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THE FUTURE OF ZAINICHI KOREAN SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS IN JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

The Zainichi Korean community of Japan, made up of the descendants of colonial era Korean migrants to Japan, is today the largest ethnic minority in Japan. By first looking at Japanese-Korean relations, with a focus on the modern era, I will show how many Koreans came to Japan for economic and educational reasons, and how this group of migrants formed the basis for today's Zainichi community. The socio-political organizations the Zainichi Koreans formed in the aftermath of World War II, the South Korea-affiliated Mindan and the North Korea-affiliated Chongryun, have had a lasting impact on the Zainichi community, and I will overview these organizations' history and their current status. I will argue that only Mindan will survive and that due to a number of factors Chongryun will disappear; however, I will also argue that given the increasingly Japanese identification of many Zainichi Koreans, as evidenced by increasing naturalization and intermarriage rates with ethnic Japanese, Zainichi socio-political organizations themselves are beginning to become irrelevant.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Japan and Korea have a richly intertwined history that goes back thousands of years, and was first recorded in the 3rd century Chinese text *The Three Kingdoms: Wei Chronicles*. From the very beginning of human settlement in the Korean peninsula and in the islands of Japan there has been much cultural interchange and population flow between the two places, and modern Korean and Japanese cultures share many similarities. However, Japanese-Korean relations have often been marked by violence, especially since the late 16th century. The Japanese invasions from 1592-1598 led by Toyotomi Hideyoshi had a disastrous impact on life in pre-modern Korea, with much undue suffering, death, and economic destruction, and in the more recent modern period, Japan was the first country in East Asia to industrialize, and it occupied and colonized Korea from 1905 to 1945 (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*). Japan's colonization of Korea proved to be a double-edged sword: Japanese infrastructural changes in Korea, such as the development of railroads and initiation of comprehensive land surveys, lifted Korea from agricultural feudalism, but at the same time Koreans were subject to extremely prejudicial and discriminatory laws. In the later period of Japanese colonial rule during the 1930s-1940s, Japan attempted to assimilate Korea into its empire through extinguishing Korean language, culture, and ethnic identity. The occupation of Korea led many Koreans to move to a wealthier Japan to earn higher wages or receive an education, and this group of Korean migrants forms the basis of the Korean community living in

Japan today (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*). The Koreans that migrated and settled in Japan during the colonial period are collectively known as "Zainichi" Koreans, Zainichi meaning "staying in Japan temporarily" in Japanese (Suzuki, *Koreans in Japan*). There have been varying levels of assimilation of the Zainichi Korean community into Japanese society based on a number of factors, including political affiliation and socio-economic status, and through looking at past and current demographic and social trends within the Korean community, based on political group identity, levels of intermarriage, and changes in nationality, predictions for the future of the Zainichi community can be made; particularly, I will argue that the South Korean-affiliated socio-political organization Mindan will outlast the North Korean-affiliated organization Chongryun, but that with the increasing assimilation of Zainichi Koreans into Japanese society, such ethnic organizations are becoming increasingly irrelevant.

I will split my analysis of the Zainichi community into three sections: in the first, I will briefly overview Japanese-Korean relations, beginning with Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasions of Korea in the late 16th century. I will more closely focus on Japanese-Korean relations in the modern era, starting in the late 19th century, and will show that through a series of treaties Japan was gradually able to encroach on Korean sovereignty. Beginning in 1910 Japan colonized Korea, and there were three eras of colonial rule in Korea: the military rule of the first decade, the relatively liberal period of the 1920s, and the war mobilization effort of the 1930s-1940s. The Zainichi Korean community was formed during the colonial period, and so an understanding of Japanese-Korean relations in the modern era is necessary for understanding how and why Koreans migrated to Japan.

In my second and third sections I will focus on the two socio-political organizations that Zainichi Koreans formed to organize the community. In my second section I will discuss the history of the North Korean-affiliated organization Chongryun, its impact on the Zainichi community, and the reasons for its decline. In the third section I will discuss the history of the South Korean-affiliated organization Mindan and its continued relevance today.

In my final section I will discuss the Zainichi community today. Particularly, I will present data about Zainichi intermarriage with Japanese people and naturalization (to become a Japanese citizen) to illustrate the high level of Zainichi assimilation into mainstream Japanese society. I will also make comparisons with the Koryo-Saram of Central Asia, another diasporic Korean group, and the Burakumin, another minority group in Japan, to discuss commonalities between the groups. I will conclude by drawing together the data I have amassed on Zainichi assimilation and the earlier analyses I have made of Chongryun and Mindan to predict that only Mindan will survive as a socio-political organizer of the Zainichi community, but that given the high rate of Zainichi assimilation into Japanese society, such groups themselves are becoming irrelevant.

Chapter 2

Modern Japan's Domination of Korea and the Migration of Koreans to Japan

Japanese-Korean history includes periods of both cultural exchange and conflict, though beginning in the 16th century military action and violence became the norm. Famously, the Japanese *daimyo* (territorial lord) Toyotomi Hideyoshi attempted to conquer Ming China (through first invading Korea) between 1592 and 1598, which resulted in much suffering for Koreans due to the ferocity and scale of the invasions (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*, 15). While the campaign was ultimately unsuccessful, many thousands of Koreans died at the hands of Toyotomi's army, and the brutality of the era can still be seen in the erroneously named *Mimizuka*, or "ear mound," located in Kyoto, that contains the severed noses of fallen Korean soldiers -- it is estimated that between 100,000-200,000 such bodily war trophies were brought back to Japan (Swope, *A Dragon's*). Alongside widespread death, many precious Korean artifacts were plundered, and thousands of Korean artisans were kidnapped to Japan (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*, 16). In the aftermath of the attempted invasion, Japanese-Korean relations remained quiet for the next 250 years, and the current Zainichi Korean community in Japan is a direct result of Japanese-Korean history beginning in the late 19th century.

In this introductory chapter, I sketch out the broad contours of Japanese-Korean relations from the late 18th century, when Japanese powers took a new interest in the Korean peninsula, to 1952, when Japan emerged from its post-war occupation under the victorious Allied powers. This information lays the groundwork for my subsequent chapters, in which Idescribe the development of Zainichi socio-political organizations,

the impact these organizations have had on the Zainichi community, the current state of Zainichi Koreans, and the future of Zainichi socio-political organizations.

In 1868 the Meiji Restoration began in Japan, which brought about many sweeping changes focused on industrialization and modernization, particularly through following Western models (Sako, Steinmetz, *Japanese Family*, 28). In 1876, eight years after the start of the Meiji era, Japan pressured Korea into signing the Treaty of Kanghwa, which is widely regarded as an "unequal treaty," and is similar to the Convention of Kanagawa that Tokugawa era Japan was forced to sign with the United States (Auslin, *Negotiating*). The Treaty of Kanghwa included a clause for extraterritoriality, meaning that Japanese people in Korea were not subject to Korean laws, thereby undermining Korea's sovereignty. In 1895 the Treaty of Shimonoseki ended Korea's tributary relationship with China, which quickly led to further Japanese expansion into Korea (Shin, Robinson, *Colonial*). In 1895 Japanese agents murdered the Korean Empress Myeongseong because she tried to stymie the increasing Japanese influence in Korea, and in 1904 Japan made Korea sign a treaty that opened up the Korean government to Japanese economic and diplomatic advisors (Lee, *Modernity*).

Things began to move quickly after Japan started to infiltrate the Korean government in 1904, and treaties signed in 1905 and 1907 institutionalized the Japanese presence in the Korean government, which further weakened Korean independence and made the Korean government more easily manipulated into adopting a pro-Japanese stance on most issues (Lee, *Modernity*, 24). In 1908 Korea was forced to sign a Protectorate Treaty, and in 1909 the Korea-Japan Memorandum on the Delegation of the

Administration of Courts and Prisons was signed, which fully legally ended Korea's judicial autonomy (Lee, *Modernity*). By 1910, Korea was officially a colony of Japan.

The Japanese colonial rule of Korea can be broken down into three main periods: the *budan seiji*, or military rule of the first decade, the *bunka seiji*, or more inclusive cultural period of the 1920s, and the war mobilization effort of the 1930s-1940s (Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism*, 4). The military rule of the first decade of colonialism was harsh, but it laid the groundwork for a modernized Korean economy; during this period Korea underwent numerous infrastructural changes, such as the development of railroads and improved roads. Japan meant to exploit Korea economically, and the General Government of Korea (GGK) led an enormous land survey project, which resulted in many Japanese gaining ownership of Korean lands (Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism*, 40). The decade of military rule also stifled Korean cultural development, and Korean intellectuals who opposed the colonial government received exceedingly strict punishments, including imprisonment, for disagreeing with Japanese policy (Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism*). The mixture of an increasingly mobile Korean population, thanks to the introduction of railroads and better transportation, combined with repressive cultural policies, brought about widespread protests against Japanese rule, which culminated in the massive March First Movement of 1919. The March First demonstrations, which were attended by as many as one million people, convinced the Japanese colonial government that a different policy in Korea had to be enacted in order to keep the colony stable and economically useful (Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism*, 44).

The colonial government thus decided to pursue a less militaristic approach in dealing with Korea, which brought about the *bunka seiji* age of comparative freedom.

The less restrictive policies of the 1920s gave rise to a flourishing cultural scene in which the Japanese censorship of the Korean press was loosened, and in which Korean intellectuals were more freely able to voice their opinions. The comparative freedom of the age inspired thousands of Koreans to go to Japan, and these first migrants ultimately formed the basis for today's Zainichi community. The impoverishment of southern Korea combined with the dramatic expansion of Japanese industry tempted many migrants to leave their lives behind in Korea to pursue higher wages in Japan; since the majority of Korean migrants to Japan were unskilled laborers, they generally competed with the poorest classes in Japan (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*, 35).

The Korean students and laborers who went to Japan in the 1920s were able to find work or an education where none existed in Korea, but they were subject to and victims of large-scale social prejudice. The Japanese press "characterized (Korean laborers) not only as rebellious and unruly but also as devoid of a sense of responsibility and less efficient in comparison with Japanese workers (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*, 40)," and Koreans were often unable to speak or read Japanese, which led to further alienation and hostility.

Violence against Koreans was not uncommon, and following the Kanto Earthquake of 1923, pogroms against Koreans occurred in Tokyo. Rumors spread that Koreans set fires or poisoned wells, and in the disastrous aftermath of the earthquake, Koreans were rounded up and executed (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*). Clearly, the massacre of Koreans solely because of their ethnic identity smacks of discrimination and prejudice, but nonetheless, Koreans continued to migrate to Japan in search of work and higher wages, and Japanese capitalists wanted the cheap labor the Koreans provided.

The Korean migrants in Japan began to move into segregated slums, often very close to their workplaces, due to discrimination in housing and often unstable job situations (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*, 44). The Koreans' homes were typically hastily constructed and of poor quality, and this helped give rise to stereotypes in Japan about Koreans being dangerous or dirty, even though it was due to prejudices in Japanese society that forced Koreans to live in these immigrant ghettos in the first place. These ethnic neighborhoods, known as Koreatowns, found in many large cities in Japan, were integral for the formation of a cohesive Zainichi community and still remain important today.

Following the steady stream of voluntary migrants who arrived in Japan during the 1920s, and who make up most of Japan's Zainichi Korean community today, the National Manpower Mobilization Act of 1939 involuntarily brought many hundreds of thousands of Koreans to Japan to aid the war effort (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*, 52). This change from voluntary to forced migration highlights the pronounced power imbalance between Koreans and Japanese during the World War II era, and is indicative of the third period of colonial rule in Korea that centered on Japanese nationalism, the expansion of the Japanese empire, and the suppression of Korean culture. Beginning in the 1930s, Koreans were subject to a number of policies intended to assimilate them into Japanese culture, including the forced adoption of Japanese names, mandated worship at Shinto shrines, and compulsory use of the Japanese language instead of Korean (Ember, Ember, Skoggard, *Koreans in Japan*). These rights violations that intended to wipe out Korean culture were combined with other more egregious policies, such as the sexual enslavement of around 100,000 Korean women, known as "comfort women," who were

forced into providing sex for the Japanese military (Mundy, *South Korea*). During the war period around 822,000 Koreans were forcibly brought to Japan, although most of the forced laborers ultimately decided to repatriate to Korea at the war's end, as they lacked the connections of the earlier migrants (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*, 53). After Japan surrendered in 1945, nearly 640,000 Koreans repatriated back to Korea, and the Korean community in Japan was much reduced in size (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*, 59).

As this necessarily broad survey indicates, Japanese-Korean relations between 1868 and 1952 were characterized by 3 key factors. First, there was a distinct lack of respect for Korean sovereignty by the Japanese, as shown by the annexation and colonization of Korea. Second, Korean culture was derided and considered inferior by the Japanese colonial government, and third, Koreans themselves were not treated as equals by the Japanese colonists, as shown by the number of Korean laborers taken involuntarily to Japan. Taken cumulatively, these factors show that the Japanese-Korean relationship in 1952, leading into the period I will discuss in my upcoming chapters, was strained, and was characterized by a large degree of animosity on both sides.

The injustices experienced by Koreans at the hands of the Japanese between 1868 and 1952 still influence the Zainichi community today. The Japanese intent to erase Korean language and culture during the last 15 years of the colonial era is a major reason why many older Zainichi Koreans insist on maintaining a strong Korean identity and oppose assimilation into mainstream Japanese culture. The unflattering perceptions of Koreans by many Japanese, which were formed during the colonial era, such as stereotypes about Koreans being considered dirty, dangerous, and culturally inferior,

often led to discrimination in postwar Japan against Koreans in housing or job opportunities, and served to segregate the Zainichi community from mainstream society.

Immediately after the end of the Second World War, the Zainichi community organized itself into two separate political organizations, known as Chongryun and Mindan, and these associations have proved to be vital for the maintenance of the community as a whole, for its relationship with the homeland, and for its formation of a unique Zainichi identity. Chongryun and Mindan were also necessary because when the San Francisco Peace Treaty between the United States and Japan took effect in 1952, Zainichi Koreans lost their Japanese nationality, and became stateless (Suzuki, *Koreans in Japan*). The advocacy of both Mindan and Chongryun enabled the Zainichi Koreans to remain in Japan, and the community infrastructure that these socio-political organizations created, such as schools, political programs, and Korean cultural events, continue to exist and remain relevant in the present day as a way for Zainichi Koreans to connect with other members of the community.

Chapter 3

The Chongryun Koreans

In 1945 the Zainichi community in Japan mirrored the division of Korea insofar as there developed two political organizations that Koreans could associate with: Chongryun, or the North Korean affiliated organization, and Mindan, the South Korean affiliated organization. While the majority of Koreans in Japan came from the southern half of the Korean peninsula, many Koreans supported Chongryun's mission of promoting a Korean identity within the context of an equal communist society, and Chongryun's strength in community organization ultimately led to widespread popularity of the organization among the Zainichi Koreans (Ryang, *North Koreans*). Given the recent history of Japan's colonization of Korea and all of the injustices that occurred against Koreans during that time, including the forced migration of Korean laborers to Japan, the tragic story of the thousands of comfort women, and the general attempt to extinguish the Korean language and ethnic identity, the values of socialism and the promotion of a strong Korean identity were understandably attractive to the many impoverished Koreans living in Japan: "Chongryun supplied not only history and teleology but also community and welfare, as should be clear from its cardinal role in finance and education (Lie, *Zainichi*, 43)."

Through Chongryun, many of the Koreans living in Japan adopted North Korean citizenship, and lived in Japan as "overseas nationals" of North Korea even though many of them had been in Japan for years and were originally from the southern part of the

Korean peninsula (Ryang, *North Koreans*). Being a Chongryun member was (and is) not only a political affiliation or simply a declaration of North Korean nationality: Chongryun functions as a whole mini-society within Japan. Alongside coordinating political rallies and study groups, Chongryun also runs schools throughout Japan, up to the university level, and makes the maintenance and promotion of a Korean identity in Japan a top priority (Ryang, *North Koreans*). Chongryun-run banks also lent money to Zainichi in need, as Japanese banks were often reluctant to loan money to Koreans, and this further improved the reputation of the organization (Lie, *Zainichi*, 42).

It may seem paradoxical that an organization sponsored by a communist state was allowed to grow and flourish in Cold War era Japan, since Japan during that time was dominated by American foreign policy and played an important role as a bulwark against the spread of communism in Asia. However, Chongryun declared that it would adhere to Japanese laws and would not meddle in domestic Japanese politics, so the organization was largely left alone by the Japanese state (Ryang, *North Koreans*, 113).

One early development that deeply affected the history of Chongryun was the influx of many Korean refugees to Japan from Cheju Island. Even though Cheju Island is the farthest south territory in Korea (and is therefore located in modern-day South Korea), many Cheju Islanders did not agree with the policies of the South Korean government, and rebelled in what turned out to be one of the most brutal conflicts of the Korean War: around 24% of the entire island's population was killed (60,000 people), and 40,000 refugees fled the island and settled in Japan (Ryang, *North Koreans*, 87). Almost all of the Cheju Islanders who escaped to Japan were not rebels themselves, but civilians escaping the violence that had erupted throughout the island. The Cheju insurgency was

incredibly brutal, and the atrocities that occurred in Cheju convinced many Zainichi Koreans that affiliating with Chongryun (and by extension, North Korea) was the correct choice, due to the extreme brutality of the South Korean soldiers who indiscriminately tortured and killed women, children, and the elderly, and who destroyed more than half of the island's villages (Cumings, *The Korean War: A History*, 130). Given the horrific statistics on civilian death and the overall destruction of the island, it is no surprise that nearly all of the Cheju refugees who escaped to Japan affiliated with Chongryun.

Chongryun continued to grow in size and importance, and beginning in the late 1950s an increasing amount of emphasis was placed on the leader of North Korea, Kim Il-Sung, in Chongryun's publications. Kim Il-Sung was presented as the infallibly wise savior of Korea and resister of Japanese and Western aggression; Chongryun officials used Kim Il-Sung's patriotic image to bolster their claim that they were working altruistically for the glory of the fatherland and had no personal investment in career advancement, and Chongryun as an organization was able to use the deification of Kim Il-Sung to present an image of North Korea as the perfect socialist state to its members (Ryang, *North Koreans*, 102).

During the late 1950s, Chongryun began a campaign to sponsor mass repatriation to North Korea, and thousands of Zainichi Koreans left their lives in Japan to go to Korea. Through the help of the North Korean propaganda machine, Chongryun managed to convince its members that North Korea truly was a socialist paradise, and in an eight year period between1959 to 1967, approximately 82,000 Koreans (and 6,000 Japanese spouses) moved to North Korea (Ryang, *North Koreans*, 113). These migrants often were much wealthier than the average North Korean, and many were at first given positions of

prominence in Pyongyang. The North Korean government strongly encouraged repatriation because its population was smaller than that of South Korea, but also because the technology and skills possessed by the migrants could be used to promote North Korean economic development (Kang, *Ethnic Koreans*, Chosun Ilbo).

The Korean migrants who left Japan for North Korea soon found that the country was far from the paradise it was promoted to be, but due to the fact that North Korea and Japan have no official relations, it was impossible for the repatriates to return to Japan. In the 1960s Chongryun stopped promoting the repatriation campaign, but by that point almost 90,000 people had already left for the North. Many members of Chongryun who were still in Japan had sent children to North Korea, or at least had relatives who repatriated, and the family members still in Japan often had to support their relatives in North Korea by giving material goods and money, due to North Korea's impoverishment.

Despite the fact that many Chongryun members who remained in Japan realized that conditions in North Korea were harsh, many members were so ideologically committed to Chongryun, and considered Chongryun and North Korea to be the savior of Korean dignity, that hardly any defections were made from the organization. While the repatriation campaign was stopped in the late 1960s, propaganda continued to play an important role in Chongryun's schools and organizational functions, with a consistent emphasis placed on an image of North Korea that was distant from reality.

Modern Chongryun

Today, Chongryun has continued to emphasize the importance of maintaining a Korean identity in Japan, despite decreasing connections with Korea and Korean culture among the younger generations of the Zainichi community. While the first generation Korean migrants to Japan all spoke Korean fluently, their children and grandchildren are more comfortable speaking Japanese, due to living in Japan and being immersed in Japanese culture from infancy. Japanese is the dominant language at home, even for Chongryun members who believe in the importance of promoting a Korean identity in the Zainichi community. Chongryun has tried desperately to counter a decreasing level of Korean proficiency in the Zainichi community through running its schools and organizational events entirely in Korean, but the Korean used by Chongryun is limited to a formal register, and cannot keep pace with the use of Japanese (Ryang, *North Koreans*, 44).

North Korea has also gained large amounts of bad press in recent years, particularly because of its shocking human rights violations and its abductions of civilians, including at least a dozen Japanese nationals who were kidnapped during the 1970s and 80s (Watts, *North Korea*, The Guardian). These abductions of Japanese civilians led to a period of close scrutiny of Chongryun by the Japanese media because of Chongryun's close relationship with North Korea, and today Chongryun continues to lose members who choose to send their children to Japanese schools. In the 1970s Chongryun schools had around 46,000 students nationwide, but today the number is only around 15,000, and to make matters worse, North Korea has stopped subsidizing the schools, and

Japan has also refused to give the schools any money (McBride, *Young Zainichi*, Japan Times).

Chongryun is thus losing the people most important for sustaining its organization, and its connections with North Korea, once the reason for the organization's prominence within the Zainichi community, have led to a steady decline in Chongryun's fortunes. North Korean propaganda is another reason why Chongryun has experienced a drop in popularity; the outrageous claims made by the state clearly have no basis in reality, and have served to alienate younger Zainichi Koreans. For instance, Kim Jong-Il's long winded 1993 publication "Abuses of Socialism are Intolerable" proclaims:

> The abuse of power and bureaucracy are products of the anti-socialist idea and expressions of anti-socialist methods. If the mass line is implemented thoroughly under the correct leadership of the working-class party in socialist society so that the popular masses occupy the position of masters of the state and society and play their role as such to the full, it is possible to eliminate the abuse of power and bureaucracy. (Kim, *Abuses*, 11)

The assertion that the "popular masses" in North Korea have any rights whatsoever has been disproved time and again, by such glaring examples as North Korea's gulag system and North Korea's caste system based on family background (Cumings, *North Korea*). Zainichi youth are well aware that North Korean propaganda (such as the quote by Kim Jong-Il) is not reflected in the reality of North Korean life, and so Chongryun as an organization, which has historically relied heavily on North Korean propaganda in its schools and events, has lost much of its credibility.

Chongryun still remains an important organization for the Zainichi community because around 25 percent of Zainichi Koreans continue to affiliate with the organization (McBride, *Young Zainichi*, Japan Times), but with the increasing number of parents who choose to send their children to Japanese schools, it seems unlikely that the organization

will continue to be as powerful as it once was. Chongryun is also currently in the midst of large financial troubles, and its headquarters in Tokyo have been seized by the Japanese courts because of unpaid debts (*Tokyo Court*, Japan Daily Press).

Many people in the younger generations of the Zainichi Korean community have experienced how being affiliated with Chongryun can be damaging socially, due to the focus in Chongryun schools on North Korea and the lack of attention placed on Japan, and the organization cannot remain vigorous with increasingly high defection rates. However, for the time being Chongryun remains an important organization for the Zainichi community thanks to support from the older generation of Korean migrants. Chongryun also no longer associates itself so closely with North Korean propaganda, and instead focuses more on the general promotion of a Korean identity in Japan (Ryang, *North Koreans*).

The historical level of influence of Chongryun on the Zainichi community was high, and remains notable today: following World War II the majority of Koreans in Japan affiliated with the organization, and due to Chongryun's virulent focus on promoting a Korean identity, many Chongryun members were sheltered from mainstream life in Japan, and had low levels of interaction with Japanese people (Ryang, *North Koreans*). Chongryun thus has had a lasting impact on the Zainichi community, because it segregated its members out of mainstream Japanese life, promoted endogamous marriage by stressing the importance of a pure Korean ethnicity (which slowed down assimilation), and ran schools in Korean, which enabled young Zainichi to remain connected to their heritage (but at the same time made it hard for Chongryun-schooled Zainichi to function effectively in Japan). These impacts remain meaningful for the

Zainichi community today, because without a popular organization like Chongryun to rally around, community cohesiveness in the aftermath of the Second World War would have been much more difficult, particularly since the Zainichi community was rendered stateless in 1952.

The organization's repatriation campaign has also deeply influenced the Korean community in Japan, on personal and political levels, because through first-hand accounts Koreans heard about the difficulties of life in North Korea, which stood in direct contrast to the propaganda Chongryun distributed. The approximately 90,000 repatriates in North Korea continue to rely on their relatives in Japan for material goods, placing a financial and emotional burden on the community. The 2005 documentary *Dear Pyongyang*, directed by the Zainichi filmmaker Yang Yong-hi, illustrates the dependence of North Korean family members on their relatives in Japan, and shows how many repatriates would not have survived the impoverishment of life in North Korea without food, medicine, and money sent from Japan. Chongryun's repatriation campaign is of course to blame for this present day dilemma, and is an illustration of the enormous impact this socio-political organization has had on Zainichi life in Japan. Thus, while Chongryun's importance for today's Zainichi community may be low, the repurcussions of its past policies continue to have a resounding effect on the community as a whole, and have deeply shaped the Zainichi Korean identity.

Chapter 4

The Mindan Koreans

Alongside Chongryun, the South Korean affiliated organization Mindan was (and still is) one of the two most important socio-political organizations in Zainichi Korean life. Both organizations were created to appeal to Zainichi Koreans, but Chongryun was much more zealous and better at recruiting. The Zainichi community was by and large mostly neglected by the South Korean government, which stood in marked contrast to the way North Korea actively tried to recruit members into Chongryun. By contrast, Mindan was pro-Japanese and was seen by many poor Zainichi as only beneficial to middle and upper class Zainichi who had business interests in South Korea (Lie, *Zainichi,* 39). Unlike Chongryun which appealed to many working class Koreans because of its focus on community organization, education, and socialist values, Mindan originally appealed to the much smaller group of middle to upper class Zainichi Koreans, who would not want to affiliate themselves with a communist state (or with their working class brethren).

Understandably, Mindan remained less popular than Chongryun for the first two decades after its establishment in 1945, but everything changed in 1965 (Lie, *Zainichi*). In 1965 a Normalization Treaty was signed between South Korea and Japan, and for the first time Zainichi Koreans had the option of affiliating with South Korea and officially becoming South Korean citizens. The implications of the Normalization Treaty were significant, and it enabled Zainichi Koreans (who chose to affiliate with South Korea) to live more securely in Japan without any threat of deportation, offered easier access to

Japanese medical and welfare benefits, and provided more freedom for international travel (Lie, Zainichi, 68). The treaty also showed that the Zainichi community was in Japan for the long term.

The 1965 Normalization Treaty changed the perspective of many Zainichi Koreans who came to realize that unification was a far off goal, and that in order to better their lives in Japan they should affiliate themselves with South Korea. The 1965 Normalization Treaty had a profound effect on Japanese-South Korean relations, and as part of the newly formed relationship, Japan gave South Korea an aid and loan package in a time when American aid to South Korea was shrinking (Oh, *Korean Politics*, 61). The normalization of relations between South Korea and Japan was of course a positive development for the Zainichi community, and many Zainichi Koreans could capitalize on their bilingualism in Korean and Japanese in business. The treaty allowed any Zainichi Korean to affiliate with South Korea regardless of their family's historical point of geographic origin in the Korean peninsula, which shows that affiliating with South Korea was largely a political statement (Suzuki, *Koreans in Japan*), and due to the desire of many Zainichi Koreans to no longer be stateless people, many became South Korean citizens. However, since North Korea and Japan have never had official relations, the Zainichi Koreans who wished to affiliate with North Korea remained stateless (Suzuki, *Koreans in Japan*).

It is important to note that the Koreans who left Chongryun and joined Mindan did so to better their own personal situations and not for ideological reasons. In other words, there was no mass campaign run by Mindan to convert members of Chongryun, and the Japanese government stayed out of the debate: "Mindan never captured the moral

imagination of the Zainichi population, but functioned as a glorified passport agency (Lie, *Zainichi*, 70)."

The generational shift felt by the Zainichi community, in which the younger members who grew up in Japan had a higher level of wealth than their parents, and who had no first-hand experience living in Korea, was significant for the community because the younger generation of Zainichi Koreans was more assimilated into Japanese society than the older generation, and the sustained growth of the South Korean economy continued to attract converts to Mindan: between 1965 and 1970, 365,005 Zainichi chose to become South Korean citizens, which started Chongryun's decline (Mindan, *History*) . Beginning in the 1980s, the socialist values and North Korea-centric rhetoric of Chongryun drove many young Zainichi to affiliate with South Korea and become South Korean citizens; furthermore, by affiliating with Mindan, Zainichi Koreans could visit their ancestor's tombs in South Korea, which is an obligatory ritual in Korean spirituality, and so Mindan won over approximately 48,000 Chongryun Koreans who wished to pay their respects in the homeland (Mindan, *History*).

As with Chongryun, Mindan also runs schools for Zainichi children, but unlike the schools run by Chongryun, they are relatively free of political propaganda. The schools' use of Japanese textbooks, and curriculum in accordance with that mandated by the Japanese Ministry of Education, allows the students to more easily integrate into Japanese society (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*, 210). The one thing that sets Mindan schools apart from regular Japanese schools is the inclusion of mandatory Korean language; this minimal focus on Korea is indicative of Mindan's policies that try to

emphasize life in Japan, rather than focusing intensively on the homeland (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*).

Today, Mindan has the largest number of members of any Korean political organization in Japan, and Mindan has greatly benefited from Japan's close ties with South Korea and interest in Korean culture (Kashiwazaki, *The Foreigner Category*, 136). Mindan has always shied away from Chongryun style propaganda and hysterics, which has ultimately served the organization well. As long as Koreans in Japan are still willing to keep their Korean nationality (and not naturalize and become Japanese citizens), it is likely that Mindan will continue to exist to organize the community and provide a structure through which Zainichi needs can be articulated. For example, Mindan was active in the fight to get rid of fingerprinting for Zainichi Koreans, but unlike Chongryun, Mindan focuses more on community organization and improving life for the Zainichi community through staging protests and holding signature campaigns, rather than advocating for a particular political agenda (Mindan, *History*).

The growth of the South Korean economy in recent years has also served Mindan well, especially in comparison with North Korea's impoverishment and isolation. South Korea's economy grew tremendously beginning in the 1960s, and essentially went from an agricultural base to a full scale industrial economy (Oh, *Korean Politics*, 244), so having a South Korean passport has become much more valuable that it once was. South Korea's transition to democracy in the 1980s has also improved the way many Zainichi Koreans see the country, because for a long time South Korea was a military dictatorship run by Japanese colonial collaborators. Finally, the vast majority of the Koreans living in Japan are originally from the southern half of the Korean peninsula, so affiliating with

South Korea makes sense given family ties to the region, South Korea's newfound status as an economic powerhouse, and South Korea's development of democracy.

Chapter Five

Current Trends in the Zainichi Korean Population

After examining the history of Chongryun and Mindan, and the impact these organizations have had on the Zainichi community, it is now possible to more closely study the current situation for Koreans in Japan, and make predictions for the future of Zainichi socio-political organizations. In 1992, Koreans "who were legitimately able to trace their residential origin in Japan to the colonial period, and their descendants were born and residing in Japan, were made special permanent residents, or *tokubetsu eijusha* (Ryang, Lie, *Diaspora*, 11)," and this change in status showed the permanence of the Zainichi community in Japan, and set the stage for increasing levels of assimilation into Japanese society.

In terms of assimilation, the significance of naturalization cannot be understated. Naturalization, or changing one's citizenship from South or North Korean to Japanese, has become increasingly common, and allows for more mainstream access into Japanese society; for instance, many Zainichi holding non-Japanese citizenship are discriminated against in marriage practice (Lim, *Korean Roots*). One common perception that has frustrated mass adoption of Japanese citizenship on the part of Zainichi Koreans is the notion that taking up Japanese citizenship necessarily entails the assumption of a Japanese ethnic identity (Lie, *Zainichi*, 86), and many Koreans do not want to give up their Korean identity for a Japanese passport. Statistically around 10,000 Koreans naturalize each year (Lim, *Korean Roots*, 84), although in 2011 only 5,656 Koreans

naturalized (Mindan, *Zainichi Statistics*). This ultimately translates to the number of Korean passport holders declining every year: in 2011, there were 545,401 Zainichi Koreans, which is almost a 100,000 person decrease from 1997, when 645,373 Zainichi Koreans were counted, and this is mainly due to naturalization (Mindan, *Zainichi Statistics*).

Naturalization, however, does not entail that a person will be fully accepted by Japanese society as being Japanese, and:

> Subconscious fear of social exclusion in marriage and intimate relationships makes Japanese nationality among the naturalized a conditional, legal token of membership rather than an all-inclusive, unquestioned location, identity, and sense of national belonging. (Lim, *Korean Roots*, 85)

Naturalization is therefore not a panacea for the discrimination faced by Zainichi Koreans, but it does allow for more intensive overall integration into Japanese society, which is often desired by younger Zainichi Koreans who were raised for their entire lives in Japan.

Alongside the issue of naturalization is Zainichi intermarriage with ethnic Japanese people. Originally, first-generation Zainichi who lived through the racism of the colonial era were reluctant to trust Japanese (Lie, *Zainichi*, 87), but today's younger generation is much more inclined to intermarry. Even in 1974 "over half of Zainichi marriages were to Japanese nationals (Lie, *Zainichi*, 88)," and by 2011, 91% of all marriages involving a Zainichi person was to a non-Korean (Mindan, *Zainichi Statistics*). In 1985 the Family Registration Law of Japan was amended, and made it much more difficult for non-family members to see a personal family register: "The request (to see a family register) …shall, except in cases prescribed by the Ministry of Justice, be made by explaining the reason…The mayor of a city, town or village may, if it is clear that a

request…is made for an unjust purpose, refuse it (Japan, *Family Registration Law*)." The significance of this change meant that fewer family registry checks were made in Japan, thus allowing Zainichi Koreans to more easily intermarry.

However, intermarriage was (and is) not easy, and in Japan "lineage, not legal nationality, still matters in committed relationships and marriage, even among Japanese of colonial Korean descent who have assimilated culturally, socioeconomically and legally (Lim, *Korean Roots*, 97)." Therefore, even if a person of Korean ancestry is a naturalized Japanese citizen with a Japanese name, they still face the prospect of discrimination due to the importance of ancestry in Japanese culture, and for that reason some Zainichi choose to marry within the community, where they will not face discrimination based on their heritage.

Most Zainichi Koreans are seamlessly able to blend in with the general Japanese public, and almost all Zainichi, naturalized or not, use Japanese names instead of Korean (Lim, *Korean Roots*, 95)." Furthermore, the majority of Zainichi children attend Japanese school, and can speak no Korean (Ryang, *Diaspora Without*, 10)." Since most Zainichi children attend Japanese schools, the importance of separate Korean schools, such as the schools run by Chongryun and Mindan, has diminished, and this has led to even more assimilation into mainstream Japan, because from an early age Zainichi children are surrounded by Japanese peers in a Japanese-speaking environment (Ryang, *North Koreans*).

Zainichi assimilation into the Japanese mainstream has proven that the community is not in a temporary state of exile; originally, Zainichi leaders assumed that Koreans would eventually repatriate back to Korea following the reunification of the

Korean peninsula, but it has become clear that the likelihood of Korea reunifying in the near future is dim. Even if Korea was to reunify, the Zainichi community has established deep roots in Japan that would be very difficult to relinquish. Furthermore, as the community continues to assimilate into the general Japanese population, children of mixed marriages are blending their identity as Zainichi Korean with Japanese. While it would be wrong to assume that the community will entirely disappear by mixing into the general Japanese population, it would also be problematic to assume that the community will continue to exist in the same way it has historically. As the older generation of first-wave migrants from Korea begins to die off, personal connections to the homeland become more distant, and a more Japanese identity is felt by the younger Zainichi.

Despite an increasing level of assimilation community-wide into Japanese culture, Zainichi population clusters are not distributed evenly throughout Japan, a fact which has had an impact on integration into Japanese society. Osaka has the largest Zainichi population of any city in Japan, and ethnic neighborhoods continue to remain an important way for the community to function and thrive (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*). These neighborhoods that are primarily ethnically Korean, such as the famous Ikuno-ku neighborhood in Osaka, help keep Zainichi from completely assimilating into mainstream Japanese society through having a profusion of Korean cultural institutions, such as restaurants, stores, and organizations, and more importantly, a substantial density of Zainichi Korean people to allow for a high level of community unity (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*).

Two useful groups to compare with the history and struggle of the Zainichi Koreans are the Koryo-Saram, or Koreans of Central Asia, and the Burakumin of Japan.

The documentary, *Koryo-Saram, the Unreliable People,* produced by Meredith Jung-En Woo, and *The History, Culture and Language of the Koryŏ Saram* by German Kim discuss in detail the harrowing story of Korean migration from Korea to the Russian Far East, and Stalin's ultimate deportation of the entire community to the steppes of Central Asia.

The Koreans who migrated to the Russian Far East, known today as the Koryo-Saram (literally meaning "Korean people" in the Hamgyong dialect of Korean), were mainly impoverished peasants looking for greater economic opportunities and freedom from Japanese colonialism (Woo, *Koryo-Saram*). The communist ideology of the Soviet Union, with its promises of equality for all, was extremely popular with indigent Koreans, and the community grew rapidly from the end of the 1800's until the 1920's. The Koryo-Saram had begun to integrate into Soviet society on a local level, but politics in Moscow forever changed the fate of the community. In 1937, Josef Stalin, the General Secretary of the communist party, decided that the community had been infiltrated by Japanese spies, and were "unreliable people" who were enemies of the state (Woo, *Koryo-Saram*). Stalin punished the community by deporting all ethnic Koreans living in the Russian Far East 4,000 miles away to Central Asia, where they were forced to work in kolkhozes, or collective farms. Most of the Koryo-Saram eventually ended up in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and after the 1950s, most of the community left the collective farms for urban centers.

Today the community has a triple identity: Korean, Russian, and Central Asian. Korean customs and culture linger on among the older generation, but very few of the younger generation can speak Korean or know much about Korean culture. Since many

Koryo-Saram intermarried with people of other ethnic backgrounds, the concept of "Korean-ness" in the community is somewhat blurred, but generally includes a notion of shared culture and ancestry.

In a similar manner with the Zainichi Koreans, the Koryo-Saram have adapted to their new home by assimilating to local customs, such as being primarily Russophone and intermarrying with local people. Today, both communities are losing touch with their Korean roots, with only the older generation primarily speaking Korean and being involved with Korean culture. However, the strong economy of South Korea has begun to produce renewed interest in the homeland among younger Koryo-Saram and Zainichi Koreans alike, and today many young people from both diasporic communities are learning Korean to pursue economic opportunities in South Korea (Woo, *Koryo-Saram*). The process of assuming another identity besides Korean, such as Japanese for the Zainichi Koreans, while at the same time capitalizing on ties to the homeland, is indicative of future trends for the Korean Diaspora. The Zainichi Koreans in particular, with their close physical proximity to Korea, are able to travel easily between Japan and Korea, and take advantage of economic opportunities thanks to their bilingualism in Japanese and Korean (at least for the Zainichi Koreans who are able to speak Korean).

The native Burakumin of Japan, on the other hand, make for a good comparison with the Zainichi Korean community not because they are a diasporic group, but because like the Zainichi Koreans, they often face high levels of discrimination in Japan based on their family history and lineage. The Burakumin are indistinguishable from other Japanese apart from their family background, much in the same way as assimilated Zainichi Koreans, and in both communities there is discussion of whether to hide or

celebrate their heritage. The Burakumin are the descendants of people who in Tokugawa Japan (1600-1868) were designated as legally belonging to a stigmatized social class or caste. Mainly due to their profession as leather workers, theywere considered unclean and forced to live in hamlets separated from common people (Ooms, *Tokugawa*, 244). Buraku status is hereditary and residence was confined to particular locales, so the separate communities were easily identifiable, making discrimination easy.

The Burakumin, just like the Zainichi Koreans, were often considered to be unclean and uncultured because of their occupations, and this stigma has carried through the generations to people no longer involved in supposedly dirty work. The entrenched family registry system of lineage in Japan denotes if someone is of Buraku ancestry, and has proved to be a major social handicap; until recently, employers or prospective in-laws could freely search and find out if someone was of Buraku heritage, which most often led to the Buraku person not being hired or forced to break off an engagement (Goodman, *The Rule*). Though the family registry system can be used for discrimination in jobs or relationships, organizations such as the Buraku Liberation League have fought for acceptance of the community in society (Goodman, *The Rule*), and intermarriage is now the norm.

In a similar manner, Koreans often suffered discrimination in work or in relationships because of their Korean heritage, but today are much more widely accepted by Japanese society. The activism of Buraku-rights organizations, and the advocacy of Chongryun and Mindan to promote a Korean identity, all within the context of Japanese society, have led Japan to become more tolerant of minority groups, and less prone to discriminate. Even though Buraku or Korean heritage is still sometimes hidden, it has

now become much easier for both communities to exist without the existential threat of prejudice at the hands of employers or in personal relationships, and Buraku and Zainichi people have been able to assimilate to a much larger degree into Japanese society in recent years. However, many Zainichi Koreans are still set apart from mainstream Japanese people because of their nationality, and discrimination has not entirely subsided, with many older Japanese people continuing to have a negative impression of the Zainichi community (Lee, de Vos, *Koreans in Japan*).

The Zainichi community therefore has commonalities with the Koryo-Saram because of both groups' assimilation into the host culture and the weakening of a Korean identity among younger community members, and with the Burakumin because of the debate about whether or not to hide their heritage. All three of these groups are quickly assimilating into mainstream society, and are able to exist with much less discrimination than in the past. As younger Zainichi continue to take on an increasingly Japanese identity, the situation of Zainichi socio-political organizations is beginning to change.

Both Mindan and Chongryun are losing thousands of members annually due to naturalization, and Chongryun's situation is particularly dismal. Chongryun's supporters are beginning to die out, and Chongryun's connections with North Korea have sullied its name. In addition, Chongryun is in the midst of a financial free fall, and its headquarters in Tokyo have been seized. With an aging membership base and increased enrollment of Zainichi children into Japanese schools, Chongryun is likely to continue to wither away within the next ten years, and eventually disappear. Chongryun was originally the preeminent Zainichi organization, but the 1965 Normalization Treaty between Japan and South Korea, combined with an increased generational divide in the 1980s led the

majority of Zainichi Koreans to adopt South Korean citizenship and affiliate with Mindan. Today, the vast majority of Zainichi Koreans hold a South Korean passport, and make Mindan, with its focus on improving life for the Zainichi community (rather than pushing a political agenda) the most important and popular socio-political organization for the community. Mindan is thus likely to outlast Chongryun because the majority of Zainichi Koreans affiliate with Mindan, and because Mindan's efforts in recent years, such as ending fingerprinting for Zainichi Koreans, have made the organization popular.

However, both organizations are becoming increasingly irrelevant because thousands of Zainichi Koreans every year naturalize and become Japanese citizens (and therefore do not need an ethnic Korean organization to affiliate with). Intermarriage rates are also so high that the Zainichi community itself is disappearing into the Japanese mainstream, and the next generation will be mostly mixed with ethnic Japanese. Given that the majority of current Zainichi Koreans have little to no command of Korean, are naturalizing at a rate of around 10,000 people every year, and are heavily intermarrying with ethnic Japanese, the next generation of Zainichi Koreans will not likely feel the need for an ethnic organization such as Mindan or Chongryun to rally around; for the time being, as Chongryun is in its final death throes, Mindan has assumed the role of the primary socio-political organization of the Zainichi community. As long as there are a substantial number of South Korean passport holders in Japan -- and in 2011 there were over 500,000 -- Mindan will continue to exist to organize and lead the community, and Chongryun will continue to spiral into irrelevance.

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