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From the Page to the Screen: Representations of Zainichi Identity

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Dedication

To my dad, Paul Cramer. Thank you for everything.

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Abstract

From the Page to the Screen: Representations of Zainichi Identity

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This report looks at how *zainichi* identity has been constructed and negotiated by prominent *zainichi* figures in Japan over the past three decades. *Zainichi* are ethnically Korean and are Korean citizens, but reside in Japan. They straddle both cultures, but belong to neither. My case studies include three prominent *zainichi* figures: Yi Yangji (1955-1992), a literary author whose semi-fictional works demonstrate the difficulties *zainichi* experience when trying to adapt to Korean culture; Yū Miri (b. 1968), a politically-engaged author and essayist whose works show the difficulties faced by *zainichi* who try to maintain a hybrid identity while living in Japan; and Akiyama Yoshihiro (b. 1975), a Mixed Martial Artist and popular culture icon, who successfully straddles the two cultures, capitalizing on his fluid, hybrid identity in order to achieve transnational stardom. For each of these figures, on a personal level, such representations offer a means for them to renegotiate their ties to South Korea and their place in Japan. On a more political and universal level, these artists and their lives are calls for acceptance, both self-acceptance by zainichi as well as by citizens of both nations to embrace the in-betweenness.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

An individual's identity is something that was both given to them at birth and crafted throughout a lifetime. For ethnic Koreans in Japan, identity is not a single defining marker; instead it is a complex web. They are often stuck between two different countries and two different cultures in this situation, while some people hold onto tradition and heritage; others will adapt to the new culture and take on that cultural identity. Still others will try to bend, break, shift, mold, and even demolish preexisting expectations of identity so they can forge new paths. Whether intended or not, eventually the constantly shifting ethnic Korean identity will form into something new. Many ethnic Koreans create and solidify their identity by maintaining pieces of their Korean culture through language and names. By teaching the next generation both Korean and Japanese as a means of continuingly connecting the family back to Korea, while others choose to forgo Korean language education and instead simply give their children Korean names to maintain that connection. Nationality is also a large piece of this construction. Ethnic Korean's born in Japan still hold Korean nationalities and many families decide to maintain this even though it prevents them from fully integrating into Japanese society. This combination of Korean identity and Japanese identity is referred to as *zainichi,* (在日) a term used to identity ethnic Koreans living in Japan, and is most often associated with those groups of ethnic Koreans who maintain aspects of both cultures.

For authors Yū Miri and Yi Yangji, and Mixed Martial Arts fighter Akiyama Yoshihiro, identity was constructed through various choices that they made, or

sometimes ones made for them by their parents. Often these identities are neither fully Japanese nor Korean. Through their work Yū, Yi, and Akiyama have exposed how they negotiate both their public and private identities.

Unlike their parents, who to some extent were forcefully integrated into Japanese society, second generation zainichi had more options. While passing, or appearing Japanese, was an option that many *zainichi* chose to undertake, others refused to hide their Koreanness. In many cases, families' second generation would naturalize together and become officially Japanese. To pass as Japanese requires individuals to be in the "ethnic closet" (Lie 2008-20), and the fear of being found out as a zainichi could mean hardship for you and your family.

ZAINICHI

The term *zainichi*, which literally means "person living in or staying in Japan," has come to refer to foreigners residing in the country. *Zainichi kankokujin* (在日韓国人) is the term designated specifically for South Koreans living in Japan, while Z*ainichi chōsenjin* (在日朝鮮人) is more commonly associated with those affiliated with North Korea. For the purposes of this study, the term *zainichi* along with all references to Korea will be referring to South Koreans and South Korea unless otherwise stated. *Zainichi* alone has come to refer to all those of Korean descent living in Japan. The use of the term itself demonstrates the separation between Japanese born in Japan and ethnic Koreans born in Korea. As such, it designates ethnic Koreans as "other" and disconnects them from the country that they call home.

According to the 2005 population census,[1] Korean immigrants are the largest significant minority population in Japan. Of the foreign residents recorded on the census, Korean nationals numbered 470,000, though it is assumed the actual number may be larger due in part to the *zainichi* population under-recording their foreign status. The next closest is Chinese nationals with 350,000 and Brazilian with roughly 210,000 reported. Many now fourth and fifth generation ethnic Koreans have family ties that reach back to when Japan was a colonial power over Korea (1910-1945). These immigrants remain Korean due to Japan's citizenship law, which bases citizenship on parentage, or blood, rather than place of birth. Some ethnic Koreans have tried to integrate fully into Japanese society by naturalizing. Until the early 1980s, this required marrying into Japanese families, taking on Japanese names, and in some cases giving up their Korean nationality and officially becoming a Japanese national. Others still fight to maintain their Korean identity, preserving Korean language, names, and history.

The historical discourse between Japan and Korea is vast and spans decades. This project will be looking primarily at the time period relevant to the three case studies, though a brief historical background will be laid out below (Hester 140). The history of Koreans in Japan can be broken down into four general periods. The first occurred when Korea was under Japanese colonial rule, from 1910 until the end of World War II. In 1910, following the forced annexation of Korea, many Koreans began migrating to Japan. This migration was in part to "find better economic opportunit[ies]," however while still

[1] http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/kokusei/2005/poj/pdf/2005ch11.pdf

better economically than Korea, “on average” *zainichi* “were paid a third less than Japanese workers” (Kim 53). By the end of World War II, around two million Koreans were living in Japan. While many Koreans decided to return home, 60,000 or so remained in Japan (Iwabuchi 2015: 87).

The second period starts at the end of World War II and continues until the “Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and The Republic of Korea”[2] was established in June of 1965. In 1947, “all non-Japanese residents in Japan” were “subjected to alien registration” (Lie and Ryang 7). This meant that Koreans living in Japan lost their resident status in Japan, and were no longer considered national subjects. Korean residents lost “their national affiliation to Japan,” including any rights they might have had as subjects to the country (7). In 1952 the San Francisco Peace Treaty was signed. This treaty clarified the legal position of non-Japanese residences of Japan. Previously, Korean residents who did not choose to naturalize were considered aliens within the country and were situated within a grey area of the legal system. Following the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan was “freed […] from the burden of compensating Koreans and other former colonial subjects” who had chosen to remain in the country and “guaranteeing their human rights” in Japan (7). Though not treated as equal politically or economically with their Japanese counterparts, *zainichi* were still considered alien residences of Japan. However, the San Francisco Peace Treaty left Resident Koreans with “no home government” while living within Japan because Japan did not recognize either

[2] https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20583/volume-583-I-8471-English.pdf

North or South Korea (7). Following the postwar U.S. Occupation of Japan, the status of Koreans maintained their ambiguity, though they kept Japanese citizenship until 1952. Subsequently, after the San Francisco Peace Treaty was signed, the *zainichi* population was deprived of their Japanese nationality, and Korean residents of Japan had only three options: remain stateless in Japan, return to Korea, or become a naturalized Japanese citizen (Wender 2005).

The "Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and The Republic of Korea," which was signed in 1965, created a new code of conduct to be upheld between the two nations. Article II voided all previous agreements and treaties taking place between Japan and Korea prior to August of 1910, and Article III reaffirmed the Republic of Korea's complete and lawful control over the nation. In this way the treaty reset all aspects of sovereignty over Korea. It became possible to Koreans living in Japan to gain permanent residency[3] as legal alien citizens if they were South Korean nationals.[4] This would mean that they retained South Korean nationality but were guaranteed the ability to stay in Japan as permanent residents. *Zainichi* also had the choice to either naturalize, or to give up their Korean citizenship and become Japanese. Remaining a Resident Korean in Japan would give *zainichi* the ability to maintain their Korean heritage through things like continuing to give children Korean names, but it also limits the opportunities available to *zainichi,* such as jobs. Naturalization, in theory, offers *zainichi* equal opportunities

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[3] From the application of the San Francisco Peace Treaty (1952), until this point Korean residents of Japan remained in the country following the Alien Registration Law. http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/hourei/data/ARA.pdf

[4] Those who identified as North Korean nationals were to remain stateless until much later.

regarding work; however, at the time naturalization also required ethnic Koreans to give up much of their Korean heritage, including taking on Japanese names. Essentially, in order to do naturalize, a *zainichi* would be required to toss aside aspects of Korean culture, such as their Korean name and family heritage (Chapman 88). While some *zainichi* chose to do so, many also believed it was an act of betrayal towards Korea. The act of naturalization, though increasing in popularity today, remains stigmatized today, as will be clear in the below discussion of the Japanese public's reaction to Akiyama Yoshihiro's naturalization.

The third period ranges from 1965 until 1991 with the creation of "special permanent residence" (特別永住者・*tokubetsu eijyūsha*). This allowed *zainichi* citizens to become residences of Japan without having to give up their Korean nationality or heritage. However, the ability to remain in Japan and naturalize did not change the acts of discrimination. Into the 1970s it was still impossible for non-naturalized *zainichi* to find employment within the country, even though the "percentage of Japan-born *zainichi* had grown to 74.6" by 1974 (Chapman 38). It was not until the early 1980s that Japan's social security system was extended to *zainichi* (Kim 63). While it is true that many ethnic Koreans self-identified as such, as the generations continued, the metaphorical distance between individuals and their "home-land" continued to grow. In the 1970s and 1980s, many second and third generation *zainichi* were no longer strictly ethnic Korean, as they had been born and raised solely in Japan as Japanese. Yet, even as the generations of *zainichi* forge their own unique identity within both Japanese and Korean society, as *zainichi* in Japan they are labeled as "other." The continuation of the use of *zainichi* and

the continued separation between ethnic Korean and Japanese only help to marginalize them as liminal others who belong in neither country.

The fourth and current period of time is from 1991 to the present, a time when that self-identification of *zainichi* has become more complicated and diverse. The number of *zainichi* who naturalize to Japanese has been on the rise since the early 1990s, upwards of 10,000 a year since the mid-90s and has been holding steady. The interracial marriages between Japanese and *zainichi* also occur, leading to families that have a branching heritage and knowledge of both Japanese and Korean culture. The contemporary period has also introduced publically the self-proclaimed *korian-japan'īzu*, or Korean-Japanese, hybridized duel ethnicity.

This fourth period marks a new "third space" for zainichi, which is not exclusively in either Japanese or Korean society. The "third space" is a product of hybridity and strategic hybridism. Hybridity, the mixing of two separate cultural, or races, together, has allowed for the doubleness of cultural identity (Iwabuchi 2002). The "third space" allows for positions to emerge that are not fully aligned with either culture, creating a figurative space for the formation of a hybridized group of individuals, such as *zainichi*, who share the mixture of culture and heritage. The liminal space allows for individuals to walk the line between both countries. While the term *zainichi* is still used, many ethnic Koreans (such as Yū Miri) in Japan have expressed their desire to be referred to as Korean-Japanese or Japanese-Korean (コリアンジャパニーズ*Korean Japani-zu*) in order to account for their doubled self-identification.

Strategic hybridism, a term coined by Iwabuchi, is meant to explain the "capacity for cultural borrowing and appropriation" into another culture, society, or group (2002: 53). Iwabuchi uses the term "strategic hybridism" in term of how Japan adapted and remastered the Japanese culture using outside influences such as that of the US. Clearly the relationship between Japanese society and *zainichi* has different connotations, however, there is a parallel between pre-modernity—pre-westernization—Japan and the laws surrounding the zainichi. Specifically, in connection with the naturalization practices and the cultural passing that takes place within the population. Both Yi Yangji and Yū Miri expressed moments in their lives when, as a product of their upbringing, they believed their Korean heritage and relatives were backwards, as well as conflicts surrounding their names. However, unlike Iwabuchi's usage of "strategic hybridism," the way *zainichi* have integrated both Korean and Japanese culture into their society is more of a reconfiguration of cultures; Strategically holding onto pieces of Korean culture, while simultaneously allowing for the influx of Japanese culture into their society.

Still, many *zainichi* fight to maintain their own ethnic distinctiveness throughout their lives; passing down Korean names, Korean language, and Korean culture to their descendants; giving *zainichi* a way to maintain their cultural heritage throughout the generations. However, it is that ethnic marker that allows for the dominant ethnic group, Japanese, to distinguish *zainichi* from other Japanese, subsequently enabling marginalization. Involvement in ethnic communities provides people with a way of understanding themselves (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 5).

This project examines how prominent *zainichi* have crafted and negotiated an identity for themselves, using both their Japanese and Korean heritage, while simultaneously making a political statement about the position of *zainichi* within Japan through their work. Chapter 2 examines 1985 novel *Koku* by Yi Yangji, an acclaimed author and second-generation *zainichi*, who writes about *zainichi* characters, who like herself studied "abroad" in Korea, and struggle to reconcile her Korean heritage and her Japanese upbringing. Through her fictional writings, Yi Yangji explores the lives of *zainichi* as they embark on journeys to discover Korea.[5] Chapter 3 will look at the works of Yū Miri (b. 1956), a second generation *zainichi,* whose family migrated to Japan before the Korean War. Yū is a critically acclaimed author, who has written a number of stories dealing with a protagonist's struggle to find meaning in their existence and a personal identity that they can embrace. She has also been very vocal on Twitter and in interviews about her personal stance on identity and the political viewpoints surrounding the *zainichi*. This section will consider how Yū's self-proclaimed identity as being neither Japanese nor Korean while simultaneously acknowledging her *zainichiness* is mirrored in her 1997 short story *Namae,* or *Name*. The final chapter will look at Mixed Martial Arts fighter Akiyama Yoshihiro, a fourth generation *zainichi* who continually reconstructs his identity in his career. In both his autobiography and the South Korean reality show *The Return of Superman,* Akiyama continually places himself between the two countries, and expresses his love for both countries and cultures. In a sense, the three

[5] For the purposes of this paper, Korea will always refer to South Korea unless otherwise specified

figures represent a spectrum, from quietly depicting *zainichi* abroad in fiction as Yi Yangji does, to giving representations of family structures and conflicts through autobiographical essays while loudly stating personal stances on the issues as Yū Miri does, or representing both side with passion and using *zainichiness* as a means to do so as Akiyama Yoshihiro does in the media. Through television and athleticism each of these figures show the struggle of identity through personal identification and representation.

Though each of these figures have had different experiences in their life as *zainichi,* they are all highly public Japanese-Korean figures who have all discussed this identity in highly public ways, incorporating and even capitalizing on it in their careers. Each were born and raised in Japan, each accepted that life until adulthood when they were forced to carve a new path for themselves. This thesis will examine how their representations of discovering identity are not isolated by time or medium, and is something universal. The struggles associated with the creation of identity are a connecting thread that ties these three people together across the generations and is relevant today.

Chapter 2: Yi Yangji, Strings of the Country

Yi Yangji (1955-1992) was a second generation *zainichi,* who was naturalized as a child when her parents chose to obtain Japanese nationalities themselves. Yi's self-identification; however, was not so cut and dry. Her ability to relate with her *zainichi,* Japanese, and Korean identities gave her insight to both her own, as well as other *zainichi*'s personal struggles and challenges regarding identity. Naturalized as a child, she was brought up Japanese. It was not until later in life that she truly began to understand how the decision her parents made affected her identity. While attending Waseda University as a young adult, Yi tried to connect to her Korean heritage through involving herself in Korean student organizations. However, the topic of her naturalization and Japanese citizenship led to tension within the group (Wender 2005). Incidents like this give insight to why Yi constructed identity in her literary works the way she does because she herself experiences many of the same things. She was able to explore issues she faced more broadly and share those experiences through the creation of her stories. She turned to fiction as a means of subtly informing her readers of the challenges face by her and other *zainichi* without expressing them.

Yi Yangji is considered one of the most prominent *zainichi* authors not only of the postwar era, but within the context of ethnic Korean literature as a whole. Her work, though written in Japanese, was even translated into Korean, a rare feat at the time. Yi's literary works speak not only of ethnic discourse in Japan but also, as we shall see later

with Yū Miri's works and Akiyama's as well, about the double edged nature of discrimination suffered by zainichi, from both Japan and Korea.

Often stuck within society as *zainichi,* the characters Yi creates fight for their hybrid identity, an identification with Korea without totally destroying a Japanese self, *Koku*[6] (1985) gives an interesting take on the events of a young *zainichi,* Suni, as she struggles studying alone in South Korea. The entire novella takes place in only a single day, giving the reader an in-depth view on an isolated day in the life of Suni. In addition, both are music lovers, invested in learning and playing the *kayagum* (a traditional Korean instrument) as a means of connecting with their Korean heritage. Both grew up in Japan, and through their education, found their way to Korea to study. For Yi, musical studies were more important than simply language education. The kayagum, Korean folk dancing, and traditional singing helped her feel truly connected with "the spirit of her homeland" (Hayes 122).

SUNI AS A CHARACTER

The incompatibility of Suni's Japanese and Korean identities is physically represented in her room. Throughout *Koku*, Suni speaks and thinks in a number of Korean words, words that she is learning during her studies in the Korea. Most are short words that a student would learn early in their education; numbers and words to describe a person, such as "sŏnsaengnim" meaning teacher and "ajumoni" meaning aunt (139).

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[6] Wender, Mellissa, eds. *Into the Light: an Anthology of Literature by Koreans in Japan.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011. Print. (pgs. 132-141). Hereafter, all translations cited parenthetically in the text are accredited to Wender unless otherwise stated.

And yet, a few Korean phrases that speak to the internal struggle Suni is facing are also present. Words like, *"urinara"* which means "our country Korea" (134), get stuck in Suni's mind. She fixates on this idea of "our country Korea," though she herself seems incapable of connecting with the country. This linguistic barrier is created in part due to Suni's choosing to socialize with fellow *zainichi* Korean language learners between classes. While she does refer to it as "unfortunate" (138), she gives no indication of trying to use Korean in these situations. Yet, her inability to fully be neither Japanese nor Korean makes these interactions nearly impossible even if she were to pursue them. The problem of communication, and Suni's own frustration surrounding it, can clearly be seen during her day's language lesson. During the lesson Suni is asked to read by her teacher. After being criticized for not sounding Korean (or rather sounding Japanese), Suni expresses her frustration by saying all *zainichi* are faced with the same problem. They must justify being able to speak only Japanese, and yet need to know Japanese to fit into Japanese society. She refutes the idea that "bloodlines" give someone a special ability to learn a language. She then states that for her and her fellow *zainichi* "Korean is simply a foreign language."[7]

Suni's inability to adapt to Korean society is always being shown, from the posters in the university that demand she "dream in Korean" (138) to the "Korean-language text" and "flash cards" (133-134) that clutter her room. They are all markers of her "otherness." Each designed to help her assimilate into the society, while each equally

[7] *"Zainichi" bungaku zenshū / isogai jirō, Kuroko Kazuo hen.* Shohan ed. Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan. 2006. Print. Page 209.

defines her as an outsider. This problem is further highlighted by her attachments to her Japanese sensei. He was an influential figure in her education in Korea, and a person whom she is deeply connected to. From the one-sided letter, Suni clearly expresses fondness towards the man, and she holds him in very high regard. The letter to her sensei further demonstrates her. In the letter she shares her frustrations over learning Korean with Sensei, and intersperses the Korean words for teacher and aunt in the letter. In her letter to him she hides her struggles with the Korean language, or simply brushes those struggles aside by dismissing it, saying “my Korean has been getting better.” Even after admitting to speaking mainly Japanese between classes Suni simply writes “there are some issues with not being in an exclusively Korean-speaking environment.” However, she tosses these things behind and writes to Sensei “in Japanese as well” because she “wanted to write to [him] so much, what else could [she] do” (138). Each of these incidents constantly connects her back to Japan. Suni’s desire to speak with Sensei outweighs her desire to learn Korean; her connection with Japan is far stronger than her connection to Korea. “After the graduation ceremony” she claims “I plan to return to Japan,” (139) in essence ‘I will return to you.’ She promises to return to Japan, expressing her deep connection with the country. Though Sensei’s response is never seen, her reliance on him is evident. He is Suni’s direct connection to Japan. Suni expresses such a strong desire to contact her sensei that she writes to him in Japanese, expressing her guilt over not exclusively using Korean, “but I wanted to write to you so much” she states, finishing with, “so what else could I do [but write to you in Japanese]” (138).

Suni finds that adapting to the Korean way of life proved challenging. Instead of feeling one with Korea, she felt isolated. This feeling of isolation is symbolized in *Koku* by the physical isolation of Suni within her bedroom where the majority of Suni's personal monologues take place. There Suni communicates with her possessions and her own reflection, a reflection that she is disassociated from. Her placement in her bedroom at the beginning of the story only adds to her personal isolation. That coupled with her constant references to Japan demonstrate her strong connection with the island nation. She longs for the "moist Japanese air," speaks "Japanese between classes," and "still dreams in Japanese" (Wender 138). Her longing for Japan and incessant use of the Japanese language only highlight her potential unwillingness to fully assimilate into Korea. Yet she expresses regret in clinging to Japan and Japanese, calling it "unfortunate" and is determined to learn Korean as best she can (138). The divide present in her language ability acts as a continual reminder that Suni is not Korean, yet her identity as a Resident Korean in Japan excludes her from being Japanese either. This inability to be neither Japanese nor Korean acts like barrier that Suni must fight against to gain freedom and create an identity that fits within both countries.

Suni's physical location plays into her instability regarding her identity. Whereas her personal connections remain with Sensei in Japan, she is not on the island nation. She is secluded. Suni lives in a small bedroom in Seoul, Korea. Her living space in Seoul is described as "tiny" in comparison to her living quarters in Japan. Suni has a single desk and uses one side "for studying, and the other for doing [her] makeup" (133). Whereas at home, in Japan, she had a dresser set aside for her makeup. Although the building itself is

located in Korea, the space seems to be distinctly Japanese. In her room, Suni studies Korean, but does not speak it, she writes letter to Sensei using Japanese, and her thoughts are just of Japan. Suni's makeup case, which sits on her writing desk, was brought from Japan. The way she applies her makeup is exactly the same as she did in Japan. On her desk also sits her dictionary; a dictionary that translates Japanese into Korean, creating both a connection and separation from the two languages and places. Like Suni herself, the dictionary is both Japanese and Korean and yet organically neither. The dictionary is a device to help ease understanding when understanding in the moment is unobtainable. Suni's dictionary allows for words she knows and understands to be transplanted and reconfigured into words those around her can understand. Just like her herself, the dictionary must adapt to be useful, to exist. In translating Japanese into Korean, the dictionary also expands the feeling of disconnection Suni experiences. In order for the Korean to be understandable, it must be connected to the Japanese that Suni has grown up understanding. In this way the need for a dictionary further isolates her from the country around her.

Unlike the dictionary which aids in understanding and yet creates an imagined isolation, the mirror that hangs in the bedroom hold a permanent "other" that cannot be altered. Suni sits in front of her mirror, putting on makeup the same way she always does, and as she applies it distances herself from her reflection. As she "draws back from the mirror" (133) examining her newly painted face, the reflection becomes a separate person. The physical Suni stares at this woman in the mirror, an entity now separate from herself. In using her Japanese makeup case, Suni has in a way returned to Japan while her

now detached reflection stayed in Korea. The reflection watches and mimics Suni's actions, but cannot physically interact with the room. A passive observer in Suni's brief decent into madness, the reflection is perhaps viewing the Japanese space in the same way the Japanese audience of the book would be viewing the Korean space through the eyes of Suni.

The mirror reflection then shifts as it represents the Korean gaze on the *zainichi* life in Korea. At every turn the mirror itself is representative of the "us," of Japanese or Korean, not of the "other," the *zainichi* those existing but never allowed to fully become. A representation of the country outside of Suni's bedroom, and yet the exact image of Suni herself. The break between Japan and Korea is a thin piece of glass over a mirrored background. Like Suni herself, who is a *zainichi* born in Japan, studying Korean, and stuck in-between the two distinct locations, this mirror image is a representation of Korea stuck inside of a Japanese space without the ability to fully escape. In this instance, as Suni takes over the identity of a Japanese woman by destroying the kayagum, the reflection becomes her *zainichi* heritage. A reflection there, but not fully accepted into the cultural society.

The reflection is just one of the things observing Suni, however. On the other side of the room, watching from a distance, is the kayagum. The kayagum is personified, given a female form and is "hung upside down," distorted, "naked" (135), its grotesque form threatening Suni. The room where she finds sanctuary is literally surrounded by the country. In the room itself, the Japanese space, the Korean reflection and the Korean instrument stand guard; watching, judging. This constant observation threatens Suni, it

makes her instinctively curl in on herself, her "body crumbl[es] in pieces" and she "draws [her] knees up to [her] chest" (135) in an attempt to hide from the judging eyes of Korea. The kayagum, as a representation of Korea, is suspended in the Japanese space mimicking the plight of *zainichi* in the country; present but separate.

The pressure of the observer's judgment only increases as the clock, a representation of the watchful Japan, continues to count the seconds. The sound of a string from the kayagum breaking is what sends Suni over the edge. The "popping sound broke [her] concentration" drawing her attention back to the confinement she feels being stuck within Korea and having only this one room as a surrogate Japan. Suni describes the standoff with the kayagum, in which she is asking it to break more strings. She is momentarily lost in herself, treating the instrument as if it would respond to her demands. It is as though she is waiting for Korea to acknowledge her position in the country, in society. However, it does not. The clock continues to tick off the seconds as if provoking her to stand up for herself, constantly pointing out her uniqueness.

The strings of the kayagum are the physical markers that give it its identity; they are the thing that makes the kayagum a kayagum. In cutting the strings, Suni can erase all meaning from the instrument leaving it blank; without meaning. The ecstasy Suni experiences after she cuts the first string and then the second until they are all hanging unconnected, is described as "a brief ripple of erotic pleasure" (135), a sexual experience of retaliation against her believe oppression and a demonstration of power. The tension in each string is released, creating an orgasmic sensation. In this moment she also becomes yet another person. Suni parts from herself as the mirror image continues to watch Sunni

cutting each string of the kayagum. “The women” (135) who cut the strings stands there “exhal[ing] excited breaths onto the naked” kayagum (136). The encounter becomes an out-of-body observation of the climaxing tension between two metaphorical countries. With the catharsis, comes the reunification of Suni’s self and Suni’s mind, as the object which enforced the separation of the two is quieted.

The kayagum, Korea, has now been stripped of its identity. Without strings, a kayagum is nothing more than a varnished piece of wood with a hollowed out chamber that once resonated sound. The bridges that allowed for musical notes to ring in a melodic pattern cannot stay in place without the tension the strings bring to them. The naked kayagum now has no meaning, no purpose, no identity, it is now representative of Suni; out of place in the room, just as she is out of place in the country. It is an aspect of Korean identity that Suni destroyed in a state of passion. She stripped the kayagum of its voice in the same way she feels stripped of her own identity. The kayagum had been given an identity, it had been created for the sole purpose of being a kayagum, and Suni stripped that identity away from the instrument. Her own identity had been placed upon her by circumstance - the circumstance of being born *zainichi*.

The strings that she cut are the defining feature that makes a piece of wood an instrument, they are the key to the kayagum’s identity. Cutting the strings clears the kayagum of the past, just like washing ones face erases makeup. Suni cleanses herself, removing the mask of makeup she had put on previously. Washing herself of the Japanese façade others see, and revealing her “lovely white” and entirely “blank face” (136). She is, in this moment, on the same level as the motionless kayagum. An

instrument stripped of the things that give it life, and Suni clear of any personal markers associated to Japan. Unlike the lifeless embodiment of Korea that remains naked and dead, Suni reapplies her makeup. She once again decides how she will construct her identity, how she will look to the world around her, how others will see her. This reconstruction could only occur once the looming presence of Korea behind her was not looking. As the makeup is reapplied, the judging reflection passes once again; fusing with Suni. Where before the woman and Suni represented difference, now together; they embrace this new ground of identity that was created in the room after the death of the kayagum; the Korean gaze.

Suni once again takes her place within the Japanese space of her bedroom. The clock continues to tick each second, but in that moment no longer seems to be counting down and yet continues to keep time. With the presence of Korea lifted, Suni feels free to be Japanese within this space. She looks towards the remaining pieces of Korea that still exist in the newly connected space. She looks at the *hangul*[8] letters drawn carefully onto the flashcards, but "they mean nothing to" her (137). Whereas before she was invested in learning Korean in this moment, that is not her desire, and she is content with simply being herself. In this moment of complete disconnection from Korea and Korean society, Suni decides to reach to Japan. She decides to write a letter to Sensei.

Sensei is Suni's Japanese axis, the focal point for and her pivot between both countries. He is the pivot point on which Suni constructs and reconstructs new pieces of

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[8] The Korean writing system.

cultural identity. He is her Japanese contact, but also her desire to please him keeps her in Korea. The letter Suni writes to him is rather personal. It mentions her education, his family, and her intent on returning to Japan following “the graduation ceremony” (139). It can also be inferred that though she writes of how he will be too busy to meet her at airport back in Japan, she actually desires that he can be the one to meet her upon her return.

How can her Japanese identity help propel Suni farther into Korea? How can her desire to please Sensei shift her axis once again? Suni has a request. She requests from her Japanese benefactor money to buy a new “most wonderful kayagum” (139). As she writes this letter, the stringy remains of her original kayagum still lay behind her. The kayagum she stripped of identity and purpose is dead and being replaced. However, is the meaning behind the original kayagum being replaced? The destroyed kayagum was a symbol of Korea, a symbol of the ever-watchful Korean society that Suni seemed to be unable to truly mold herself into. Perhaps this new kayagum would be something different. Although still an embodiment of Korean culture and Korean heritage, it would be paid for by Japan. In essence, owned by Japan. This new traditionally Korean yet Japanese owned kayagum would be more like Suni than its demolished counterpart. Like Suni, the new instrument would be in Korea, but belong to Japan. Perhaps this reconstruction of identity is more a metaphor for Suni and other *zainichi*. Ownership is something not often associated with anything outside of material items or pets, but is not nationality a type of ownership? This new kayagum can be a fusion of the two countries, connected to both by Suni. It will be both Korean in heritage and yet Japanese in

nationality. By belonging to Suni, the new kayagum will be a personification of Suni's own identity.

Following the letter and the reconstruction of the kayagum's identity, Suni loses her identity once more. However, this time the loss is not aggravated or impassioned. The events of the early morning have left her depleted. Completely exhausted, she lets everything catch up with her. Looking at her small room, she begins to question herself. Asking "what happened," "why" did it happen, and even "who" am I or "who" is it that did the destruction (140). In this moment Suni is once again between things; between the events of that morning; between countries; between languages. She notices the books under her desk, more dictionaries, but this time the Japanese language is conspicuously absent. These books are Korean to English dictionaries, completely bypassing the language Suni feels most secure with, the language she identifies most with. She laughs at her new lack of understanding, lack of acceptance, lack of place in the world. It seems as though the acknowledgment of not being accepted is something that she is so familiar with, that acknowledgment is now comical; a comical commentary on the creation of identity and belonging that Yi Yangji herself might have acknowledged.

Suni's anger towards herself contradicts the destruction of the kayagum, and it contradicts the purchasing of a new kayagum. In destroying her kayagum, she destroyed the wall between her and Korea. In reaching to Sensei and Japan for financial help to buy a new instrument, she asserted Japan as the more powerful of the two countries and trapped Korea (the new kayagum) under Japan's power. Sensei has the power to allow Suni to continue her Korean studies. He has the power to recreate the culture, the country

Suni disregarded in destroying the kayagum. This power is representative of Japan and its influence over Korea.

SUNI AS THE EMBODIMENT OF YI YANGJI

While it cannot be said that *Koku* is solely an autobiographical representation of Yi Yangji's life, the parallels between Suni and Yi are glaringly present. Suni's narrative focuses on her struggles of identity with regards to Japanese, her native language, and Korean, the language she seeks to learn. It also focuses on her feeling of "otherness" within Korean. Yi spent years studying in Korea trying to not only master the Korea language, but also aspects of Korean culture that resembled Japanese. Music played a huge role in Yi's life, as it does her character Suni, and while in Korea Yi studied both Korean dance and music. In Japan, she had studied traditional music, so the transition from traditional Japanese music to traditional Korean music seemed an easy one.

Yi's character Suni, along with many of her fictional characters, shares many attributes with Yi herself. In the case of Suni, this is especially her love of music and desire to grasp Korean culture through the study of traditional arts. Like Yi, Suni studies music and dance while in Korea, she struggles to fit in, and she experiences feelings of separation that exists, and Suni struggles to identify as either Korean or Japanese. Yi Yangji used her work as a means of defining issues that still exist today. While *zainichi* are Korean citizens that live in Japan, they are not Korean in the same way people born in Korea are, and traveling between the two cultures is not that simple. In essence, to be a *zainichi* means to simultaneously be both Japanese and Korean while also being neither

Japanese nor Korean, stuck between the two counties with only a handful of options that allow the maintenance of both identities but the possession of neither one.

Just like her character Suni, Yi Yangji expresses similar moments of conflict during her life. At one point, she admitted to thinking of Korean relatives are uncivilized and even barbaric (Hayes 121). However, outwardly it seems that Yi was much less conflicted about who she was in terms of her national or ethnic identity as an adult.

For Yi, Korea became the safe haven Suni found in the Japanese space of her room. Yi used Korea and her studies there to help her deal with the loss of both of her brothers to illness (Hayes 123). Yet, her literary works continued to have *zainichi* protagonists struggling to find solid footing within society. A former classmate of Yi's who, following her death, claimed that Yi had desires to "renaturalize," or revert her Japanese citizenship back to that of Korean (Wender 128).

Notwithstanding this affinity for Korea, Yi Yangji writes as a Japanese author in Japanese. Yet she writes this work from the space of Korea. Like Suni, who writes letters in Japanese to a Japanese audience (Sensei), Yi too writes her fictional story in Japanese. Interestingly, *Koku* suggests that Korea offers the corporeal space occupied physically by Yi Yangji and fictionally by Suni is Korea. During the writing process and publication process of *Koku*, along with other texts, Yi Yangji was in Korea going to school. However, *Koku* and all of Yi's works were written in Japanese and published in Japan. Though written about experiences in Korea, the text is meant for Japanese readers. It therefore enables her to declare her hybrid identity to the Japanese public and to display it publically as a means to show them the struggles of *zainichi*, like herself. This gives the

Japanese readers a look into the lives of *zainichi* abroad; creating a connection between themselves and their Korean neighbors that is otherwise not obtainable. Not only does this process help Yi as an author negotiate her personal identity, but it also lends itself to the production of identity in fellow *zainichi* in Japan who may read the novel.

While Yi Yangji's stories are fictional, many personal aspects of her life come across in them. In the case of *Koku,* the autobiographical aspects of Yi's life revolve around the personal emotions expressed by Suni, and the desire to carve out a place for herself in Korea. The similarities between Yi Yangji and her characters seem to indicate this larger purpose. The conflicts, both internal, like seen in *Koku*, and external are fictional, and therefore staged. They are staged expressions of struggle, of uncertainty, and of regret. Writing these events seemed to be a way for Yi to "voice" out her own opinions; opinions about national identity, about the *zainichi* situation, and about the political situation between Japan and Korea. As a woman, writing pieces of literature might have been the only way to be heard. As a *zainichi*, writing in Japanese was probably the only way to get her work published. However, the decision to pull the curtains back on the struggles of identity completely intentional.

Whether or not Suni can be viewed as an analogue for Yi Yangji herself is not the most useful question to ask. While certain aspects of Suni's character probably map nicely onto Yi's actually life, Suni is fictional. However, the struggles she faces throughout *Koku* are relatable, legitimate, and real. Therein lays the power of Yi's works. As an individual, Yi only had the ability to actively construct her personal identity. Even with the role she played in *zainichi* activism (Hayes 122), her voice was never going to

reach as far as a literary text might. Writing may have been Yi's greatest contribution to the *zainichi* population.

Koku's Suni is trapped between the two countries, just as her author, Yi Yangji, is. Though Suni, Yangji's character, exists only in words on a page, she clearly reflects the struggles of the author Yangji and offers a means by which to alters her own identity. Through Suni, Yi Yangji illustrates the deconstruction, reconstruction, and negotiation of her own identity, as well as that of other zainichi. Two figures, voices interwoven, work together to construct something new or refine something old: one voice located in reality, the other in fiction, one the creator, the other the created. They are one and yet dissonant. The duet they sing is a disjointed tale of manipulating and reconstructing identity through cultural symbols. Although working in tandem, the players are divided by the page.

Chapter 3: Yū Miri, the Importance of Names

Second generation *zainichi* author Yū Miri was born in 1968 to parents who had migrated to Japan from Korea early in their childhood before the start of the Korean War. Yū is currently a best-selling author in Japan whose work often illustrates the struggles faced by people who have been pushed out of mainstream society in some way, such as minority groups, people struggling financially, women, and people dealing with forms of abuse.

Though she has been celebrated for speaking out for these marginalized populations, she has also encountered controversy. Her first novel, *Ishi ni oyogu sakana,* (The Fish Swimming in the Stone), was eventually banned in 1999, following a libel lawsuit to stop publication (Napack). *Ishi ni oyogu sakana* had been reported, by Yū, to be a story loosely based off of personal experiences. However, a friend of Yū claimed that the story was actually based on herself. The acquaintance claimed her portrayal in the book was "cruel" and caused "irrecoverable damages" to her personally (Brasor). In this first work, perhaps she uses another's identity to craft and negotiate her own.

While Yū is known for her works of fiction, she has also written several autobiographical works as well. *Inochi* (*Life*, 2000)*, Tamashī* (*Soul* 2001)*,* and *Koe (Voice,* 2002) are considered her autobiographical trilogy. Each of these texts tells story of important events Yū Miri experienced. The first, *Inochi,* tells about the birth of her son and the events surrounding it, *Tamashī* discusses the death of her dear friend, and *Koe*

continues the story of her life with her son. Yū has discussed continuing the series with two more works as well. Yū's willingness to produce multiple pieces of autobiographical texts indicate her desire to share her story, and in turn showing representations of other *zainichi* struggles as well. Yū has demonstrated that not only are her personal experiences potential material to include in her work, but also the lives and struggles of others, as shown by her book *Ishi ni oyogu sakana.*

Yū's connection with Japan and Korea is complex. Although she does not want to identify as a *zainichi* author, she does not deny her Korean heritage as she acknowledges her South Korean citizenship and "uses the Korean Pronunciation of her name" (Wender 2005: 160).

Even though many of her texts deal with similar issues to those faced by *zainichi* and even with multiple autobiographical depictions in her literature, she does not wish to be associated with *zainichi* literature. In 1997 *Kazoku shinema*, or *Family Cinema*, received the prestigious Akutagawa Prize. The book, which depicts an estranged and dysfunctional family's reunion, caused more controversy, including anonymous death threats and canceled book signings for fear of violence, because of its depiction of family issues and according to Yū matters concerning "freedom of expression" (Herskovitz). The threats seem to have been closely related to Yū's status as a *zainichi*, rather than the book's plot or reception, and she even received threats warning her that "she will be killed" for being "Korean" (Herskovitz). This reasoning is rather ironic given Yū's stance on both Japan and Korea. While she stands against the discrimination faced by *zainichi* and Koreans in Japan, she judges both countries critically, asserting that Japanese-

Koreans are often treated badly in Japan as well as in Korea. In her opinion, she does not have a nation. Her country, she states, "is the ground beneath my feet" (Napack).Yū has consciously tried to separate herself from *zainichi bungaku*, or *zainichi* literature, and the strictly Korean or Japanese identity as well. Yū has stated that "what she knows best […] is family" not specifically Japanese nor Korean, but an "ideal for the family" and so she writes about those relationships. She continues claiming that while ideals exist, "places such as Japan, South Korea, and the United States" have "lost" their models and the only thing that can be done is to "create […] original scenarios (Herskovitz). For Yū writing about family struggles and dynamics have always been more important than writing specifically about *zainichi,* but about how individuals face struggles internally. Often times these struggles are tied with an individual's personal identity, and in the case of Yū, with her status of being a *zainichi.* While she wishes to be separated from the genre of *zainichi bungaku,* her depictions of *zainichi* struggles firmly place much of her writing in the center of that genre. In doing this, Yū seems to have more freedom to discuss the plight of *zainichi* and other groups in Japan without being sectioned off to a specific genre of literature. By claiming she is not a part of *zainichi* literature Yū is not bound by the tropes that dominate that field.

Confusion surrounding ethnic and racial identity affected Yū growing up as well. Like many *zainichi,* she was introduced to some Korean but never learned how to speak or read it fluently. In the years following her expulsion from high school, Yū joined a theater troupe and began crafting herself a new identity.

NAMAE AND OTHER SHORT STORIES

Similarly, some of her texts appear to be ambiguous as to whether they are solely works of fiction, solely autobiographical in nature, or if the stories themselves are actually a combination of the two. But in each, she mirrors her own real life issues with how the narrator deals with moments of adversity and with specific incidents that did occur in her life. In her short essay "Namae,"[9] or Name, Yū's character looks back at her childhood when she was taking part in the Coming of Age Ceremony. The ceremony, which was for children of Korean descent, required that each child respond in Korean when called upon. This requirement made the narrator Yū feel uncomfortable. Like Yū, the narrator had received little exposure to the Korean language and felt out of place at the ceremony wearing traditional Korean attire. Yū Miri has admitted to being unable to speak Korean, and that the confusion between Japanese and Korean in her youth was a point of great stress growing up. This stress is reflected in the narrator of "Namae." When required to respond to the master of ceremonies in Korean, she admits she "was embarrassed to answer" in Korean (87).

Such ambivalence over using Korean surrounds the question regarding the pronunciation of her family name and the names of her parents. The narrator's own confusion regarding the names of her parents, which are pronounced differently depending on whether the kanji is being read in Japanese or Korean, only increases her feelings of disconnection. Of her father's name, she writes, "Of course, the Korean

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[9] "Namae" (名前) is a part of a larger compilation called *watashi-go jiten.* Tokyo: Asashishinbunsha. 1996.

reading is different, but it's difficult and I can't pronounce it" (88). Her inability to pronounce her father's Korean name insinuates that she is far removed from her Korean identity; the name is foreign to her. In "Namae," she mirrors her real life issues in deciding upon the reading of her own name. She writes about when she joins a theater troupe as an actress, and she was asked to decide between the Japanese reading of her last name, Yanagi,[10] or the Korean reading, Yū. In a sense, Yū became a stage name. Though she had been accustom to hearing both Yanagi and Yū throughout her life, being in Japan Yanagi was likely much more common. In requesting to be referred to as Yū, she declared a separate identity. She declared an identity that creates a divergence from Japan and seems to align more with her Korean heritage and culture. Yet in remaining in Japan and as a Japanese author, Yū is declaring her otherness. She is solidifying her *zainichi*ness taking her Korean name. She recounts how her choice entailed challenging questions about whether she "had always used that name" and required explanations that challenge her connections with Japan and with Korea (88). She grew up using the Japanese readings for her name, and in adulthood decided to use the Korean readings. This puts her firming between the two countries. It marks an instance where she sided with Korean culture rather than Japanese. This decision is significant because Yū has always been insistent on separating herself from the umbrella term that is *zainichi* and refusing to side with either side of her identity. Yū is obviously committed to Japan, but has never naturalized. She has also clearly expressed her gratitude to her parents for not

[10] 柳美里can be read as *Yanagi Miri* or *Yū Miri.*

having naturalized her in childhood (Wender 196). Yū prefers to be in the grey area between Japanese and Korean, and in her adult life and rarely attempts to pass as one or the other.

In "A Girl Who Changed Her Name," it is not ethnic identity but instead gendered identity at issue. In it a young girl, M, is told to play male roles in a theater troupe. She cuts her hair and begins to take on the male role both on and off stage. She even starts referring to herself with the male pronoun, "boku*,"* and discards her "skirts and dresses, replacing them with male clothes such as pants" (53). M finds comfort in not being a girl, comfort in a newly constructed identity, while her mother reacts negatively when the girl's feminine clothes were replaced with that masculine ones.. Before she took on this personality, she was "shy" and "introverted," but becoming male on stage gave her confidence and strength (55). Following a nightmare, in which she "saw [her]self become a women in [her] dream" and was frightened, the girl is forced to question who she is and who she wants to be (55). This story's commentary on identity and self-discovery is a perpetual theme in not only Yū's stories but her life as well. Similar to the act of using the Korean reading , While "Yū" who faced the choice of a Korean or Japanese name, the character in "A Girl Who Changed Her Name" has to decide if the masculine identity she has taken on is the identity she wants to maintain.

In another autobiographical short piece, "Families Who Were Naturalized in Japan," Yū refers to both her extended family and other families she observed who had naturalized to Japanese. Yū's uncle, who has established a place for himself in Japanese society as a "truck driver," married into a Japanese family and was "naturalized" at that

time (210). Following his naturalization, Yū's uncle separated himself from all Korean characteristics that would make him appear non-Japanese. He attempted to completely erase all traces of *zainichi* and Korean culture from his life, so that he was able to "pass" as Japanese.

Yū Miri's experiences with her uncle reflect this concept. If her presence were to reflect the Korean heritage they both share, he would no longer be able to pass as Japanese. His entire façade would come crashing down with something as simple as a Korean word said in his home. The use of Korean in his presence, or in the presence of a naturalized zainichi at the time, was seen as the potential "outing" of that individual from the "ethnic closet." The act of speaking Korean had the potential to reveal the uncles true self, which terrified him. In the tale, the narrator recounts visiting her uncle prior to his naturalization and following his naturalization. Before he changed the nationality of himself and his family, Yū referred to him as "samchon," a Korean word meaning uncle. However, after his naturalization he refused to be called "samchon" because it was too Korean. Similarly, the narrator Yū uses the Korean word "kalchi" to describe the Japanese beltfish while her family visits her uncle's house. After doing so she is scolded for using the Korean word. After their visit, Yū's uncle calls her mother in frustration questioning if they had "used Korean outside" because the neighbors seemed to be looking at him differently. His desire to fit in overruled his Korean heritage, so much so that the family never visited him again.

On the surface, language discrimination such as this seems trivial. However, for the narrator's uncle, the use of Korean has become a taboo because he fears what his

neighbors might do if they discovered he was zainichi. Admitting that you were once a Resident Korean is also admitting you were not born Japanese. To use the Korean language would only confirm that fact. Even today, Korean linage is often speculated when a person's name is missing from the family registry (Lie 2008: 21). "Naturalization required the adoption of Japanese sounding name until the late 1990s," a name missing from the registry might mark a gap in the Japanese heritage and point to Korean heritage (85). The significance of "Families Who Were Naturalized in Japan" is how Yū crafted a fictitious yet autobiographical critic, not on naturalization itself, but on the requirement to erase the Korean side of *zainichi* to do so. In the text Yū and her siblings use of Korean "outed" her uncle as a Korean, but it did not "out" her. Yū is not naturalized, therefore not hiding a piece of her identity in order to "pass" in society. She, as the author, is however, reflecting on the event. Beyond discovering personal identity through her narratives, she calls into question aspects of Japanese society that she finds questionable.

As the narrative progresses, we are introduced to an older Yū who recounts how she and another zainichi girl got expelled from school. Unlike Yū, this other girl had been naturalized by her parents. Whereas Yū is still free to explore both the Korean and Japanese sides of herself, this girl is stuck on a single shore. Although the two never interacted, she reacted to Yū's expulsion with sadness. The girl left a note and flowers at Yū's home expressing that sadness. It read "the red bloom is a poppy, the white bloom is a lily, Miri, please bloom in the beautiful Miri color" (212). The girl's letter and sadness allude to a connection that she felt to Yū. Even though they had never spoken, there was a connection of heritage and upbringing that, while Yū does not seem to make any

indication, deeply affected the girl. Her ending statements, in which she asks Yū to find her own individual and unique color before she blooms seems to signify that the girl wants Yū to be at peace with herself. It also suggests that she, the girl, wished for the ability to decide on her own as well. The other colors, "red" and "white," are put in opposition of each other, each representing a different flower. Red as a color is harsh and vibrant, whereas white is calm and neutral. It seems as though each color also represents a side of the zainichi identity that these two share; Japanese and Korean. Just like the Japanese and South Korean flags, the colors of red and white stand in contrast with one another, and yet they stand affixed to the same plan; the same girl. As the concluding statement of the short story, this line suggests that deciding upon which side to represent, to be, is the least important aspect defining your *zainichi* identity, but what is important is finding peace with your decision.

Yū Miri has stated that "being caught between Japan and South Korea […] has been useful" to her as a writer. Being in between both places and both societies likely allows her to see both sides of the same story, giving a broader less bias view-point on the issues between not only the two countries but also *zainichi* placement within both societies. The burden created by being in between both Japan and South Korea gives her inspiration for her work (Wender 2005: 196). However, following the birth of her son, Yū Miri made the decision to have him hold Japanese citizenship. In doing so, she chose to have her son not face the same issues she faced because of her zainichi status. It also creates a distance between mother and son. He has a Japanese passport and his surname is read "Yanagi" not Yū (Napack). In giving him a place in Japan, Yū further isolates

herself and craves a path farther removed from the Japanese and the Korea identity. This act of reclassifying one's identity, for Yū is expanding her son's place in Japan while simultaneously distancing herself from him.

Chapter 4: Akiyama Yoshihiro, Son of Korea; Daughter of Japan

Unlike Yi Yangji, who was naturalized by her parents, or Yū Miri who has never chosen to naturalize, Akiyama made the public decision to do so in his adult life. This puts full responsibly on his shoulders and in turn can be seen as an act of proclaiming identity. This coupled with his insistence to publicly declare himself deeply attached to both countries, gives a strong sense of selfhood in his *zainichi* identity. Akiyama has not kept his opinion on his relationship between his Korean identity and his Japanese identity secret, choosing instead to make them public at every opportunity, using his *zainichi* status as a means of self-promotion. People have criticized Akiyama for this type of self-promotion saying that he is "using his position as a *zainichi* for personal profit" (Akiyama 99). As someone who is naturalized Japanese and yet accepting of both cultures and countries, Akiyama firmly believes that the current generation has "far less ill will" than previous generations, and that the relationship between the two countries (and the *zainichi*) is now more like a "rivalry" along the same lines as a baseball match. Beside naturalization, Akiyama also believes that the *hallyu,* or Korean culture wave, has changed the opinions of the generation's youth. Akiyama feels that "with the *hallyu* wave and drama boom, the interest in Korean culture has lessened the distance between the two countries" (94). Regardless of his assertion, however, prejudice against *zainichi* still exists.

A fourth generation z*ainichi*, Akiyama Yoshihiro (Korean name: Choo SungHoon) was born and raised in Osaka. Throughout his childhood and adolescence, Akiyama learned the martial art judo. As a Kinki University student in Japan, he won

awards in judo and was considered an impressive judoka, or an expert in judo. Though he considered naturalization and becoming a Japanese citizen, Akiyama dreamed of competing for the national Korean judo team, a dream shared with his father (Yeo and Arnold).

Eventually, after years of trying to obtain this dream, Akiyama came to the decision that success in judo was not possible for him in Korea; he returned to Japan. In 2001 he became a naturalized Japanese citizen to gain eligibility to compete on the Japanese national team, and in 2002 he won the gold and beat a South Korean judoka. Headlines called him a betrayer (Yeo and Arnold). He belonged to both countries but felt apart of neither.

During one interview soon after his first win as a representative for Japan, Akiyama stated, "I am Korean. I am also Japanese. It doesn't matter to me. I love both countries." Similar declarations appear in Akiyama's autobiography where he discusses at length the push-pull relationship he and his family faced with Japanese and Korean culture. He states *zainichi* will not refer to themselves as Japanese, yet people living in Korea would not call *zainichi* Korean either (Akiyama 92). Even though *zainichi* "hold a Korean identity" and are "Korean […] a *zainichi* is still a *zainichi"* (93). Following his naturalization Akiyama has said, "I am not Korean anymore, but in my heart I never forgot that I am Korean" (Yeo and Arnold).

From a generational standpoint, the idea of acceptance of naturalized *zainichi* varies, as does the opinions of intermarriage. While the practice has continued to increase in numbers, public figures such as Akiyama often get the brunt of the negativity. In 2009

Akiyama married a Japanese super model, Shiho, and again was faced with controversy. Shiho, being a public feature, also faced public criticism for marrying a "Korean."

A few years later, in 2011 they had a daughter. While Akiyama's family continued to support him after he gave up his Korean nationality, it did create a rift between them. Akiyama admitted that naming his daughter Sarang, a Korean name meaning love, was one way to rebuild bridges between him and his father. Unlike Yū Miri, Akiyama has consciously chosen to raise his daughter in both societies. In having two contemporarily relevant zainichi decide on completely opposite actions regarding their children raises the question of how universal the zainichi identity can be; or if there is such a thing as zainichi identity at all. Akiyama's daughter is, and will continue, to live in Japan as a Japanese, and yet she has been given a name that will undoubtedly cause her to be singled out as someone of Korean heritage. With this choice, Akiyama, and his wife, are deciding for their child how she will be viewed and represented within both countries. This action is something that becomes a trend for the Akiyama family over the following years. As the two of them, both Akiyama and Sarang, continue to make public appearances in Korea and film in Japan. Akiyama uses Sarang, whether or not done intentionally, as a negotiation chip in both countries. His daughter becomes a gateway towards reconnecting with his Korean heritage, and reintegrating and assimilating with that culture. She has no agency in this, or in her own identity construction, as Akiyama is the deciding force. This contrasts with the agency he possessed in deciding to become a Japanese citizen himself. Although his father expressed disappointment, the choice was

still his own. In crafting his daughter's identity, Akiyama is simultaneously re-forming his own as well.

THE RETURN OF SUPERMAN

The Akiyamas joined the KBS variety show *The Return of Superman*[11] (슈퍼맨이 돌아왔다) in 2013, a Korean variety show where celebrity fathers must take care of their children without the help of their wives for forty-eight hours. The show is broadcast weekly on KBS in Korean and then uploaded onto the KBS World YouTube channel[12] with English subtitles for their international fans. After partaking in the pilot episode, Akiyama first said in a press conference that he and Sarang would not be appearing on the show as regulars. However, they ended up participating on the show for four and a half years (September 2013–March 2016). During the first episode, after it had been decided that they would be appearing as regulars, he stated that his father was the reason he decided to participate in the show. According to the short interview, Akiyama's father thought that *The Return of Superman* was a good way for him and his wife, as grandparents, to watch Sarang learn Korean (ep 1). His father's request was the deciding factor. Akiyama later agreed, as he felt she would not have learned the language without participating in the show.

The act of watching Sarang grow and learn adds another dynamic. In the context of the Akiyama home there are in essence four lenses or filters through which to watch

[11] *The Return of Superman* is also referred to *Superman Returns* in English

[12] The show can also be found on any Korean-English Subbed website, such as Drama Fever.

Sarang acquire her Hybrid Korean-Japanese identity. The primary lens is that of the Akiyama family, who are physically present throughout the process. Then there is Akiyama's chosen viewers, his parents, whom expressed a strong desire to watch their granddaughter to grow "in Korean" on the show. The show which aids in her to learning of her Korean heritage while still living in Tokyo, Japan. It brings the Korean language and space into the Japanese home as the cameras follow Akiyama and his daughter around their home and Japan for a forty-eight hour period. In that way the show thus lessens the distances between the two places and cultures. The next lens is through the eyes of the Korean viewers, who have expressed delight at watching the creation of Sarang's Korean identity. The final lens is that of the international viewers (like myself), who watch the conception of identity as a non-participatory member often located outside of Asia. These different viewpoints demonstrate the commodification of identity and the consumer's desire for commodities. In the case of the show, these commodities are attached to the children. With Akiyama and Sarang, the product is directly connected with the production of identity, which makes her the perfect focal point for other cultural product placement such as the music industry.

In enlisting his daughter's participation in the show, Akiyama not only strengthened his ties with his parents, but also started the journey of regaining acceptance with the South Korean population. *The Return of Superman* has been extremely successful in South Korea, maintaining the number one position for eleven months consecutively as of 2015 (allkpop.com). With the show's nationwide success, the popularity of Sarang and her father skyrocketed. Popular Korean music groups, such as

Girl's Generation, requested a guest appearance on the show in order to meet Akiyama's daughter, and BigBang's leader G-Dragon has posted Instagram videos of Sarang dancing to his music on multiple occasions. The show has made the Akiyama family a household name in the country of Korea, where many fans have overlooked previous grievances surrounding Akiyama's nationality and alliance with Japan.

Sarang has been the key to this rise in his popularity. The nation of Korea has fallen in love with her, and in turn accepted Akiyama. Similarly, their place on the show has influenced Shiho's, Sarang's mother's family as well. During many episodes Shiho expresses a desire to learn Korean in order to help her daughter study it as well. In connection, Shiho's mother and grandmother have been shown speaking simple sentences in Korean and trying to communicate with Sarang through the foreign language. While, admittedly, these events could be a marketing strategy for the Korean show, they seem to have a much larger purpose. The Korean audience is presented with a Japanese family who is interested and determined to learn Korean and understand aspects of Korean culture. This has the potential to soften negative stereotypes surrounding Japanese people in Korea. It also offers the Korean audience a more neutral cultural image of Japan rather than a politically charged one.

The success of *The Return of Superman* has also allowed the Akiyama family to visit Korea on multiple occasions for interviews and to meet the other cast members. They also appear in other Korean variety shows. Beside the Akiyama family visiting Korea, there have been a number of incidents in the show where other families involved in the filming have visited Japan. By visiting, more cultural integration takes place, and

the other children are introduced to Japan without the lens of the television filtering it. Whereas Akiyama's judo and mixed martial arts competitions place him against South Korea, in taking part in this variety show he has been placed alongside the country, acting as an extension of Korea while in Japan and vice versa. Akiyama is in some ways a neutral party, and in other ways a cultural ambassador of sorts. He connects with both his Korean and Japanese fans through social media along with the show itself.

However, *Return to Superman* is not solely a medium for Akiyama's self-representation. The show is produced and funded by the South Korea television company KBS (Korean Broadcasting System), and the majority of the cast and crew are Korean as well. The primary audience, as alluded above, is South Korean, but the show's viewership is not limited to the peninsula. Through the internet, the show's fame as expanded globally and Akiyama represents himself in a manner that mimics that expansion through his use of Japanese, Korean, and English in his social media posts.

The show is not meant as representation of Korean or Japanese live, but simply a show to show fathers caring for their children. Childcare throughout much of the world is considered a feminine role, and the representation given in the show is no different, as the fathers often struggle with the simplest aspects of childcare. However, Akiyama has often been shown in a different way. He is depicted as good dad, but somewhat feminized in this show. The general incompetence of the fathers, primary the fathers living in Korea, is a heavily accentuated feature in the early episodes of the show. Whereas the other cast members fumbled with the cooking, cleaning, and childcare for episodes spanning months, Akiyama was introduced with existing cooking skills and seen effortlessly caring

for his daughter. From the pilot episode[13] Akiyama is seen cooking for both his daughter and his wife, and interacting with Sarang joyfully in front of the camera. While he misunderstands the three-year-old at times, it cannot compare with the other dads' inability to understand or interact with their children. He has also been characterized on camera as the most domestic of the celebrity dads to partake on the show. His fashion sense is highlighted on the show in multiple occasions, along with his willingness to wear and apron and do housework.

Akiyama's feminization may be a symptom of a larger tendency. Historically, colonized countries, and their people, have been "feminized in colonial discourse" (Karlsson 30). Often the colonizing country takes on the dominate position and masculinizes themselves while feminizing the other. In the case of Japan and Korea, one can assume that Japan (as a colonial power) was seen as the more masculine power in the dynamic between the two. In contrast, through his profession as a Mixed Martial Arts fighter, Akiyama is also hyper masculinized. The juxtaposition of Akiyama as a feminized household figure with his hyper masculinized profession seems to contradict previous assumptions about the relationship between Japan and Korea. However, this is a tool that Akiyama uses to further his influence in both countries. Similar to how he has used his own, and his daughters, roll on *Return of Superman* this too is a commoditization of the self.

[13] https://youtu.be/veFdtxdsEG0?t=2m45s

Since the globalization of East Asia, and more specifically the spread of Korean culture via the *Hallyu Wave,* the use of foreigners in the Korean entertainment market has been increasing. While this trend seems to be more common in the music industry, Akiyama is not the only non-music figure from Japan (or other countries) to find success in Korea. Which is why, Akiyama's role in *Return to Superman* also points to another trend happening in the entertainment industry, the use of "foreign" stars to sell and promote products in other countries, furthering the commoditization of culture discussed earlier. In most cases the industries use the language skills of the foreigner to further influences of their products in other countries. While it is true that Akiyama falls into this category, as someone with influence in both countries, his willingness to use his cultural connections are more diverse. Akiyama too uses the industry to carve out a duel identity for himself and Sarang.

With the success of the show and Akiyama's personal stance on issues surrounding Japan and Korea, he has created a market for their constructed identity. Essentially, he is using cultural commoditization as a means to further promote the Akiyama name as a brand. In this way, Akiyama fully embraces his *zainichi* heritage not only expand his own career, but to help influences others in similar situations. Whereas both Yi and Yū focused their identity negotiation through the means of a literary lens, Akiyama's use of mass media necessarily reaches a larger audience; thus widening the potential impact range. Creating "familiarity" of both Korea and Japan, as well as spreading both "cultures" has been Akiyama's proclaimed "purpose" (Akiyama 99). An argument could be made that a similar purpose also drives Yū in the publishing of her

personal narratives. Akiyama has ingrained his name into the *zainichi* culture and also in Korea. He, as a cultural product, reaches far beyond the physical boundaries of the country. In turn, he has also attached this meaning to his daughter, as she too has become a means of consuming culture. In both the case of Akiyama and his daughter, the culture provided is a hybrid one. Encircling them is both Japan and Korea and, therefore, these respective cultures as well become hybridized in a strategic manner.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In his autobiography Akiyama Yoshihiro wrote that "The *zainichi's* view [of Japan and Korea] is decided at birth. Having familiarity with both cultures, knowing counties, is my biggest asset" (99). Here he claims that *zainichi* possess a unique asset, the ability to slide between two cultures. Yi Yangji, Yū Miri, and Akiyama Yoshihiro each chose to use their position as *zainichi* to accomplish this. They used that position to address challenges associated with growing up between two nations, and they also used that position as a means to gain success. In the cases of Yi and Yū the success was primarily commercial, as their respective novels gained readership and received awards. For Akiyama, the success that he has gained has been personal as much as it has been commercial. He has reconnected with family and culture, and he has recreated his Korean identity. On the commercial level, his fame grew with each week he shared with his daughter, and opportunities in the Korean entertainment sphere continue to rise.

Yi Yangji, through her fiction, gives a glimpse behind the curtain and into the lives of *zainichi* who strive to assimilate into Korea, whether by actually physically relocating there or symbolically. She shows that despite the assumption that they must possess something innate that will allow them to fit into Korean society, many *zainichi* struggle to conform to the culture. Many find the Korean language difficult and long for Japan, while others long for freedom from the requirement to pick either Korean or Japanese. Yi's character, Suni, an analogue for not only herself but for other young *zainichi* as well, quietly exists in Korea, while she fights herself in the mirror and challenges herself in attempt to conform.

Akiyama suggests that conforming will allow for easy assimilation. He writes, "It is inevitable that a person born as a *zainichi* will melt into the [Japanese] crowd" (Akiyama 158). However, melting does not always erase the presumed difference that exists in the minds of some Japanese, and those who choose to assimilate may find themselves discriminated against by Koreans. As Akiyama writes, "Discrimination happens in Korea also. We are Korean, and yet not *Korean*" (157).

The stories presented by Yū Miri examine the other side of this curtain. If Yi Yangji looked at the relationship between *zainichi* and their "homeland" of Korea, then Yū Miri looks at how *zainichi* are treated in Japan. Her works highlight the barriers faced when an individual is told to conform. Whereas, Yi's Suni was unwillingness and enable to assimilate Korean culture, Yū depicts people who struggle in the aftermath of assimilating into the Japanese culture. Her uncle, so desperate to hide his past self that he is paranoid of being discovered as anything other than Japanese makes him hyper aware of all things non-Japanese. Yū's account of the young girl forced to naturalize and to conform, begs Yū to think carefully before disposing of her *zainichi* identity and to instead retain her uniqueness and individuality with her duel identity. Yū shows the struggles of having two names, the struggles of not fitting into either community because to do so would require rejecting half of herself.

Akiyama's personal and occupational identities coincide, as he raises his daughter on Korean television while still living in Japan. In making her identity negotiation into a spectacle, Akiyama uses the *zainichi* identity as a means of enhancing his personal career, while simultaneously, reconnecting with Korea alongside his young daughter.

The representation of identity is complex and unique, but the need for representation is universal. Each of these figures have contributed to the construction of a *zainichi* identity, and have added to the discourse surrounding the *zainichi* population in Japan while also opening the door to outside countries. While Yi's view of the *zainichi* life may be more personal and less political, as compared with Akiyama, her representation of *zainichi* abroad facilitates a conversation between Japan and Korean. Yū resists any single source of identification and illustrates a need for individuality, and promotes herself in a way that demonstrates these things. Akiyama stands as a combination of both Yi and Yū, in his enthusiasm remain a part of both worlds, while giving up on neither. Together, their representations of *zainichi* identity create a well-rounded model that touches on multiple aspects of identity construction that can represent a large pool of *zainichi* individuals.

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