from 1959 into the 1960s. These were choices made primarily by first-generation Koreans competent in Korean language and culture practices.

The second set of choices has involved the politics of the state, and the orientation of Japan-resident Koreans toward a divided Korea.

There are a couple of dimensions of this I would like to mention. First, of course, is the question of affiliation with the north or with the south. Before 1965, most Koreans in Japan chose the former. This was shaped by, first, the socio-economic position of most Koreans in Japan within an exploited low-wage laboring class disposed to sympathize with a politics of the left; and secondly, by the material and moral support coming from the north which helped build, among other things, a full-fledged Korean school system within Japan. The Japan-ROK Normalization treaty of 1965, however, altered this dynamic, as it gave Koreans with ROK nationality greater stability in terms of residence status and access to certain social services. By the early 1970s, the majority of Koreans in Japan had become nationals of the Republic of Korea.

The second dimension of the politics of the state among Koreans in Japan involved the question of Korea-orientation versus Japan-orientation. An emerging perspective on this issue, particularly among some second-generation Koreans, was brought out in relief by the movement organized around the Hitachi employment discrimination case. In 1970, a young Korean high school graduate, Pak Jong-shik, had applied to Hitachi under his Japanese-style name of "Arai," passed the company recruitment process and received an offer of employment. When the company discovered that Pak was actually of Korean nationality, they withdrew their offer. Pak sued Hitachi in an effort to force the company to overturn its refusal of employment. A network of both Japanese and Koreans supporting Pak's claims grew up around the case, eventually developing into a nationwide network organized against ethnic discrimination. The ethnic organizations representing the two states on the Korean peninsula, however, distanced themselves from Pak's movement, on the grounds that it was a demand for integration into Japanese society and thereby promoted the assimilation of Koreans.

The Hitachi case set the stage for internal debates that were to follow among Koreans in Japan between a view advocating a civil rights perspective that sought equality of treatment within Japanese society and streams of thought promoting ethnonational consciousness and solidarity that gave priority to the homeland and the Korean nation in the lives of Korean residents in Japan.

An important intervention from the Japanese side that helped to frame this debate was that of an official of the Japanese Immigration Bureau by the name of Sakanaka Hidenori. In 1977, in the pages of a journal issued by the Ministry of Justice, Sakanaka made the case that naturalization was the

best route both for Koreans themselves and for Japanese society. He advocated this view in order to resolve what he characterized as the contradiction between Koreans being culturally “quasi-Japanese” (*jun-Nihonjin*) while being defined legally as “foreigner.” Sakanaka was himself engaged in an internal debate within Japanese political circles about how to treat resident Koreans in the context of state security. He took the position that Koreans' status should be stabilized to the greatest degree possible, and that the choice of naturalization be made easier, to encourage their assimilation and integration within Japanese society. This was against a position that advocated leaving Koreans in an unstable position in order to make more stark the choice between repatriation and naturalization (Sakanaka 1999: 8–9). Korean intellectuals responded to Sakanaka's position only with criticism, equating naturalization with an assimilation policy that encouraged the loss of a Korean identity (ibid.: 12–14).

It was in this context that Kim Dong-myong (1979) proposed a “third way” for Koreans in an essay by this title (*daisan no michi*). The “third way” would be an alternative to both “repatriatism,” that is, living with primary reference to the homeland, and naturalization, which was widely regarded as abandoning the homeland and the Korean community and thereby rejecting Koreanness. Kim advocated, rather, “living as *zaiNichi*,” that is, working to create a life based in Japan while maintaining foreign nationality and Korean identity (Park 1999: 76–78). As Park points out (ibid.: 77), Kim rejected both Sakanaka's suggestion of the naturalization option, as well as the position that the fate of Koreans in Japan was integrally bound up with the fate of the homeland, which should in turn be an integral part of the consciousness of Koreans in Japan.

Another series of debates reflecting the tension between homeland- and Japan-orientation arose in the mid-1980s, most prominently between Yang Tae-ho and Kang Sang-jun. Yang emphasized the dangers he saw as inherent in the anti-discrimination and civil rights movements based on the assumption of settlement in Japan. Raising the specter of assimilation (*naikokuminka*), Kang argued that a stable ethnonational consciousness, referencing the homeland, was essential to maintaining an autonomous Korean subjectivity (*shutaisei*). He advocated an approach that would position Koreans in Japan within the historical experience of the movement from Korea to Japan (Park 1999: 79), and would thus maintain an element of homeland orientation.

The position of anti-discrimination activist Yang Tae-ho is suggested in the title of his major work, the book “You Can’t Return to Pusan Port” (*Pusan-ko ni kaerenai*, 1984). Yang accused Kang of placing too much emphasis on the homeland as a constant reference point for Koreans in Japan, arguing that an ethnic consciousness of Koreans should be based on the objective fact of Korean settlement in Japan. The fate of Koreans in Japan, he argued, should not be left in the hands of the political forces in the homeland. Rather, urging that Koreans in Japan maintain a critical stance toward both regimes on the peninsula, Yang advocated a particular, autonomous subjectivity for Koreans resident in Japan (Park 1999: 80–81).

A tension between homeland-orientation and Japan-orientation continues to be a dimension of the internal debate among Koreans in Japan. However, while these debates have been unfolding, there have been significant changes in both the conditions under which Koreans in Japan live their lives and in perspective among many Koreans. Important legal and social changes include the following:

? The Nationality Law was revised in 1985, with effect from 1986, from a patrilineal reckoning of nationality to one that allowed for bilateral reckoning. Thus, whereas before 1986, a child of a Japanese woman and a non-Japanese national man would not be recognized as a Japanese national, from that year children born of such parentage have been given the option to choose Japanese nationality. Most children of such marriages are registered as, and are considered by the state to be, Japanese nationals.

? Following Japan–ROK negotiations, in 1991, the Japanese government introduced an immigration regime that established full equality among former colonial subjects and their foreign-national descendants with regard to residence status, and that guaranteed permanent residency through the generations, with the creation of the “special permanent residency” (*tokubetsu eiju*) category, applying to all those had been “divested of Japanese nationality” in 1952.

\_ The early 1990s witnessed a rise in rates of naturalization among foreign national Koreans in Japan. Generally hovering between four and six thousand over the two decades from 1970, the number topped 7,000 for the first time in 1992, surpassed 10,000 in 1995, and has been maintained at around 10,000 since. The rate of naturalization doubled during the decade of the 1990s. Since 1952, nearly a quarter of a million Koreans in

Japan have taken Japanese nationality. The year 1991 also witnessed the peak population of foreign national Koreans resident in Japan, at just under 700,000. The figure has fallen every year since.

? Rates of "international marriage" among Koreans have risen so that by the mid-1990s, more than 80 per cent of all marriages involving Korean nationals in Japan were to Japanese nationals.

All in all, these changes both reflect and contribute to a blurring of boundaries between Korean and Japanese. Through so-called "international marriages," Koreans and Japanese are forming family bonds. And they are creating Japanese national children who can trace their

ancestral heritage to both the Korean peninsula and Japan (see, e.g., Yamanaka, et al. 1998). In the hierarchy of foreign nationals in Japan (Shipper 2002), Koreans and other former colonial subjects and their descendants to whom the "special permanent residence" category applies, now have the most stable residence status.

Generational and social changes have given rise to a third set of choices for Koreans in Japan, and here I refer not only to foreign national Koreans but to any who may trace their roots to Korea. This third set involves how to orient oneself not to Korea in terms of state politics as much as to "Koreanness," as heritage, and as an aspect of self-identity and public presentation of self. Young residents of Japan who can trace Korean heritage must not only face the question of "how" to be a Korean in Japan, but also the question of what is a "Korean."

To summarize, the three sets of choices I have outlined arise from the fact of Koreans living in postcolonial diaspora. The first set of choices involved whether to live in diaspora or not, that is, to repatriate or to continue a life based in Japan. These choices have now essentially been made. Return is no longer considered a serious option. The second set of choices involved how to orient oneself within the complex state politics arising from national division, reflected in the political organization of Koreans in Japan, and from institutionalized discrimination which limited, and continues to limit to some degree, the life chances of Koreans in Japan. The debates arising out of this context revolve around what are the issues to be given priority by diasporic Koreans in Japan and what kind of linkages should be maintained with the homeland and the Korean nation. It is to these questions that much of the discussion on the "zaiNichi" issue has been

devoted. These questions have not been superseded, but have been complicated by the third set of choices.

The third set of choices is framed by a post-diasporic context. That is, most young Koreans in Japan are removed from issues of state politics on the peninsula. The great majority have been educated in Japanese schools and are thoroughly culturally assimilated to Japanese standards. They are native Japanese speakers, and few of them are fluent in Korean. Their assumption is that their fate is thoroughly tied in with that of Japan. And increasingly the common view in Japan is that they are constituent members of Japanese society, even as there remain areas from which those of foreign nationality are excluded.

I would now like to turn to this third, post-diasporic, context that those of ethnic Korean background in Japan are now facing, and in particular on the emergence of a new discourse on the relationship of ethnicity and nationality among some of them. For this, I discuss two particular manifestations: (1) the recent novel *GO*, authored by a young "Korean-Japanese" and made into a hit film, which directly addresses the question of positioning of Koreans in Japan vis-a-vis the homeland and Japanese society; and (2) several recent books by Koreans that give a positive assessment of the option of acquiring Japanese nationality.

*GO*: Romantic rebellion against ethnonational categories

"Take a look at the wide world. After that, decide for yourself."

? Sugihara's father

*GO*, as novel, film and rental video, it is safe to say, has achieved the widest exposure of any representation of Koreans in Japan within Japanese popular culture. Both novel and film have achieved major critical and commercial success.

The novel *GO* was written by a third-generation resident Korean in Japan who goes under the Japanese-style name of Kaneshiro Kazuki. A first novel published in 2000, the book won the then 31-year old Kaneshiro the Naoki prize, Japan's highest honor for a work of popular fiction. Kaneshiro, who, the book jacket informs us, holds South Korean nationality, refers to himself as a "Korean-Japanese," a point I take up below. The film version, released in the fall of 2001, also won a number of film awards, including Japanese Academy Awards in eight categories. Directed by

Yukisada Isao, it stars Kubotsuka Yosuke, a very popular young heart-throb, who is Japanese.

The story, purportedly autobiographically based, is about a boy who, after attending North Korea-affiliated primary and junior high schools, transfers to a Japanese high school. While insisting at points that the story is about his “love life,” *GO*, in fact, offers at times poignant, at times comical depictions of the main character’s relationships with his father, with his erstwhile Korean schoolmates, and with various Japanese he encounters.

The driving theme of *GO* revolves around the categories and constraints of nationality and how they operate in the lives of various characters. The life experiences of the main character, Sugihara, reveal to him the limits of nationality, as well as the contingency, even arbitrariness, of national categories. I will give a few key examples, relying primarily on the novel, from a work rich in reflection on these issues.

Early on in the novel, Sugihara, who is the first-person narrator, mentions that his father is now on his third nationality, and explains the historical and personal facts behind this. Sugihara's father was born in Cheju during the colonial period, thus as a Japanese national. His parents brought him along to Japan when they were drafted to work in a factory in Japan producing war materiel. After the war, he was stripped of Japanese nationality, and came to be loyal to North Korea, and its representative organization in Japan, Chosen Soren, because they followed Marxism, which was, in his words, "kind to the poor" (7-9). One day, Sugihara's father announces that he would like to take the family to Hawaii, and that, in order to do so, he will apply for Republic of Korea nationality. Since he is a former Chosen Soren activist, his application for ROK nationality would be expected to take quite a long time to process. However, his ROK passport comes through "in record time." Why? Because he paid a "great deal of money" in bribes to a Mindan functionary (9)

One day, Sugihara's father takes him to a beach, sits him down and tells him, “Take a look at the wide world. After that, decide for yourself.” A few days later, Sugihara informs his father that he will leave the North Korean educational track. He agrees to change to ROK nationality, but declines the trip to Hawaii. Rather, he asks to be allowed to apply the money the trip would have cost to sit for the entrance examination for a Japanese high school.

When word gets around at his North Korean junior high school that Sugihara is studying to enter a Japanese high school, some of his teachers begin to bully him, both physically and with words. Once, during class, he is berated by his teacher for being a "traitor to his country" (*baikokudo*). In response to this, a voice rises from the back of the room that, "We've never had anything like a country" (72). This is the voice of the very bright and gentle Jong-il, who is himself the offspring of a Japanese mother and a Korean father whom he has never known. His interjection earns him the first pummeling of his academic career at the hands of the teacher. It also brings him closer to Sugihara, and the two become friends.

While Jong-il continues on to a North Korean-affiliated high school and Sugihara a Japanese high school, they stay in contact. At a meeting in a coffee shop, Sugihara excitedly brings up the topic of *The Mismeasure of Man*, the book by American paleontologist, theorist of evolution and popular science writer Stephen J. Gould. The lesson he learned here, he explains, is to "not trust genetic determinists" (75).

The genetics theme is taken up again in a yakiniku restaurant where Sugihara's mother works. Gathered together with the young employees of the restaurant, who are of a variety of nationalities, Sugihara explains the implications of recent research on mitochondrial DNA, specifically what can be understood about human genetic roots from analyzing the slow, constant rate of mutation over time. Because only the mother's mitochondrial DNA is passed on, it can be used to trace human roots back to a single female ancestor. He reports that 50 percent of the Japanese inhabitants of the main island of Honshu have the mitochondrial DNA that is most common in Korea and China. On the other hand, only about 50 percent possessed the type distinctive among Japanese. This is due, he explains, to the fact that 2,000 years ago, a great number of "Yayoi people" migrated to Japan from the continent, making the "Japanese" people who were already there into a minority. A Japanese girl asks, "but even if they possess the mitochondrial DNA common in Korea and China, they're still Japanese, aren't they?" Sugihara responds, "because they were born and raised in Japan and have Japanese nationality. Just like if you were born and raised in the United States and had U.S. nationality, you would be an American." Jong-il interjects, "but roots aren't bound by nationality" (89-90).

Japanese girl: "But how far back to you have to reckon? I don't have anything like a genealogy."

Jong-il: "It's complicated. Better to leave out all the ones in between and just trace back to "a single woman." When that "one single woman" was alive, there were no distinctions of nationality or anything. So maybe we can think of ourselves just as descendants of this period of freedom" (90).

As the others are reflecting on this, Sugihara again speaks: "In the end, nationality is just like an apartment rental contract. If you don't like the apartment any longer, you can just cancel the contract and leave." When the Japanese girl asks if one can "just cancel the contract," Sugihara informs her that the 2nd clause of the 22nd article of the Japanese Constitution (his "favorite clause") provides that "the freedom to move to another country and to renounce one's nationality shall not be violated" (90-91).

A short time later, Sugihara describes studying about "the myth of homogeneous race" in Japan (*tan'itsu minzoku shinwa*). Looking through a variety of books and documents he has collected from the library, his eyes alight upon a series of words on the topic (reproduced in the novel in bold-print Sino-Japanese characters): "unity; discrimination; assimilation; exclusion; pure blood; mixed blood; difference; homogeneity ... " (93), and on and on. Sugihara snaps (*kireta*), he tells the reader; he decides to become Norwegian. Just as he's busying himself around his room looking for things to sell to finance his move to Norway, his father walks in. He tells his father his plan. He will go to Norway, become a Norwegian, learn the language, forget the dirty Japanese language, marry a cute Norwegian girl, have cute half-Norwegian babies and make a happy family. His father complements him on his rational thinking, but asks "Why Norway?" His rational answer is that he wants to get as far away from Japan as possible. At which point his father informs him that "the other side of Japan is South America." A few moments later, Sugihara's father turns a serious face towards his son and utters some words in Spanish. When his son asks what he said, he replies. "That's Spanish. I thought about becoming Spanish." Because, he says, he heard the women were beautiful. What he had uttered was, "No soy coreano, ni soy japones, yo soy desarraigado": "I am neither Korean nor Japanese. I am uprooted" (95-97).

During his first year at high school, Sugihara meets and becomes attracted to a Japanese girl called Sakurai. She, in fact, is the instigator of their relationship. Their mutual affection grows, though she has no idea that he is anything but Japanese.

Meanwhile, Jong-il dies a tragic death while trying to help a Korean girl, conspicuously dressed in the black *chima-chogori* uniform of a North Korean-affiliated school, who he believes is being harassed by some Japanese boys. On the night of Jong-il's funeral, Sakurai offers to stay with Sugihara through the night, in his time of pain. They go to a hotel. This would be their first experience of making love together. The narrator describes the physical build-up, culminating in Sakurai's telling Sugihara that she loves him. This is their most intimate moment. Because it is their most intimate moment, Sugihara decides he must tell her the truth about his ethnic background. He wishes to hide nothing from her, and believes she is in frame of mind to be receptive to him.

Building up to the consummation of their love, Sugihara calls for a pause to reveal to her something that he's kept hidden. "It's really no big deal to me, but I'm not," he says, hesitantly, struggling for the words, "Japanese." He tells her that his nationality is South Korean. "It was North Korean, and in three months it could be Japanese. Maybe I'll be American in a year. And maybe Norwegian when I die" (177).

"What are you say?" Sakurai asks Sugihara responds that "nationality has no meaning." She asks if he was born and raised in Japan.

"I've generally breathed the same air as you, and eaten the same food. But my education was different. Up to junior high, I was at a North Korean school. I learned Korean language and stuff." He continues in a joking manner, "I'm bilingual. But in Japan they only seem to think that people who speak English are bilingual. And in the Olympics, I can root for both the Japanese and Korean teams. Impressive, don't you think?" (177-78).

Sakurai is not impressed. For her, his nationality is a big deal. She physically and psychologically withdraws from him, their moment of intimacy shattered. When Sugihara presses her for an explanation, Sakurai explains that her father had told her from childhood that she was not to go out with Korean or Chinese guys, because "their blood is unclean (*chi ga kitana*)." Sugihara then asks how she distinguishes those with Japanese or Korean or Chinese nationality (178-79).

"By where they were born, or the language they speak..."

"Well, how about returnee kids who, because of their parents' work, were born abroad, and have foreign nationality? Are they not Japanese? "

"If their parents are Japanese, I think they would be Japanese."

"So, it's a matter of roots, then? So, how far back do you trace? If you found out that your great-grandfather had some Chinese blood, would you no longer be Japanese?" Sugihara continues, "Even so, you'd still be Japanese? Because you were born in Japan and speak Japanese? Well, then, in that case, I'm also Japanese" (179–80).

When Sakurai objects that it's not possible that she could have an ancestor with Chinese blood, Sugihara returns to his DNA evidence. Earlier, when he was invited to dinner at the Sakurai's residence, he learned that the whole family is allergic to alcohol. Now, he uses this fact to argue that Sakurai's ancestors could not have been Jomon, thought to be direct ancestors of Japanese, because Jomon had no such allergy. Rather, the characteristic of alcohol allergy arose in northeastern China 2,500 years ago, Sugihara insists, and migrated to Japan from the continent with the Yayoi people. "So, is your blood, mixed with these genes born in China, also unclean?" (181).

The scene ends with Sugihara clumsily putting on his clothes and leaving the hotel room. He and Sakurai break off contact.

One winter's night a few months later, Sugihara receives a call from Sakurai, their first contact since the hotel incident. Sakurai asks him to meet her on the grounds of the primary school where they had spent time on the night of their first meeting. Sugihara agrees. The scene of their meeting is the climax of the film:

Sakurai is waiting on a bench when Sugihara arrives. As he approaches her slowly and silently, Sakurai comments on the weather. She then offers, "Since we last met, in my own way, I've been doing some thinking. I've read some books, some difficult books." Sugihara suddenly squats down before her and angrily spits out the question: "What am I (*ore wa nanimono da*)?" Sakurai replies, "zaiNichi Kankokujin...." "What...!" He shouts out his question again, and she repeats her answer. With this, Sugihara stands and launches into the following diatribe:

Sometimes I just want to kill all you stinking Japanese. How is it that, without a doubt in your mind, you can call us "zaiNichi" ? I was born and raised in this country. Don't call us the same way you call those that came from outside, like

the “zaiNichi American forces” or “zaiNichi Iranians.” You’ re all labeling me as if I were a stranger, and that you expected me to leave this country sometime. Do you get it? Have you ever even once thought about this?

It doesn’ t matter. If you want to call me “zaiNichi,” go right ahead. You’ re all scared of me, aren’ t you? You can’ t be comfortable if you don’ t classify something, give it a name. But I don’ t accept this. I’ m something like a lion. A lion doesn’ t think of himself as a “lion.” You all just apply a label however you like to something you think is a lion. I dare you to come closer while calling me these names. I’ ll sink my teeth into your carotid artery and bite you to death. Do you get it? As long as you keep calling me “zaiNichi,” you’ re always in danger of being bitten to death. Doesn’ t that bother you? I’ ll tell you, I’ m not “zaiNichi,” I’ m not a “Kankokujin,” I’ m not a “Chosenjin,” I’ m not a “Mongoloid.” Stop trying to squeeze me into some narrow space. I am me (*ore wa ore*). No, I’ m also disgusted with me being me. I also want to be liberated from being me. I’ m looking for something [someone] that can help me forget that I’ m me, and I’ ll go anywhere to find it. If I can’ t find it in this country, I’ ll do just what you all want and leave. You all can’ t do this, can you? You’ ll all die bound up by the state and land and titles (*katagaki*) and conventions and tradition and culture. It serves you right! Because I don’ t have any of these things to begin with, I can go wherever I want. I can go anytime. Doesn’ t this bother you? Shit, why am I saying these things? Shit. Shit (233–235).

While reluctant to spoil the ending, I can reveal that Sugihara does get the girl in the end. Sakurai comes to the enlightened view that Sugihara's nationality does not matter in their relationship. This is just what Sugihara has been trying to convince the people around him throughout the novel, based upon his own experience and understanding of nationality.

#### Nationality as a contingent accident of birth

Sugihara's father has already had three nationalities, and he has had two himself, while imagining several more. Nationality is something that can be bought, as his father has expedited his application for ROK nationality through a large bribe. Sugihara, as well as his father, imagine

escape from the difficulties of life in Japan as a change of nationality, accompanying a change in place. Nationality, in Sugihara's words, is like an apartment rental contract, to be entered into or dissolved on the basis of preference, or expedience. In short, nationality to Sugihara is an element of strategic positioning, and bears little emotional weight in terms of ethnic solidarity or nostalgia for the homeland.

Because as he is unable to find a sense of belonging based on national affiliation, despite the best efforts of his teachers in the Chosen Soren schools, Sugihara comes to float between nationalities, unanchored. Throughout the novel, he is working through a process of positioning himself within the categories of affiliation that are available within his social world.

The DNA trope that appears at several points in the novel is used by Sugihara to sever, and thereby de-essentialize, the isomorphism of nationality, heritage, language and culture that is commonly naturalized in the language of nation-affiliation. One "true" roots, Sugihara insists, cannot be traced via the familiar categories of nationality. Our roots cross and mix in ways so complicated that they cannot work to distinguish us in any worthwhile sense. The method of using "roots" to locate the basis of our distinctiveness, i.e., a separateness sanctioned by its origins in the deep past, is rendered dubious by the question of "how far to trace back." In Sugihara's understanding, if we trace back far enough, we become the people we're trying to distinguish ourselves from. Trace back as far as we can trace, and we merge in the person of a single genitrix.

If language/culture is used to mark distinctiveness, then Sugihara and Sakurai, both native speakers of Japanese, come to be category mates. Their relationship itself, how they spend their time, how they explore one another's interests, values and sensibilities, centers on a shared exploration, or "excavation" (*hakkutsu*), as Sugihara terms it, of mostly Western, especially American, popular culture. This is totally commonplace, and very easy to carry out in the global city of Tokyo. Their mutual points of reference for creating, exploring and sharing a world view are such cultural figures and forms as Jimi Hendrix, *Dead Zone*, *Escape from Alcatraz*, Clint Eastwood, *Star Wars*, Roualt and Chagall, Miles Davis and Bruce Springsteen. Cultural elements drawn from what might be described as "national cultural traditions" play little part in their lives overall, and certainly do not seem to present any barriers in their efforts to explore and to know one another.

In the post-diasporic world Sugihara inhabits, the homeland and the nation have ceased to be viable devices for organizing affiliation. Far from mediating an experience of primordial attachment, the nation, in its legally sanctioned form of nationality, has come to appear to Sugihara as contingent, even arbitrary ?an accident of birth. This has left him, as articulated by Jong-il, a man without a country. What might have once been labels of affiliation and solidarity ("zaiNichi," "Chosenjin," "Kankokujin") have become to him imposed categories that work to constrain and contain him. Sugihara is left to negotiate for himself the links amongst place, heritage and culture that the Japanese around him take for granted.

### Becoming Japanese, maintaining Koreanness

Sugihara's "problem," ? the contradictions he is compelled to negotiate owing to the disjuncture he feels between his experience of himself and imposed categories of affiliation ? are resolved in the novel by Sakurai's "enlightenment," that is, by her capacity and willingness to be indifferent to Sugihara's nationality. Insofar as Sugihara advertises the narrative as his own "love story," this ending brings closure. However, Sugihara still remains, at novel's end, a man (a high school student) without a country. The instability of a position such as Sugihara's is clear. And it does not appear to be on the way to solution, certainly not in Japanese society, by an abandonment of the categories of national affiliation.

Proposals for resolving this kind of instability have recently appeared in a handful of books that argue for the possibility of living as "Korean-Japanese," that is, as naturalized Japanese nationals who maintain a Korean ethnic identity. Increasing discussion among Koreans in Japan has been devoted to the issue of Japanese-national ethnic Koreans since the late 1980s (Park 1999: 81-87), but the positive advocacy of naturalization must be seen as a newly emergent position.

These books, the last three of which I will discuss in substance, include such titles as:

(1) *For Nobody but Myself: Living as a Korean-Japanese* (Kankoku-kei Nihonjin), 1996, by Kaneko Hiroshi.

(2) *A Resident Korean Who Wants to Become Japanese* (Nihonjin ni naritai zaiNichi Kankokujin), 2000, by Iwamoto Mitsuo, also known as I In-shik.

(3) *The Fourth Choice: Korean–Japanese ? The Lifestyle and Nationality of the Six Million Ethnic Koreans Around the World*, 2001, by Kawa Heigyoku.

(4) *The Final Chapter of “ZaiNichi,”* 2001, by Tei Tai-kin, otherwise known as Chung Daekyung.

(5) And a work by a Korean journalist, Chi Tong-wook, entitled *Quit Being ZaiNichi* (ZaiNichi wo yamenasai), 1997.

One thing that is noteworthy about these books is use of the term, “Korean–Japanese,” or “Kankoku–kei Nihonjin.” The prevalent term for naturalized Koreans has been some variant of the phrase, “Nihon kokuseki wo shutoku shita Kankoku–Chosenjin,” a locution meaning “Koreans who have acquired Japanese nationality.” “Korean–Japanese” is thus a recent coinage, and does some powerful conceptual work. The term “Japanese” or “Nihonjin” is widely understood as a descent–based ethnic category. To modify it with another descent–based ethnic qualifier is, in common–sense terms, to create an oxymoron. Going against the grain of this common sense, the term “Kankoku–kei Nihonjin” displaces the descent–based ethnic core of the term “Japanese,” leaving the concept as a civil–political shell which can just as well be filled with Korean ethnicity.

And this is what is at the core of the argument in some of these books: That the acquisition of Japanese nationality does not necessarily mean the abandonment of a sense of Koreanness, of pride in Korean heritage. This is what Kawa deems “the fourth way” : Not repatriatism, not living as a “zaiNichi” foreign resident, and not rejecting ethnic heritage through a process of assimilation and naturalization involving complete absorption into a “mono–ethnic Japan.” The “fourth choice,” rather, is the acquisition of full civic–political membership in the Japanese polity through the acquisition of Japanese nationality, while maintaining a pride in Korean heritage, including the display of one’s Korean heritage through the use of ethnic names.

In arguing that “Koreanness” can be preserved even with the acquisition of non–Korean nationality, two of the authors ? Kawa in the

major portion of his work, and Chi in part of a chapter ? describe what Koreans residing outside of Korea are doing in terms of nationality. In overwhelming numbers, they are taking up the nationality of the country in which they reside. In this context, zaiNichi are depicted as the exception within the normative behavior of ethnic Koreans living outside of the homeland. From this perspective, there is nothing “un-Korean” about taking up non-Korean nationality. In fact, Kawa explains, in a law passed in the Republic of Korea in 1999 concerning the treatment of overseas Koreans, ethnic Koreans who have taken up non-Korean nationality are fully recognized. Naturalization is thus presented as a legitimate, logical, even “natural” choice for Koreans pursuing their lives outside of Korea.

Chung, the author of *The Final Chapter of ZaiNichi* (*ZaiNichi Kankokujin no Shuen*), both predicts and advocates an end to “zaiNichi” as a kind of liminal, unstable category embodying a contradiction between formal, legal affiliation with the Republic of Korea and emotional attachments and identifications defined by settlement in Japan. Living this contradiction, Chung asserts, has made zaiNichi into a kind of existence “which they cannot explain to themselves” (2001: 8). Their sense of themselves as Koreans or as foreigners is weak, leaving them as “Koreans on paper” only (*ibid.*: 15). Echoing Kawa and Chi, Chung argues that the only solution to these contradictions is to adjust formal affiliation to the facts of residence and emotional attachment, that is, to take Japanese nationality (*ibid.*: 56–58).

In advocating this kind of adjustment, all three of these authors rebut the argument that acquiring Japanese nationality is tantamount to abandonment of ethnic sentiments and absorption into a mono-ethnic Japan. To the contrary. Chung, for instance, asserts that “the birth of Korean–Japanese” (*Korian-kei Nihonjin*) will be a “turning point” in the development of a “multidimensional Japan” (*ibid.*: 5). Kawa holds that Koreans acquiring Japanese nationality while maintaining pride in their Korean heritage, including the use of ethnic names, will be part of Japan’s transition to a “multiethnic society of living together” (*taminzoku kyosei shakai*) (2001: 329–330). Chi is rooting for zaiNichi Koreans to give up their zaiNichi position to become “Korean–Japanese” (*Korian-Japanizu*), and to be the “most cosmopolitan” of Japanese, to be the supreme Japanese “internationalists” (*kokusaijin*) (Chi 1997: 210–211).

The central task that each of these authors sets for himself is to pry apart the descent-based notions of ethnonational affiliation and the civil-

political aspects of nationality that have heretofore been virtually indivisible in the definition of “Japanese.” It is this delinking that creates the possibility of acquiring Japanese nationality while maintaining positive ties to one’s heritage and one’s co-ethnics.

## Conclusions

While the authors of the books discussed above are engaged in polemical argument, Kaneshiro Kazuki, on the other hand, in *GO*, has depicted a world, based in experience, through narrative art. Chi, Chung and Kawa argue expressly in support of acquisition of Japanese nationality by foreign national zaiNichi Koreans in Japan. Kaneshiro, at the stage in his coming-of-age story depicted in *GO*, has only felt the constraints of nationality as an imposed label. In struggling to escape from the "Chosen," "Kankoku" and "zaiNichi" labels that mark him as "Other" vis-a-vis Japanese society, he also works to undermine the stability of the nationality concept itself. What Kaneshiro (along with Sugihara) shares with the other authors is a skepticism toward common-sense assumptions of the "natural" isomorphism of nationality, heritage, language and culture. For all of these authors, nationality becomes a matter of strategic positioning.

As recent works by Lie (2001), Morris-Suzuki (1996), Oguma (1998, 2002) and others have pointed out, the boundaries of “the Japanese,” ways of conceptualizing Japaneseness and criteria for belonging in Japanese society are not fixed and stable, but respond to internal and external dynamics. It would be wise to assume that they will continue to change.

There has been an informing reciprocity between changes within the Korean community in Japan and changes within Japanese society as a whole. As Japanese society begins, tentatively, to offer a “third way” of dealing with difference, that is, not exclusion and not erasure through assimilation, but positive recognition and acceptance of difference, those of Korean background are more able to carry the Korean elements of their identity, and to express them, as they move across boundaries of formal political affiliation. But this is occurring, as Chung is at pains to point out, as generational processes of assimilation have left the Korean cultural content in the lives of most Koreans in Japan and concrete connections to the homeland ever more attenuated.

Sugihara, in his rejection of the labels that Japanese society has imposed upon him to maintain its nation-oriented social order, draws attention to the question of "what is a Korean?" after three to four generations of settlement in Japan. His position as one who shares native Japanese cultural competence also enables him to question "what is a Japanese?" Kaneshiro describes himself as "Korean-Japanese," even while maintaining ROK nationality. This recently coined compound category, represents a challenge to the heretofore dominant definitions of both "Korean" and "Japanese." Similarly, the position of the other authors discussed above that one can be "Nihonjin" through acquisition of Japanese nationality without abandoning a sense of a heritage rooted in Korea reveal, minimally, that a shift has taken place among some Koreans in terms of their conceptualization of belonging.

What is less noticeable is any significant shift among ethnic Japanese in their sense of "Nihonjin" as an exclusive, descent-based category. While the recently developed civic ideology of "multicultural living together" (*tabunka kyosei*) makes explicit a new sense that Japanese share their society with non-Japanese, it does little to challenge the ethnic Japanese understanding of what constitutes the category of "Nihonjin." Perhaps such a shift in social categories and boundaries will come through the concrete interaction with people who call themselves "Korean-Japanese."

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