

# Zainichi Literature

Japanese Writings by Ethnic Koreans



Edited by John Lie

TRANSNATIONAL KOREA 3

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*Zainichi Literature: Japanese Writings by Ethnic Koreans*

John Lie, editor

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**Institute of  
East Asian Studies**  
University of California, Berkeley

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# Preface

Zainichi (diasporic Koreans in Japan) writings contain signal achievements, but they are virtually unknown outside Japan, and, to a lesser extent, the two Koreas. Melissa L. Wender's pioneering anthology in English, *Into the Light* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), remains a beacon; I can only hope that others will follow this modest collection of translated pieces in order to illuminate the sea of variegated—searing and shattering—works that should be better known. There is something remarkable in the vast corpus of Zainichi literature, and it's a pity that it has fallen between the proverbial stacks of nationalist literary scholarship.

This collection is the outcome of two workshops held at the University of California, Berkeley. In organizing the workshop and making this volume possible, I would like to thank Dylan Davis, Stephanie Kim, Laura Nelson, Kate Chouta, and the staff of the Center for Korean Studies and the Institute of East Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. This work was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies [KSPS] Grant funded by the Korean Government [MOE] [AKS-2012-BAA-2102]. Thanks also to Kiri Lee, Christopher D. Scott, and Melissa L. Wender who participated in one or both workshops but were unable to contribute to this volume.

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**Nayoung Aimee Kwon** is an associate professor of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, the Program in the Arts of the Moving Image, and the Program in Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies at Duke University. Her publications include *Intimate Empire: Collaboration and Colonial Modernity in Korea and Japan* (Duke University Press, forthcoming in Korean from Somyŏng Press) and a coedited volume *Transcolonial Film Coproductions in the Japanese Empire: Antinomies in the Colonial Archive*. She is currently translating Kim Saryang's works into English and editing a transnational volume of critical works about his legacy.

**John Lie** teaches social theory at the University of California, Berkeley. He has written *Multiethnic Japan* (Harvard University Press, 2001) and *Zainichi (Koreans in Japan): Diasporic Nationalism and Postcolonial Identity* (University of California Press, 2008).

**Youngmi Lim** is an associate professor of sociology at Musashi University, Tokyo. She received her PhD in sociology from the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center and has taught at various CUNY campuses for ten years. She is currently writing a book on Japanese and Zainichi intermarriages.

**Samuel Perry** is an associate professor of East Asian studies at Brown University. His research brings together the fields of modern literature, translation, and cultural history as he seeks to understand the strategies by which marginalized people have contested dominant cultures in East Asia. His published work includes *Recasting Red Culture in Proletarian Japan: Childhood, Korea, and the Historical Avant-Garde* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), and two books of translation from Korean and Japanese, *From Wōnso Pond* by Kang Kyōng-ae (Feminist Press, 2009) and *Five Faces of Japanese Feminism: Crimson and Other Works* by Sata Ineko (University of Hawai'i Press, 2016). He is currently writing a monograph about Japanese literature at the time of the Korean War and translating a collection of queer Korean literature.

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**Christina Yi** is an assistant professor of modern Japanese literature at the University of British Columbia. She received her PhD in modern Japanese literature from Columbia University. In 2011, she was awarded the William F. Sibley Memorial Translation Prize for her translation of Kim Saryang's "Pegasus" (Tenma). Her research focuses on the rise of Japanese-language literature by Korean colonial subjects during the 1930s and 1940s and its subsequent effect on discourse regarding "national" and "ethnic minority" literature in postwar Japan and Korea.

# Introduction

JOHN LIE

In 1972 Lee Hoesung (Ri Kaisei) won the Akutagawa Prize, the most prestigious literary award in Japan.<sup>1</sup> The event inaugurated a Zainichi Korean literature boom in Japan.<sup>2</sup> Not only were pioneering Zainichi authors such as Kim Saryang (Kin Shiryō) and Kim Talsu republished and reread, but Lee and his peers also received renewed attention from the Japanese literary world (*bundan*).<sup>3</sup> Although it is problematic to equate prestigious awards with literary influence or even greatness, it is nevertheless striking

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<sup>1</sup> Transliteration encapsulates the divides and confusions of Zainichi life. In the colonial period and thereafter, many ethnic Koreans living in the Japanese archipelago adopted Japanese pseudonyms. Even when they retained their Korean names, they employed the Japanese pronunciation: hence, Kin Shiryō rather than Kim Saryang. The problem runs deeper, however. A very common surname, usually rendered as Lee in English, is pronounced *Yi* in southern Korea, whence most Zainichi hailed, and *Ri* in northern Korea. Because of the lingering awareness that the proper (or the received Chinese) pronunciation is Lee or Ri, most educated Koreans sought to transliterate it into English as Lee or Ri (or Rhee as in the case of the first president of South Korea, Syngman Rhee, or Lie as in the case of my father). The most common South Korean transliteration is Lee, whereas that of North Korea is Ri. Furthermore, many Zainichi employ Japanese phonetics even when they speak Korean. That is, Kim Saryang in Zainichi Korean would be Kim Saryan. Given that Kim Saryang wrote and lived as Kin Shiryō when he wrote his Japanese-language texts, the historically accurate rendering should probably be Kin Shiryō rather than Kim Saryang. Given the strength of nationalist, anti-, or postcolonial convictions, however, contemporary scholars, whether in Japan or the United States, use the Korean rendering.

<sup>2</sup> Zainichi, which means “residing in Japan,” does not necessarily refer to ethnic or diasporic Koreans; one may be Zainichi American or Zainichi Chinese. Here I use the term *Zainichi* as a common referent to a demographic group: postcolonial ethnic or diasporic Koreans in Japan.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Shiraiishi Shōgo, “‘Zainichi’ bungaku nijūnen no inshō,” *Kikan seikyū* 1 (1989). There was another boom of sorts around 1940 after two Zainichi writers were nominated for the Akutagawa Prize. *Bundan* is a term often employed in modern Japanese cultural life, denoting a central stage for authors, critics, and publishers, who in turn constitute a concentrated and overlapping web of relations. An influential account is Itō Sei, *Nihon bundanshi*, 18 vols. (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1954–1973).



that Zainichi writers have proceeded to win the Akutagawa Prize on several occasions: Lee Yangji in 1988, Yū Miri in 1996, and Gen Getsu in 1999. Needless to say, the list omits several others whose claim to literary eminence would be difficult to deny, including Kim Talsu, Kim Sokpom (Kin Sekihan), Kin Kakuei, and Sagisawa Megumu. If we turn to the Naoki Prize, geared toward popular works of fiction, we also find a series of Zainichi recipients: Tachihara Masaaki in 1966, Tsuka Kōhei in 1981, Ijūin Shizuka in 1992, and Kaneshiro Kazuki in 2000. Given that no estimate of the Zainichi population exceeds 1 percent of the total population of Japan, it would appear that Zainichi are overrepresented in the top echelon of the literary world.<sup>4</sup>

The accounting exercise suggests that Zainichi literature has a *prima facie* claim to the attention of Japanese literature aficionados and scholars.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, the secondary literature in Japanese is immense. Save perhaps for a recent surge of interest among South Korean scholars, however, there is nary any recognition of Zainichi literary achievements, perhaps even its very existence, elsewhere. It is a pity, as the body of work in and of itself continues to have literary significance, because it is an exceedingly interesting instance of diasporic literature: a phenomenon of world literature that is of great and growing interest to readers and critics. This book seeks to redress the neglect.<sup>6</sup>

This introductory essay provides a conspectus of Zainichi literature—serving as something of a truncated Zainichi literary history—and queries in particular its shifting and conflicting boundaries. Classification of Zainichiness and Zainichi literature raises the inevitable question of belonging and identity. It may very well be that these sociological considerations pollute and pervert the purity of literature—though very few have claimed that literature has no ethnonational boundaries given the inevitable importance of language—but we cannot bypass them when the very definition of a literary genre is sociological, not literary, in character.

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<sup>4</sup> The same generalization can be made for other spheres of culture and entertainment, including music and movies. A proximate reason is the manifold obstacles toward professional and other prestigious employment in postwar Japan.

<sup>5</sup> There is a question as to whether Korean-language writings by Zainichi writers should be included in the study of Zainichi literature. The short answer, argued cogently by Song Hyewon, is affirmative (“*Zainichi Chōsenjin bungagushi no tame ni* [Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2014]). It is also possible to expand the ambit of Japanese literature to include works in non-Japanese languages, most obviously Ainu, Okinawan, Korean, Chinese, and English. Needless to say, as of the late 2010s, such a perspective would be a minority view.

<sup>6</sup> For a pioneering anthology of Zainichi literature in English, see Melissa L. Wender, ed., *Into the Light* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2010).

ONE

## Two Essays: “Letter to Mother” and “Colonial Koreans and Peninsulars”

KIM SARYANG

*Translated with an introduction by Nayoung Aimee Kwon*

Kim Saryang (1914–1950; Jp. Kin Shiryō) is a remarkable bilingual writer who came of age in colonial Korea at the height of the Japanese Empire. Like many of his intellectual counterparts from the colonies, he went to Tokyo to be educated in the colonial education system. He rose to the limelight of the Japanese literary establishment as a young man and was even nominated for the prestigious Akutagawa Prize. “Letter to Mother” is a pseudo-autobiographical snapshot of this experience in the epistolary form. It was written in Japanese and published in the journal *Bungei shuto* (Literary capital) in March 1940, and then reprinted in *The Complete Works of Kim Saryang* (*Kin Shiryō zenshū*, 1972–1973). We do not know whether it was an actual letter Kim wrote to his own mother or if it was performatively written for the Japanese reading public. The indeterminacy of its “authenticity” raises important questions about the colonized bilingual writer’s predicament of writing for multiple audiences in the empire. The final line, which asks “Mother” to have his little sister translate the letter into Korean so that she can read it, exposes the gap between the sender and the receiver, the writer and his mother tongue, as well as the gendered and generational untranslatability produced in the colonial divide.

The second essay, “Colonial Koreans and Peninsulars” (*Chōsenjin and Hantōjin*), also written in Japanese and published in *Sin fūdo* (New climate), is Kim’s musings on the issue of naming and labeling the racialized Other among us. Coursing through this essay is a question: how do subjects, especially colonized or racialized subjects, negotiate the ways in which they are being named by a racialized society? The essay embodies an uncanny coexistence of contending emotions and rhetorical devices: it appears to be both a powerful indictment of a racist Japanese society and a

TWO

## Trash

KIM TALSU

*Translated with an introduction by Christina Yi*

Kim Talsu (1919–1997; Jp. Kimu Darusu or Kin Tatsuju) is widely recognized as one of the most prominent Zainichi Korean writers of his generation. Born in Korea but raised primarily in Japan, Kim remained in Japan after the end of the Fifteen Year War (1931–1945) and became heavily involved in leftist politics and literary culture there. Much of his early fiction, including the short story translated here, celebrated the end of the Japanese Empire while also attempting to come to terms with its enduring legacies. Indeed, throughout his writing career Kim would consistently call attention to the impossibility of fully separating the colonial past from a “post”(colonial/war) present, particularly given the neocolonial configurations that emerged through the partitioning of the Korean peninsula and Allied Occupation of Japan (1945–1952).

Kim first published “Trash” (Gomi) in the Japanese literary coterie journal *Bungei shuto* (Literary capital) in 1942 as a short, humorous sketch about a Korean colonial subject making his living in mainland Japan as a scrap collector. He later revised and republished the story in 1947 in the journal *Minshu Chōsen* (Democratic Korea), of which Kim was also the primary editor and cofounder. The revised edition featured a more nuanced portrait of the central protagonist and his relationship with the other Korean characters who populate the story. It also foregrounded the oppressiveness of the wartime climate, turning the narrative into a critical exploration of the imbrications of Japanese imperialism and capitalism. Although the Korean protagonist of “Trash” works hard to turn the junk he collects in metropolitan Japan into capital to be used to buy land in Korea, the narrative constantly underscores the fragile contingency of any “success” gained by working within, rather than without, the systems of imperial control. In the final line of the story, for example, the protagonist yells out “*Aigu!*” The Korean interjection is glossed in that instance as “I’m happy,” even though

THREE

## In Shinjuku

YANG SÖGIL

*Translated with an introduction by Samuel Perry*

Born in Osaka to Korean parents originally from the Korean island of Cheju, Yang Sögil (b. 1936) began writing for the Zainichi poetry journal *Azalea* (*Chindalle*) in his youth before withdrawing from the publishing world for some twenty years. “In Shinjuku” (“Shinjuku nite”) is the first chapter of a longer work called “Aftershocks” (“Yoshin”), which Yang published in 1978 in the journal *Literary Outlook* (*Bungei tenbō*) and later included in his debut collection, *Rhapsody* (*Kyōsōkyoku*, 1981). It appears as a separate story in the 2006 *Anthology of Zainichi Literature*.<sup>1</sup> Several of Yang’s later works have been adapted as films, including most famously the semiautobiographical *Blood and Bones* (*Chi to hone*, 2004).

One partial English translation of “In Shinjuku” ends up excising almost all of the passages that deal with the political struggle of the Zainichi community, which is crucial for understanding the key conflicts in Yang’s story. Korea’s experience as a former Japanese colony, as well as the relationship of the Zainichi Korean community to the Japanese Communist Party and to Japanese immigration law, go a long way toward explaining the particular longing for homeland, the seemingly gratuitous violence, and the tortured masculinity that often play an important role in Yang’s works, including this story. The piece opens with a scene that takes place in Tokyo’s red-light district, Kabukichō, located in the heart of Shinjuku.

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<sup>1</sup> “Shinjuku nite,” in “Zainichi” *bungaku zenshū*, ed. Jirō Isogai and Kazuo Kuroko (Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2006), 7:31–41.

FOUR

## Selected Poems from *Nagune Taryong: Eternal Traveler*

LEE JUNGJA

*Translated with an introduction by Haeng-ja Chung*

### Translator's Note

*Nagune Taryong: Eternal Traveler*, published in 1991, is a collection of 390 tanka poems by Lee Jungja, a Japanese-born Korean from the city of Iga in Mie Prefecture.<sup>1</sup> *Nagune* means “traveler,” and *taryong* means “lament” in Korean. Some poems highlight visible and invisible characteristics of law, history, and livelihood in Japan. Others capture the poet’s struggle in the dichotomous framework between Korea and Japan or between the generation gaps imposed on her. Some poems show her attempt to transcend such contradictions, and others express the moments of joy in between. Due to space constraints, only selected poems are translated here.

A Japanese tanka poem consists of upper phrases (five syllables, seven syllables, five syllables) and lower phrases (seven syllables, seven syllables). This succinct format, like that of *haiku* poems, may allow multiple interpretations, and I often had to choose one among many possibilities. I placed my translation along each original poem, so that readers may entertain their own interpretations. My translation tries to represent the tanka style by dividing each poem into five lines, although in the original each poem is printed vertically in a single line. It is a challenge to convey the possible meanings of a poem or the intention of a poet while retaining the effects of this particular format and sounds.

I used lowercase throughout the translations to show the nuances of the original poems. For example, in tanka, the subject *I* is often assumed or suggested. However, in English translation, it is hard to omit the subject.

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<sup>1</sup> See Lee Jungja 李正子, *Nagune Taryong: Eternal Traveler* ナグネタリヨン:永遠の旅人 (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 1991).

## FIVE

# Lee-kun's Blues

WON SOO-IL

*Translated with an introduction by Nathaniel Heneghan*

"Lee-kun's Blues" ("Ri-kun no yūtsu") was published in 1987 as part of Won Soo-il's debut short story collection *Ikaino Story—The Women from Cheju* (*Ikaino monogatari—Chejudo kara kita onnatachi*). Won has since produced two immensely entertaining and idiosyncratic novels, *AV Odyssey* (1997) and *All Night Blues* (2004), as well as a compilation of anecdotes about his mother's struggles to raise a family as a Korean immigrant in Osaka, *Ikaino Tallyon* (2016). Not particularly well-known or prolific, Won thus exists as a minor author of "minor literature." Perhaps more so than any other Zainichi Korean author, however, Won's works exhibit a single-minded commitment to the documentation of the cultural space of Ikaino, Osaka's Korean ethnic enclave, and its formative position in the Zainichi collective imagination. This is most evident in "Lee-kun's Blues," wherein the titular protagonist posits Ikaino as the true "hometown" of the young generation of Zainichi Koreans for whom Cheju Island exists not "as a place to call 'home'; it was only a place to visit." Ikaino, in the mind of Lee, constitutes a unique syncretic space that is neither Korea nor Japan, but is made of cultural fragments of both, emblematic of the increasing hybridization and decenteredness of Zainichi Korean identity in general.

Readers familiar with the Zainichi canon will note more than a passing resemblance to Kim Sa-ryang's important prewar work "Hikari no naka ni" (Into the light, 1939). Both stories feature young Korean teachers—Kim's at a primary school and Won's at one of the ubiquitous cram schools—who conceal their ethnic identity by working under a *tsūmei* (Japanese assumed name) but whose ambivalence about this act is amplified by an encounter with a fellow Korean student. Knowing Won's keen awareness of his position in the Zainichi literary tradition, this allusion is clearly intentional. As a fictional work, Won's story is remarkable in that it is both reflective and prescient, linking the protagonist's crisis with the struggles of the prewar

## Selected Poems from *I Am Twelve*

OKA MASAFUMI

*Translated with an introduction by Youngmi Lim*

The poems of Oka Masafumi (1962–1974) were published posthumously by his parents, Ko Sa-myeong (Kō Shimei) and Oka Yuriko. One summer evening on his way home from school, Oka Masafumi threw himself from a high-rise apartment complex in his neighborhood. He was just twelve years and nine months old when he killed himself, leaving behind only a notebook of poems. At the time of Masafumi’s death, Ko had just launched his professional writing career with the award-winning publication of his autobiography *What “To Live” Means* (生きることの意味). As Ko recalled, “Masafumi’s death was about half a year after I published *What “To Live” Means*. I had been looking into the bitterness of life, delving into some thoughts about what makes life worthy of pursuing in spite of that bitterness, which I finally put together in a book titled *What “To Live” Means*. If this is what irony in life means, what could be a more cruel irony than this?”<sup>1</sup>

Masafumi’s parents met through their involvement in the Japanese Communist Party and faced the challenges involved in a cross-national relationship. Ko, inspired to become a writer at the time of his marriage to Yuriko, grew up in Japan but was of colonial Korean descent. Yuriko graduated from college in an era when only a handful of women did so and became a full-time teacher. At the beginning of their marriage, they were mostly dependent on Yuriko’s salary.

Masafumi was born seven years after his parents’ marriage. Initially, the couple was hesitant to raise a child while still trying to come to terms with

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I thank James M. Raeside, Rie Sauté, and anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions, and John Lie for making this project and related workshops possible.

<sup>1</sup> Ko Sa-myeong, “A Postscript,” in Oka Masafumi, *I Am Twelve*, new ed., edited by Ko Sa-myeong and Oka Yuriko (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1985), 177–195.

SEVEN

## Specimens of Families

YŪ MIRI

*Translated with an introduction by Abbie (Miyabi) Yamamoto*

Yū Miri (b. 1968) is one of the most prolific and commercially successful writers in contemporary Japan, and has authored novels, plays, and essays. She debuted as a playwright in 1988 and received the prestigious Kishida Drama Prize in 1992 with *Uo no matsuri* (Festival for the fish). In 1997, she received the significant Akutagawa Prize with *Kazoku shinema* (Family cinema) and has continued to win many prizes and awards for both her scripts and prose.

Much of her writing is often perceived to be autobiographical or at least factually based. This perception is supported by the similarities between her essays (presumed to be factual) and novels. That she was sued for invading the privacy of a woman who claimed to be the model of the protagonist of her first novel, *Ishi ni oyogu sakana* (The fish that swims in the stone; 1994), only further justifies this view. These presumptions, however, have been challenged by some critics who, among other things, point to Yū's comments where she revealed that her essays are a place for her to develop ideas for fiction rather than to record factual events.<sup>1</sup>

Thematically, Yū's writings often revolve around families and, in particular, dysfunctional family relations. She is unusual among Zainichi Korean writers who publish under an obviously Korean name in that she has not published many works focused on explicitly Zainichi Korean issues, such as citizenship, history, the Korean peninsula, and border-crossing. Since she gave birth in 2000, however, these themes have grown in centrality within her corpus of work.

Her literary style is sharp, elegant, and realistic. She is a writer who is able to inscribe her narratives with the subtle details that infuse them with

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this view, see Nagaoka Morito, *Yū Miri "Yū Miri" to iu monogatari* [The story called "Yū Miri" by Yū Miri] (Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2009).



## APPENDIX

# Zainichi Recognition: Kin Kakuei in the 1960s

JOHN LIE

In virtually every considered reflection on Zainichi literature, the year zero is the end of colonial rule. First-generation ethnic Koreans, especially those who arrived in the Japanese archipelago as children, began to publish energetically during the colonial period. Again, it would be misleading to insist on the fundamental discontinuity before and after 1945, but post-Liberation Zainichi writings had several notable characteristics. Most importantly, they were part and parcel of the heroic and epic aesthetics of socialist realism.<sup>1</sup> Almost all ethnic Koreans who remained in Japan became aligned with North Korea, whether because of its political legitimacy as an anticolonial force or its substantive efforts to provide ethnic education and livelihood assistance. As I noted in the introduction to this volume, ethnic Korean writings in Japanese for the first two decades after 1945 featured socialist-realist works of heroic struggles, frequently in Manchuria and elsewhere in continental Asia. These works have been largely forgotten, and are rarely now included in the canon of Zainichi literature. It is worth stressing that a considerable body of ethnic Koreans writings in Korean—both before and after Liberation—has been largely neglected and unfortunately lies outside the purview of this volume.

What remains from the early post-World War II decades are Zainichi writers who sought to portray the conflicts, both geopolitical and interpersonal, of postcolonial subjects. The division of Korea, embedded in turn

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<sup>1</sup> The immediate post-1945 years recapitulated the dominance of proletarian literature in the 1920s and 1930s. In both time periods, we can observe the primacy of politics and the model of socialist literature based on the Soviet example. On the Russian model, see, e.g., Edward J. Brown, *Russian Literature since Revolution*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), and Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000). In this regard, there is something of a family resemblance between North Korean literature and Zainichi literature in the 1950s and 1960s.