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Bell, M. orcid.org/0000-0003-2364-3730 (2018) Reimagining the homeland: Zainichi Koreans' transnational longing for North Korea. The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology, 20 (1). pp. 22-41. ISSN 1444-2213

https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2018.1548642

Reimagining the Homeland: Zainichi Koreans' Transnational Longing for North Korea

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This paper explores the changing relationship of diaspora to the homeland. In particular, this article focuses on the changing relationship of pro-North Korea, Zainichi Koreans (Koreans in Japan) towards North Korea. Many Koreans in Japan continue to identify with North Korea, but the nature of this relationship has changed, due to shifting generational attitudes towards both the host society and North Korea. A dance recital I witnessed in an ethnic Korean high school in Japan exemplifies these changes. I suggest that the symbols highlighted within the recital articulate a particular form of political-ethnic identity that is characterised by a long distance nationalism, but without the desire to return to the homeland. Based on a year of ethnographic fieldwork with members of the pro-North Korea organisation, Ch'ongryŏn, this paper explores how diasporic groups construct, negotiate, and reproduce identity in relation to nation states and transnational processes.

Keywords: Diaspora; identity; affective transnational longing; Zainichi Korean; North Korea; Japan

On a sunny spring day in 2014, the 'Chae-Ilbon Chosŏnin Ch'ongryŏn haphoe' (Ch'ongryŏn/Chōsen Sōren) school in Chuo-ku, Kobe opened its doors to family and

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friends of students for the annual school fete. Following the Japanese government's announcement that it would exclude all 'North Korean schools' from statewide funding[2], parents at the Kobe school hoped that this year's event would raise funds for purchasing materials and the upkeep of the school's buildings. Over the course of an afternoon that was characterised by the consumption of Korean food and Japanese beer, I joined parents of students from pre-school to high school age in observing highly choreographed dances, songs, and skits. Of the performances that afternoon, one in particular captured the audience's attention: a dance by a group of high school girls dressed in traditional Korean dresses (*hanbok/ch'ima chŏgori*). I suggest that the symbolism within the recital reflected the changing attitude of pro-North Korea Zainichi Koreans[3] towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK/North Korea). The performance articulated an identity[4] characterised by what I refer to as a transnational affective longing[5], in which members of Ch'ongryŏn imagine

[2] See a 2014 report by Matthew Carney in *ABC News*.

[3] I use the term 'Zainichi Korean' to refer to Koreans who migrated to Japan from the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945) until the Korean War (1950-1953). In Japanese 'Zainichi' means 'residing in Japan'. The expression 'Zainichi Korean' has been appropriated by long-term ethnic Koreans to distinguish them from the Japanese population and from later waves of 'Newcomer' migrants from South Korea.

[4] This article understands identity as, 'a process of ongoing social interaction in which people are agents in shaping their identification through a dialectic process with other actors and with the material world around them' (Bell 2018, 7).

[5] In this article I use the expression 'transnational' to refer to the social and cultural connections that people create and maintain across long distances. For more on transnationalism see Steven Vertovec (2001, 2009).

themselves existing in a state of exile from the homeland, but without the attendant desire to return.

This paper asks what the relationship between ethnic identity, exile, and performance reveals about new forms of nationalism and identity in the post-Cold War world. Discussions with interlocutors suggested that many members of Ch'ongryŏn continue to identify North Korea as the homeland, but that the nature of this relationship has changed.[6] The change in this relationship is due primarily to a growing number of Zainichi Koreans naturalising as Japanese or South Korean citizens, and to the declining membership of the organisation as a consequence. This article borrows from Aihwa Ong's (1996) understanding of citizenship as a cultural process of 'subject-ification' (Foucault 1989, cited in Ong 1996, 737), whereby people become subjects of a national community through a dialectical relationship of 'self-making' and 'being made' with the nation state. I take a Ch'ongryŏn school performance as a starting point for my analysis of the emerging relationship of diasporic Koreans to North Korea. In the past, such performances presented a utopic return to the homeland[7], reflecting a communally experienced aspiration of Ch'ongryŏn affiliated Koreans. I suggest that contemporary performances reflect both

[6] Although reports in the media often refer to this community as 'North Koreans in Japan', this is a misunderstanding because Koreans who affiliate and/or sympathise with North Korea do not have North Korean citizenship. Ryang explains that, 'Technically speaking, there can be no North Koreans in Japan, for the Japanese government makes no diplomatic acknowledgement of North Korea' (2009, 9).

[7] The idea of homeland for many Zainichi Koreans who politically sympathise with North Korea is complicated by the fact that the majority of these individuals trace their origins to what became South Korea in 1948.

a longing for North Korea[8] and recognition that for Zainichi Koreans in modern day Japan, the aspiration to migrate to the homeland will remain unrealised. The shifting symbolism embodied in the performance I witnessed and the formal and informal discussions I had with Ch'ongryŏn members reflect an understanding of the nation as an invented cultural and political state (Gellner 2006, 47) and further, as a long distance, imagined communion between individuals, most of whom will never meet (Anderson 2006, 6). Consequently, these cultural processes illuminate a critical aspect of the communally imagined relationship of Ch'ongryŏn members to the DPRK, and can be conceived of as a cultural and political practice whereby Ch'ongryŏn members engage in dialectic communion with the North Korean state to reconfigure the terms of their belonging.

This paper is based on a year of ethnographic fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews with Ch'ongryŏn members in Kobe, Osaka, and Tokyo, and participant observation in two Ch'ongryŏn schools and one South Korea-affiliated school[9]. I explore how diasporic groups construct, negotiate, and reproduce a form of

[8] The General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, 'Ch'ongryŏn' in Korean and 'Chōsen Sōren' in Japanese is one of two main organisations for Zainichi Koreans and has close ties to North Korea. Ch'ongryŏn functions as North Korea's de facto embassy in Japan. For more information on this organisation refer to the Ch'ongryŏn webpage: http://www.chongryon.com/

[9] I used qualitative methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews to research the lives of ethnic Koreans residing in Japan. I observed and participated in school open days and met with Ch'ongryŏn members for informal interviews. I draw on interlocutor responses from semi-structured interviews and in-depth conversations with 10 members of Ch'ongryŏn in Osaka, Kobe, and Tokyo. Following my fieldwork in Japan I spent a month in the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), carrying out research

long distance ‘cultural citizenship’ (Ong 1996), in which they reimagine the terms of their belonging to the homeland. The first section provides ethnographic evidence and analysis of a dance recital that I suggest is emblematic of this changing relationship. Section two examines the development of ethnic Korean education in Ch'ongryŏn institutions and the factors that have shaped the lives of Koreans in Japan. The third section examines the affective value of North Korea for this community, rethinking the DPRK along similar lines to the rural hometown that has largely vanished in Japan’s rush to modernity. The final section discusses shifting understandings of belonging to the homeland, in which Ch'ongryŏn members acknowledge the debt accrued for North Korean support, but without the accompanying ideology of return.

Ethnic Identity in the Spotlight

The shift in ethnic Korean identity and imagined communion with the homeland are particularly evident in the performances and symbols presented in Ch'ongryŏn schools today. During the open day, the main hall of the Kobe Ch'ongryŏn school is crowded with parents, staff, and school supporters.[10] The air is filled with the smells of food and alive with the sounds of eating, talking, and laughing. I follow my hosts to a table in front of the stage, where we are heartily welcomed by two middle-aged men, Mr Yamada and Mr Han. They smile encouragingly as we exchange introductions in a blend of Korean and Japanese. We discuss the relationship of Ch'ongryŏn to the

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on Zainichi Koreans in Japan and the mass migration of some 90,000 Koreans from Japan to North Korea.

[10] The occasion for this event was a Ch'ongryŏn school fund raising ‘bazaar’.

Japanese government and Mr Han tells me that the government funding cuts have taken a toll on his family. From next year, he explains, he will have to send his youngest child to a Japanese school. Both men tell me that they were educated in Ch'ongryŏn institutions and both had grandparents who migrated from Cheju Island during the colonial period (1910-1945). Our conversation is interrupted as a class of kindergarten students takes the stage for the first performance.

Throughout the day, parents move back and forth between the seating and the food stalls as their children participate in Korean drumming, accordion playing, traditional song and dance, martial arts displays, and a skit involving Power Rangers.[11] In the early afternoon, a dance troupe of six girls glide on to the stage. One of the girls sets up a board and takes her place in front of it. It is possible to clearly make out a map of the Korean peninsula. Three large, coloured stars are attached to the map. A blue star covers Mount Paektu, on the Chinese-Korean border. This star is large enough that its arms reach into China. Over Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, there is a bright red star of the same size and shape. At the bottom of the map, below the Korean peninsula, is a yellow star. The third star marks Cheju Island, the southern most point of South Korea.[12]

Figure 1: A Dancer Gestures to the Map of the Korean Peninsula.

[11] The performances I observed in Ch'ongryŏn schools were an inversion of those I observed in a South Korea-affiliated school in Osaka. In the 'South Korean' school there were only two traditional Korean cultural performances throughout the entire day. The majority of performances were K-pop dances, American love songs, or skits performed in English.

[12] It is likely that the star over Cheju Island reflects the high number of Zainichi Koreans in this community who trace their ancestry back to the island.

The lead dancer is frozen whilst indicating towards the map (see figure 1). The others wait expectantly in the centre of the stage. Offstage, the first strains of string music fill the air and the dancers turn their heads in the direction of the Korean peninsula. Their faces flood with expressions of joy as the performer next to the map gestures towards each of the three stars. The lone dancer looks back and forth between the performers and the map of Korea and mimes instructing the students as the music pitter-patters along. The dancers communicate a carefree mood, as they gaze in adoration toward the 'teacher'. The lead dancer then tiptoes rapidly over to the waiting students who rise up to greet her. Immediately the dancers merge and their movements synchronise. They dance with gusto, vacillating to and from the image of Korea, performing a moment of turbulence and chaos. From off-stage, a teacher hands each performer a large piece of plain, white paper. The dancers use dramatic gestures to fold their paper into an airplane. The lead dancer, who had been miming the role of teacher, gestures to each of the other performers to approach the image of Korea.

Figure 2: Students Perform the Carefree Moments Before Exodus From the Homeland

One by one, the lead dancer encourages each student to 'take off' from one of the sites on the map—Mount Paektu, Pyongyang, Cheju Island. With great effort the dancers launch away from the Korean peninsula and out into the open stage. Each airplane immediately finds itself in trouble, expressed by a dancer struggling to control her plane, and each subsequently crashes to its doom moments after departing Korea.

After the final airplane spirals into the ocean, the dancers reassemble. The tightly bound group moves as one, swaying to and from the audience. The writhing human bodies gather momentum as the music builds. From behind the curtain a huge cardboard airplane emerges, its structure painted with brightly coloured stripes that resemble the patterns of a traditional Korean dress. Each dancer grasps a piece of the much larger, sturdier airplane. In a coordinated, sweeping gesture the rainbow-decorated plane bursts away from the map. The larger plane, guided by the dancers' concerted efforts, soars high above the stage. The music, initially wavering, reaches a crescendo and the dancers return to centre stage for a final hurrah. The audience erupts into applause as the performers bow and glide off the stage.

Figure 3: Dancers Celebrate as the Korean Plane Soars High Above the Stage.

Performance, as a cultural representation, offers unique insights into the political, economic, and historical relationship of diaspora to the homeland (Cf. Turino 2008; Aparicio and Jáquez 2003; Zheng 2010; Carstensen-Egwuom 2011; Knudsen 2011; Silverman 2012; Koo 2014, 2016). Song and dance can be presented as symbols of personal and communal ethnic-nationalist resistance (Tsuda 2000), as a 'hybrid practice' through which minority groups draw on symbols of the global in reshaping locally embedded discourses (Knudsen 2011), and as a means by which immigrant groups integrate themselves into the host society by conspicuously performing their foreignness to the majority society (Carstensen-Egwuom 2011, 131). Sunhee Koo, referencing Thomas Turino (2008), explains, 'As cultural representations, music and dance have played effective roles in marking, reinforcing, and constructing a nation or national identity' (in Koo 2016, 389-390). Often, immigrants are regarded solely as a

source of social and economic problems for the host society, but a focus on cultural representations such as song, dance, and storytelling allows for the emergence of new narratives that speak to the 'aesthetic intersections between the local and the global and between agency and identity' (Kiwan and Meinhof 2011, 4).

In North Korea, the line demarcating the stage from the public realm is blurred. North Korean music, theatre, and performance, connecting the political and the everyday, emerged through former North Korean leader Kim Jong-il's interest in propaganda and political representation. Within North Korea, cultural representations are highly political, for example, following the ascent of Kim Jong-un to power (2011-) and the attendant purges of his rivals, political messages reinforcing the authority of the young leader were communicated in hastily assembled songs and widely printed lyrics (Cathcart and Korhonen 2017, 5-7).

A common feature of North Korean productions, from onstage performance to everyday life, is the importance of affective value. In particular, the colonial experience and attendant loss of nation are motifs crosscutting North Korean screen, stage, and musical performances. The Arirang Mass Games are the most well known of North Korean state performances. In a production involving tens of thousands of dancers, singers, and athletes, participants tell a story of colonisation, of Kim Il-sung's heroic fight against the Japanese, and of Korea's subsequent division into two separate states. Amongst the tragedy of conflict and national separation, there are also moments for hope. Specifically, Arirang highlights the, 'Redemptive aesthetics of exodus and empowers the prophecy of truth emerging from life in exile' (Kwon 2010, 11). Within state produced performances exile is presented as a liminal period through which characters must proceed in order to transform their loss into a rebirth. These productions are predicated on the twin pillars of exile and redemption within North

Korea's founding myth, that of Kim Il-sung's own exile to Manchuria and his subsequent redemption through vanquishing the Japanese and returning triumphant to the homeland (Kim 2010, 72-77). The experiences of national loss, dispersal, and redemption are further present throughout the hagiography of the North Korean leadership.[13] The didactic kernel at the heart of these productions is that exile is a transitional space through which a glorious return is both necessary and inevitable. In this sense, exodus and exile are required for a patriotic longing to emerge that compels a person to return to the homeland.

Do the redemptive qualities of exile and return also apply to North Koreans outside their country? North Koreans who flee for South Korea often find themselves at a cross roads, in terms of their cultural identity (Bell 2013, 2014). Many prefer to hide their North Korean origins rather than risk rejection by South Koreans. Performance is a means for reading the shifting identities of diasporic Koreans, suggesting that North Korean refugees embody the divergence and reconciliation of individuals experiencing two polarised states contemporaneously (Koo 2016, 390). Consequently, performance is a means to illustrate how North Koreans in exile negotiate their social positioning by producing a hybridised identity. The result is an identity stripped of its overt political ideology and acceptable for South Korean audiences.

The Ch'ongryŏn recital I witnessed suggested a shift in the diasporic identity of North Korea-affiliated Koreans in Japan. Reflecting DPRK state performances, in terms of ethnic-nationalist content and performers' bodily comportment, the recital

[13] For a thorough treatment of the hagiography of the North Korean leadership see Christopher Richardson's (2017) chapter in *Change and Continuity in North Korean Politics*.

presented a narrative of dispersal and exile.[14] However, the performance departed from the state narratives seen in Arirang in its omission of a return to the homeland. Instead, the symbolism in the school performance illustrated a shift from an ideology of return to an ideology of longing. Each of the stars attached to the map of the Korean peninsula covered an area of emotional and political significance to the DPRK state and the Zainichi Korean community. Within the mnemonic landscape of the Korean diaspora, these sites are deployed in the service of the state as a sacred geography that connects the political and the imagined community of the citizen both at home and abroad.[15] The North Korean government locates its founding myth in Mount Paektu, on the border with China (Armstrong 1995). It is the site of the Korean partisan struggle against the colonial oppressor and ostensibly the birthplace of Kim Jong-il, said to have been born during his father's guerrilla campaign. Further, Korean mythology commonly references Mount Paektu as the spiritual home of all the Korean people. Pyongyang, represented by a shining red star, is the capital of North Korea and the political centre of the putative homeland for Koreans exiled in the land of the former coloniser. The inclusion of Pyongyang on the map of an undivided Korea sits in bold relief to the absence of Seoul, the capital of South Korea. The red

[14] Jung's description of the Arirang performance as a state display of contour and power in which a mass of bodies are arranged and subjected to, 'a bodily regimen that is designed to instill a certain structure of sociality and affect, which anchors the Father in both the body and psyche', is particularly useful for characterising North Korean performance (2013, 96).

[15] For an in depth exploration of the concept of sacred geography see Raphael Samuel (1994) *Theatres of Memory*. For more on the relationship between state ideology and the North Korean government's landscapes of power see Robert Winstanley-Chesters (2014) *Environment, Politics and Ideology in North Korea: Landscape as Political Project*.

star on the map indicates the political capital for the exiled North Korea supporting community. It is also symbolically synonymous with deceased leader, Kim Il-sung.

A bright yellow star sits over Cheju Island. A large number of Zainichi Koreans now living in Kobe and Osaka originated from the ROK's most southern island.[16] The origin story of this transnational community is characterised by a history of rebellion and state violence, Cold War ideological polemics, and a series of forced migrations to Japan.[17] Cheju Island has not been erased from the origin myth of the Korean community in Japan because of the island's ostensible shared political affiliations with North Korea. Subsequently, there is no tension between identifying Cheju Island as Ch'ongryŏn Koreans' geographic origins and Pyongyang as the ideological point of longing. Having said this, Cheju Island is of secondary importance to the political primacy of Pyongyang and the DPRK.

At the beginning of the performance, the lead dancer plays the role of a teacher in a Ch'ongryŏn school. Using the map as a prop, she mimes the story of Koreans in Japan. As the 'teacher' tells the story, the 'students' come alive. They re-enact the time before Japanese colonisation, playing games and dancing with a carefree innocence.[18] During this period, Koreans are depicted as untainted and

[16] Morris-Suzuki explains that, by the time of the Asia-Pacific War, most Cheju families had at least one member living in Japan (2010, 34).

[17] For more on the migration of Koreans from Cheju to Japan and the ideological violence that followed colonial rule on the island see Hun Jun Kim (2014), *The Massacres at Mt. Halla: Sixty Years of Truth Seeking in South Korea*.

[18] The performers' representation of life in pre-colonial Korea as a carefree, child-like state echoes Brian Myers' reflections on how the North Korean government presents a narrative of the 'cleanest, purest' race (Myers 2010, 8-9).

existing in a prelapsarian state. The movements of the dance, the smiles on the children's faces and the continuous references to the Korean peninsula underline the significance of a homeland prior to the loss of sovereignty. The pre-colonial homeland is a place where Koreans were free to indulge their childlike spontaneity in a Garden of Eden-like environment. The Japanese annexation put an end to the time of innocence, as symbolised by the baritone of the offstage string instruments and the erratic movements of the dancers. At this point, amongst the chaos and heartbreak of Japanese imperial rule, white paper planes launch away from the peninsula. But, from Cheju to Mount Paektu, the flimsy aircraft struggle to chart a safe path. At first, the audience appears uncertain as to why the non-descript vessels have plummeted to their doom. It is only after the students have joined together to create a much larger, colourful aeroplane that we realise the significance of the Korean vessels.

The smaller paper planes represent the individual efforts to survive outside of colonial Korea. These featureless vessels are also emblematic of Koreans who lost or forgot their Korean culture following emigration. The traditional colours of the larger plane and the joint efforts of the performers to 'fly' it together underline the necessity of maintaining ethnic solidarity outside of the homeland. Japan's omission from the oversized map is of further interest, as to accept the significance of the former coloniser in shaping this community would be to acknowledge the diasporic characteristics of Zainichi Korean identity. Because Ch'ongryŏn does not allow for a hybrid identity, Japan, specifically the Japanese people, cannot feature in the narrative of loss and exile.

The students' performance illustrated the danger that exile poses to the Korean people, threatening to scatter populations and strip them of their ethnic identity. But as with North Korean state productions, the Ch'ongryŏn performance also shows that

loss and hope are part of the same narrative. While flight from the homeland is a heart-wrenching loss, the hope is that Koreans outside the homeland will flourish. But such success is only possible if dispersed Koreans keep one eye on each of the sacred sites of Pyongyang and Mount Paektu, and remember the benevolence of the archetypal Korean-in-exile, Kim Il-sung.

Ch'ongryŏn Koreans in Japan imagine themselves as both peripheral and central to the homeland. They are peripheral in terms of their geographic distance from Pyongyang. But their location places the heaviest burden on them to retain their ethnic identity in the face of pressure from the host society. This is a burden riddled with moral implications, as the host society is also the former coloniser. To resist assimilation into Japanese society is to continue Kim Il-sung's anti-colonial struggle. In this sense, Koreans in Japan reimagine the periphery as the frontline of an ethnic nationalist struggle for survival that started with the loss of the nation.

The Debt Owed

The Korean community in Japan consists of several waves of migration arriving in Japan throughout the twentieth century: Koreans who migrated to Japan during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945) and up until the end of the Korean War (1953); so-called 'New-comers', who arrived in Japan from the late 1980s, when the South Korean government liberalised overseas travel for its citizens, students from South Korea, and returnees from North Korea who were part of the 1960s mass migration from Japan to North Korea (Morris-Suzuki 2007; Bell 2016, 2018).

The longest established Korean community in Japan is comprised of the descendants of Koreans who arrived as labour for the expanding Japanese empire.

Some 98 per cent of Koreans to arrive during this period originated from the southern half of the peninsula, in particular North and South Kyŏngsang provinces and Cheju Island (Ryang 2000, 5). In the years following the liberation and subsequent division of the Korean peninsula, a little over 600,000 Koreans in Japan chose not to return home (Ryang 1997, chapter 3). Many Koreans who stayed in Japan politically identified with North Korea and regarded Soviet supported Kim Il-sung as more politically legitimate than President Syngman Rhee in the American-backed South. Rhee's fervent anti-communism worried many Koreans in Japan. In some cases, they stayed in Japan out of fear for their lives in South Korea (Caprio and Jia 2009, 21). Often, reports coming out of South Korea about political violence, disease and unemployment further dissuaded Koreans from leaving Japan for South Korea.[19]

Reproducing the bifurcation of the Korean peninsula, the Korean community in Japan split into two major camps, each claiming to represent the rights and welfare of Zainichi Koreans. The leftist Chae'il chosŏnin yonmaeng (League of Koreans) was formed in October 1945[20] and was the predecessor to Ch'ongryŏn[21]. On the other side of the political spectrum, the Chae-Ilbon Taehan Min'guk Mindan (Korean Residents Union in Japan/Mindan), established on October 3, 1946 was aligned with South

[19] B AG 232 105-025 (Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross).

[20] The Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) dissolved the League in 1949, ostensibly for carrying out Communist activities. Further, the Japanese government shut down 350 ethnic Korean schools supported by the League (Tai 2004, 358).

[21] Ch'ongryŏn (established May 5, 1955) grew out of Minsen, or the 'United Democratic Front of Koreans Residing in Japan', which itself emerged from the 'League of Koreans'.

Korea. Many Koreans in the post-war period had one foot in each camp and a large number were politically unaligned.[22]

Japanese colonial policies aimed to assimilate minority imperial subjects into Japanese culture by circumscribing their behaviour and everyday life. The attempted erasure of Korean cultural practices included forbidding Korean-style clothes, forcing Koreans to use Japanese names, and forcibly converting Koreans from Buddhism to Shintoism.[23] In an effort to undo Japanese indoctrination, in improvised classrooms throughout Japan the League of Koreans taught Korean language, history, and geography using textbooks written in Korean.[24] The number of Korean schools grew quickly and, by 1948, some 58,000 students were enrolled in 600 schools across Japan (Lee and De Vos 1981, 163). By the late 1950s, North Korea, through Ch'ongryŏn, was more active than South Korea in acting as guarantor of the welfare

[22] According to the Japanese police, quoted in *The Japan Times*, of the estimated 580,000 Korean residents in Japan in 1965, more than 350,000 were pro-Ch'ongryŏn and 230,000 were registered with Mindan. In the same article, Mindan estimated the number of 'neutral' Koreans to be around 200,000. Morita, drawing on the Japanese government's annual Residence Foreigner Statistics, notes that by 1974 there were 638,806 Koreans in Japan. The 350,067 with *Kyotei Eiju* (permanent residence in Japan) were registered as ROK citizens and the remainder (around 288,739) would have been *Chosen seki* – regarded as stateless by the Japanese government (1996, 177). However, these are rough estimates and not clear-cut distinctions.

[23] For a thorough account of Japan's assimilation policies in Korea see Mark Caprio's (2009) *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945.*

[24] For more on the early years of Korean education in Japan see Lee and De Vos (2006, chapter 8), and Inokuchi, in Ryang (ed.) (2000, chapter 7).

and education of Koreans in Japan.[25] For example, from January 1958 to June 1959, the DPRK provided 1.5 million dollars in Japanese yen to fund facilities such as banks, hospitals, clinics, and schools.[26] In contrast, Mindan had only four schools, with around 3,000 students.[27] For Ch'ongryŏn, ethnic education, with an emphasis on Korean language and history, was a means of preparing Korean children to return to the homeland. Lessons in Ch'ongryŏn schools were conducted in Korean with the goal of ensuring that students 'learn that they are overseas nationals of North Korea' (Ryang 1997, 3). Pointing to the organisation's role in fostering a sense of long distance nationalism for Koreans in Japan, even the school buildings constructed by Ch'ongryŏn were interpreted as a symbolic reminder to the community of their obligation towards the DPRK (Menadue-Chun 2019, forthcoming). In comparison, Mindan failed to encourage grassroots support from the Zainichi Korean community; it also struggled to solicit funds from the South Korean government (Lee and De Vos 1981, 124-125). The comparative success of Ch'ongryŏn stemmed from the difference in approach of the two organisations. Where Ch'ongryŏn focused on, 'Maintaining and protecting the culture and language of Koreans in Japan', to paraphrase Chin Kil-sang, the current director of the organisation[28], Mindan encouraged Koreans to assimilate into Japanese society, including taking Japanese citizenship.

[25] Lee and De Vos note that, in contrast to Rhee's South Korea, North Korea's approach to Japan was conciliatory, perhaps as a way of gaining the allegiance of Koreans in Japan and driving a wedge between Japan and South Korea (95-97).

[26] B AG 232 105-025 15/07/59-15/07/59, pp.31, International Committee of the Red Cross.

[27] This is according to a December 1965 report in *The Japan Times*.

[28] Interview with Chin Kil-sang in Tokyo, June 2014.

Comprising kindergartens, primary schools, junior and senior high schools and a university, Ch'ongryŏn continues to operate the largest ethnic school system in Japan.[29] However, since 1994, Ch'ongryŏn's membership has been shrinking.[30] A growing number of Zainichi Koreans have opted to take Japanese citizenship (Hester 2000, 182; Tai 2004; Ryang 2016) and, as they have done so, their relationship to the DPRK has withered. Zainichi Koreans naturalising as Japanese citizenship reflects a tendency for such individuals to see ethnicity as distinct from nationality. The implication of this shift is that North Korea-affiliated Zainichi Koreans continue to understand themselves as ethnically Korean, but do not feel the same kind of political allegiance to the DPRK. Consequently, more Zainichi Koreans are opting for an identity that is independent of Korean and Japanese affiliations (Fukuoka 1993; Tai 2004; Chapman 2004, 2008; Lie 2008; Shipper 2010). In other words, being 'Korean-Japanese' no longer requires the possession of symbolic items of return to one of the Korean states, such as a South Korean passport or an alien card marking an individual as 'Chōsen-seki' ('North Korean').[31] In other words, an individual can hold a

[29] For more information on the contemporary curriculum offered in a Ch'ongryŏn school see the Tokyo Chōsen Middle and High School webpage.

[30] Ch'ongryŏn does not release information on its membership but, according to a 2016 report in the Asahi news, the Japanese Public Security Intelligence Agency believes the organisation has around 70,000 members ('*Chōsensōrenwa yaku 7man-ri*').

[31] 'Chōsen-seki' is the status assigned to Koreans in Japan who choose neither to naturalise as Japanese nor to take South Korean citizenship. It essentially marks them as stateless. The Japanese government ascribes this status to 'North Korean' residents in Japan because it does not recognize North Korea as a sovereign state. For a discussion of nationality and Koreans in Japan see Eika Tai (2009) 'Between Assimilation and Transnationalism: the Debate on Nationality Acquisition among Koreans in Japan'.

Japanese passport while identifying as Korean. This means that a Korean who takes Japanese citizenship can continue to use their Korean name and maintain Korean cultural practices while living permanently in Japan. Such changes in the identity politics of Zainichi Koreans represents 'a fundamental shift in the area of postcolonial identity formation' (Ryang 2016, 11).

Despite a simpler path to naturalisation, however, a number of Ch'ongryŏn members still equate it with a rejection of Korean identity and, as such, have no intention of taking Japanese citizenship. The association of political and national allegiance with the possession of a passport or other signifiers of citizenship, was aptly reflected in the lament of Ko Sang-hun, a real estate manager in Kobe,

> Our grandparents struggled so much with unemployment and prejudice from the Japanese. But they managed to bring us all together. We used to be so strong, here in Japan, but nowadays many people are leaving Ch'ongryŏn. They leave and get Japanese passports.

Sang-hun highlighted two important themes that often arose during my discussions with Ch'ongryŏn affiliated Zainichi Koreans: exclusion from the host society and feelings of betrayal by individuals who take Japanese or South Korean citizenship. For individuals who naturalise, the exchange of symbolic items of return for items that speak to an indefinite residency in Japan does not necessitate an abrogation of their ethnic identity. In contrast, for Sang-hun and others who express similar views, leaving Ch'ongryŏn and becoming a Japanese citizen is a rejection of Korean identity. Rejecting Korean identity also means a failure to acknowledge and reciprocate the debt owed to North Korea for supporting Zainichi Koreans in the face of 'unemployment and prejudice from the Japanese'.

Sang-hun used debt idioms to explain the relationship of Zainichi Koreans to North Korea. He claimed that the North Korean leadership had supported Koreans in Japan when no one else would, and that this demanded ongoing loyalty to the DPRK state. Other Ch'ongryŏn members I spoke with agreed with Sang-hun's sentiments, reminding me that North Korea had contributed financial and material support to help establish schools and businesses and to ensure employment in Ch'ongryŏn operated companies that favoured hiring graduates from Ch'ongryŏn schools. Their relationship to North Korea allowed these individuals to maintain their Korean identity when confronted by institutionalised pressure to assimilate, and provided comfort and solidarity despite discrimination by the Japanese authorities.

The debt relationship was manifested in various ways in Tokyo and Kobe Ch'ongryŏn schools. For example, references to Kim Il-sung's benevolence were embedded in the students' craft projects plastered on the walls, and expressed during vocal and dance performances. Images of Kim, surrounded by adoring children, hung in classrooms. The manifestation of the debt owed to North Korea was visible throughout the schools and impressed on the viewer that the school's loyalties rested with the DPRK. The visual representations of the emotional bonds to North Korea, however, constituted a considerably muted tone in comparison to the past. Until the 1990s, Ch'ongryŏn students were required to take ideological lessons designed to foster a loyalty to North Korea and the Kim family. A former student I interviewed in Osaka recalled her own patriotic education, during which time she learned about Kim Il-sung's exile, his dreams of a Korea free from foreign interference, and his eventual return to free the fatherland from the yoke of the Japanese. From 1993, however, Ch'ongryŏn redesigned the curriculum to give students a broader understanding of the world, while also preparing students for the Japanese university entrance

examinations (Ryang 1997, 56-57). Following these reforms, during which the teaching of Japanese language and history increased, some parents of students expressed concern that Ch'ongryŏn was losing its way.[32]

My interlocutors acknowledged the debt owed to North Korea, and it was made obvious in the schools I visited. Reproducing the burden of this debt is the moral obligation of Ch'ongryŏn-affiliated Zainichi Koreans. To retain a memory of the debt is to produce and reproduce the melancholy of separation from a homeland to which physical relocation is neither possible nor desired.

North Korea as the Hometown Lost

The concept of 'hometown' (*furusato*), and the affective associations therein are helpful for illuminating the shifting positionality of North Korea in the imagination of Ch'ongryŏn members. In Japan, *furusato* is used to refer to the place where a person is born, but it is also a powerfully emotive cultural construct that captures a feeling of longing for a mythical time and place. Jennifer Robertson notes that *furusato* is a concept that is particularly popular in economically and socially precarious times when the future is conceived of as unknown or troubling (1988, 507). The emotive pull of the *furusato* lends itself to supporting disaffected, urban dwelling Japanese by imagining a return to a bygone era in which life was simpler. The rapid urbanisation of Japan means that the rural hometown has usually changed beyond recognition.

[32] The debt relationship that exists between Ch'ongryŏn Zainichi Koreans and North Korea was also present during a discussion Ryang had with a concerned parent in Kobe who told her, 'If we were to forget to thank our Great Leader, how would we be able to identify ourselves as [North Korean] overseas nationals?' (1997, 58).

Thus, *furusato* is a slippery concept as it encourages a melancholic longing for a place that no longer exists. It is also a deceptive concept, because the hometown, as it is nostalgically recalled, is also likely to be very different from how it existed in reality.

The Korean equivalent of *furusato* is *kohyang.* The two terms share the same Chinese etymology. *Kohyang* is defined as, 'A place deep in your heart that you long for' (Naver dictionary).[33] As a concept that speaks to the loss of one's self for denizens of post-industrial, highly urbanised societies, *kohyang* has a similarly affective tone to *furusato*. But there are distinctly Korean elements to how *kohyang* is understood[34]. The concept of *kohyang* has been shaped by loss on an individual level, through the quality of estrangement from modern society. It has further been shaped by communal experiences of colonisation. Thus, for Koreans, *kohyang* is contemporaneously experienced as both loss of the hometown and loss of the country. *Kohyang* is consequently a concept encapsulating the melancholy of alienation from both the self and from the nation.

For some Zainichi Koreans, the *kohyang* as a geographical locale has lost much of its meaning. The majority of Koreans who arrived in Japan during the colonial era emigrated from what later became South Korea. Many of my interlocutors recognised that their forebears had migrated from Kyŏngsang Province or Cheju Island during the colonial era. Over time, however, memories of the

[33] Three definitions come up when searching for 'hometown' in the Naver dictionary: 1. The place where you are born, 2. Your ancestral home, and 3. A place deep in your heart (*maum*) that you long for (translation by the author).

[34] For more discussion on Korean literature and the concept of *kohyang* see Misun Lee's (1988) post-doctoral research, *A Study of Hometown Consciousness in Korean Contemporary literature* (in Korean).

ancestral home have faded. The efforts of Ch'ongryŏn enabled North Korea to fill the conceptual lacunae as the *kohyang*. The paradox is that the distance between the Ch'ongryŏn community in Japan and North Korea is necessary to maintain a comforting melancholia for the lost homeland. Exile is thus experienced as a condition of existential disaffection, in other words, 'nostalgia for the experience of nostalgia' (Robertson 1988, 497).

Longing for North Korea is central to Ch'ongryŏn Koreans' identity as Koreans in Japan. The melancholy of exile fosters a feeling of solidarity amongst Ch'ongryŏn members, and nostalgia is a communally experienced modality for relating to the homeland. As expectations for a return have dissipated, the post-colonial identity of many 'North Koreans' in Japan has shifted towards an affective state that keeps the heart in the homeland while the body remains in the land of the former coloniser.

Public Faces and Pure Hearts

In order to nurture a post-colonial identity while living in the land of the former coloniser, Ch'ongryŏn members produce a dual narrative of belonging. In the official narrative, Zainichi Koreans acknowledge the debt accrued for DPRK support. This acknowledgement is accompanied by a tacit promise that dispersed Koreans will return to the homeland following the reunification of the two Koreas. In this sense, 'North Koreans' in Japan understand themselves as an exiled community that is prevented from returning home by obstacles created by interfering foreign powers.

In the unofficial narrative the debt is also acknowledged, but the ideology of return has vanished, replaced by a melancholic nostalgia. The unofficial narrative

emphasises the portability of ethnic identity. Because ethnic identity is portable, the individual is not required to relocate to North Korea to complete the self-making process. We can better understand the expression of these seemingly contradictory messages with reference to Jung Hyang-jin's (2013) binary of 'public face' (*kongjŏgin ŏlgul*) and 'pure heart' (*chinsim*). Jung employs this dichotomy to describe the self-presentation strategies of North Koreans. 'Public face' refers to the highly rigid and politicised way of acting in public; this is the official, public performance of the self. 'Pure heart' refers to the 'guileless sincerity' of North Koreans during intimate moments when the public face slips. Jung argues that these two modes of presentation support each other for the purpose of maintaining loyalty to the North Korean state (2013, 87). The bi-furcation of affective behavior is also a helpful means for understanding Ch'ongryŏn-affiliated Koreans' relationship to the imagined homeland: a longing for the homeland without the desire to return.

An affective transnational longing consists of a 'public face' of politically correct actions that deferentially acknowledge the homeland in speech acts, cultural productions, and official gatherings. Ch'ongryŏn members I interviewed lauded the achievements of Kim Il-sung. They explained that they felt a deep emotional connection (*chŏng*) towards North Korea. One member told me he had named his sons after the North Korean leadership. Another told me that, prior to the Japanese trade and travel sanctions, he had made numerous trips to North Korea and that his brother had even met Kim Il-sung, receiving a Rolex watch as a mark of recognition for his activism in Japan. But crediting state support for helping Koreans maintain their ethnic identity—publically acknowledging the debt—does not mean these individuals desire to return to North Korea. In a discussion I had with a teacher in an Osaka Ch'ongryŏn school my interlocutor and his friend, both members of

Ch'ongryŏn and both having made multiple trips to North Korea, agreed, 'North Korea is a horrible country'. Neither of my interviewees had any desire to live in the DPRK. In moments such as these, the public face slips and the performance is momentarily suspended.

Running parallel to a public face is a 'pure heart'. When the public face slips, it reveals an alternative rendering of the homeland for Koreans in Japan. The pure heart reconceptualises the homeland as an idealised space, but acknowledges that home for Zainichi Koreans is Japan. The dance displayed elements of both public face and pure heart. North Korean support was acknowledged as the progenitor of the ethnic identity for Koreans in Japan. The debt to each of the sacred places—the spiritual home (Mount Paektu), the political home (Pyongyang), and the geographical home (Cheju Island)—were acknowledged during the dance. But the dance did not conclude with a return to the *kohyang*. Instead, the performance inferred, through the successful launching of a distinctly Korean vessel, that life in Japan is an acceptable conclusion to exile. Having said this, life in Japan is only accepted on the condition that Koreans who do not return to the homeland continue to long for the homeland. Subsequently, the transnational moral obligation of Zainichi Koreans is to produce and reproduce the melancholy of separation from the homeland. These two modes of behaviour, the public face and the pure heart, unite and then overlap diasporic ethnic communities ruptured by colonial exploitation and geo-political friction.

Conclusion: An Affective Transnational Longing

This paper has delineated the affective characteristics of North Korea-affiliated Koreans' hybrid, post-colonial identity. Koreans in Japan are not a deterritorialised

ethnic minority, independent from both the homeland and the host society. On the contrary, I have argued that my interlocutors straddle two worlds as they intimately connect to both North Korea and Japan through an affective transnational imagining of time and space.

Ch'ongryŏn-affiliated Koreans draw on DPRK state mythology, with exile and redemption as central themes, to express their communality with the homeland, while also explaining and justifying their location on the periphery. This requires negotiating an apparent contradiction, in that they long for North Korea without desiring to return. They achieve this by reimagining North Korea not as a geo-political space, but as the symbol, par excellence, of Korean identity, at the heart of which is the inevitability of exile. Subsequently, to embody a longing for the homeland through the production and reproduction of a Korean cultural citizenship is to stake a claim to a redemption that would usually be reserved only for those who return from exile. I have suggested that the diasporic identity of Ch'ongryŏn Koreans in Japan is best conceived of as an affective transnational longing. The transnational longing for North Korea is, by necessity, a painful state because without an attendant sense of loss, Ch'ongryŏn Koreans must accept their exiled status, and risk conceding that they have turned their back on the homeland.

The dance recital, the images on the school walls, and the cultural performances that I observed presented the contemporary relationship of diasporic Koreans to North Korea for an audience of Ch'ongryŏn members. The performance underlined that everyday events in intimate, community spaces are a means of marking and constructing transnational identity. The performance recalled the dispersal and subsequent formation of Korean communities outside of the homeland, and the creation of material and kinship links between Japan and North Korea.

Ch'ongryŏn Koreans continue to identify with North Korea, but now a dual narrative of transnational imagining characterises the relationship. On the one hand, Ch'ongryŏn Koreans acknowledge a debt towards North Korea for years of financial and material support. The promise of return features centrally in this official narrative. But, because return is neither possible nor desirable, a second, affective narrative has emerged. The affective narrative underlines the portability of ethnic identity and instead permits belonging through a sincere longing for the homeland. Alongside an ethnic identity constructed around the ideology of return emerges a communal 'pure heart' identity in which a nostalgic longing for the homeland defines the relationship of displaced Koreans to a romanticised North Korea. Ch'ongryŏn members' ideology of return to the homeland has retreated into the background, replaced by an emotional connection to an idealised place that is both out of time and out of space.

Subsequently, Ch'ongryŏn Koreans reimagine North Korea in a similarly nostalgic way as the pre-modern hometown is conceived of for disaffected urban dwellers. The North Korea that was communally imagined and performed in the recital has a similar, emotive affect on the individual as the *furusato* or *kohyang*. North Korea as the mythic *kohyang* shapes the ethnic identity of Ch'ongryŏn Koreans in Japan. At the centre of contemporary Zainichi Korean identity is nostalgia for a time and a place that has only ever existed in the imagination—a hometown providing comfort and reassurance when the Korean community in Japan is shaken by abduction allegations, missile launches or nuclear tests.

Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross

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Notes on transliteration

Japanese and Korean names have been written with family names first and personal name following. For Korean names I used the McCune-Reischauer system, except when the names are commonly written in an alternate fashion, such as 'Pyongyang', 'Syngman Rhee' and 'Kim Il-sung'.

Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank my interlocutors for their invaluable help with my research, especially my hosts during the school open days. Further thanks go to Im Kohong for his help during fieldwork, and to Peter Matanle, Ziyi Wei, Yu Chen, and Harald Conrad for their comments on an early version of this article. Finally, sincere thanks go to the anonymous TAPJA reviewers for their helpful suggestions, and to Susan Menadue-Chun and Rosita Armytage for offering useful comments and feedback.

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Figure captions

Figure 1: A dancer gestures to the map of the Korean peninsula

Figure 2: Students perform the carefree moments before the exodus

Figure 3: Dancers celebrate as the Korean plane soars high above the stage