Unpacking the Complexities of Racism and Marginalization Faced by Zainichi Koreans in Japan Using Critical Race Theory

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Abstract:

Zainichi Koreans, an ethnic minority group in Japan, have been subjected to significant discrimination and marginalization in Japanese society. This thesis utilizes a critical race theory lens to document the experience of Zainichi Koreans facing racism and discrimination in Japan. The historical and social context of Zainichi Koreans in Japan is examined to reveal how structural and systemic racism have contributed to their marginalization and stigmatization.

The research analyzes the ways in which racism is expressed and experienced by Zainichi Koreans in different domains of their lives, including education, employment, housing, and social interactions. By examining the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and power, this paper highlights the multiplicity of forms of racism faced by Zainichi Koreans, including microaggressions, exclusion, and violence. The findings suggest that racism has a profound impact on the identity, mental health, and social mobility of Zainichi Koreans.

This thesis argues that racism against Zainichi Koreans is not simply a matter of individual prejudice, but rather a systemic and institutionalized problem that is deeply embedded in Japanese society, and rooted in a deep history between Korea and Japan. However, this thesis acknowledges that there has been some progress made in terms of the recognition of the Zainichi identity demonstrated by the increasing number of positive representations of Zainihci individuals in film and television. By centering the voices and experiences of Zainichi Koreans, this thesis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the intersections of race, power, and inequality in Japanese society.

Introduction:

Zainichi Koreans are a significant ethnic minority group in Japan, comprising approximately 0.5% of the country's population. They are people of Korean ethnicity who have permanent residency status in Japan but are not considered Japanese citizens. The term "Zainichi" means "resident in Japan," and is used to refer to people who have been living in Japan for an extended period of time without being granted citizenship. Zainichi Koreans are a unique and complex group with a distinct identity and history. They are descendants of Koreans who migrated to Japan during the colonial period, as well as their descendants who were born and raised in Japan.

During Japan's colonization of Korea from 1910 to 1945, the Japanese government implemented a policy of forced labor, where Koreans were forcibly taken to Japan to work in factories and mines. The Korean laborers were treated as cheap labor and subjected to harsh working conditions. They were also denied basic human rights and subjected to physical and psychological abuse. Many of these migrants were separated from their families and communities and forced to work long hours with little pay. The majority of the Korean migrants were men, although women and children were also brought to Japan to work in factories and mines. The total number of Koreans who were forcibly taken to Japan varies by estimate, however, the general consensus is between 700,000 to 800,000 (Moon, 2010, pp. 1).

After World War II, when Japan was defeated and Korea was liberated from Japanese rule, many Koreans in Japan were left stranded without any means to return to their home country. Many Zainichi Koreans also lost their homes and possessions during the war and were left with nothing. There were about 1.4 million ethnic Koreans living in Japan during the Second

World War, but many soon repatriated back to the Korean peninsula and the Korean population in Japan settled at around 600,000 (Moon, 2010, pp. 1)

In 1947, the Japanese government passed the Alien Registration Law, which required all non-Japanese residents in Japan to register with the government and carry identification at all times. This law affected Zainichi Koreans, who were not granted citizenship and were therefore classified as "aliens" under the law. The law also limited their access to certain rights and privileges, including the right to vote and the ability to work in certain industries. Additionally, they required fingerprinting of all Aliens, which many Zainichi saw as a violation of their human rights. Additionally, the Japanese required the Koreans to register their fingerprints, a policy that was heavily protested against by many Zainichi.

During the post-war period, Zainichi Koreans faced a particularly difficult situation due to their unique legal status in Japan. In addition to being classified as "aliens" under the Alien Registration Law, many Zainichi Koreans chose to be designated as "Chōsen-seki" (朝鮮籍), a term that referred to stateless individuals of Korean descent. The term "Chōsen" was used to refer to the Korean peninsula during the time of Japan's colonization of Korea and was used to indicate that these individuals were not affiliated with either North or South Korea.

Being designated as "Chōsen-seki" had significant implications for Zainichi Koreans, as it limited their access to basic rights and services, such as healthcare, education, and employment. It also had a profound impact on their identity and sense of belonging, as they were neither recognized as citizens of Japan nor as nationals of any other country. The legacy of the "Chōsen-seki" designation continues to impact the experiences of Zainichi Koreans today, as they continue to face discrimination and marginalization in Japan. It is also important to note that

for many Koreans, Chōsen was considered a derogatory term for their home country, as it was the colonial name that Japan had designated for Korea, and invoked painful memories.

In 1952, the San Francisco Peace Treaty was signed, formally ending World War II and granting Japan independence. However, the treaty did not address the issue of Zainichi Koreans' legal status. In 1947, the Japanese government passed the Special Act on Immigration Control, which granted Zainichi Koreans special permission to remain in Japan without being subject to deportation. However, this act still did not grant them citizenship or equal rights. Zainichi Koreans continue to face discrimination and marginalization in Japan, often being treated as "foreigners" or "others" despite their long history and deep roots in Japan. This discrimination is rooted in the historical and political context of Japan's relations with Korea and the failure of the Japanese government to grant Zainichi Koreans equal citizenship and rights.

Despite their long-standing presence in Japan, Zainichi Koreans have historically faced discrimination and marginalization in Japanese society. They have been viewed as outsiders, often being treated as second-class citizens or even as non-citizens. This discrimination has taken many forms, including exclusion from employment opportunities, limited access to education and housing, and restricted social mobility. According to Bumsoo Kim, during the 1960s Zainichi Koreans were the first to be cut from jobs and housing during times of economic hardship. Even those with a Japanese university education were forced into working unskilled positions like truck driving and day laborers (Kim, 2011, pp. 292).

Today, Zainichi Koreans continue to experience various forms of racism and discrimination in Japan. They often encounter language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and stereotypes that prevent them from fully participating in Japanese society. Moreover, they face

exclusion and stigmatization in institutional settings, such as schools and workplaces, where they are often denied equal opportunities and treated unfairly.

Despite the significant impact of racism and discrimination on the lives of Zainichi Koreans in Japan, their experiences have largely been overlooked in mainstream Japanese society. This thesis addresses this gap in the literature by utilizing a critical race theory lens to explore the experiences of Zainichi Koreans with racism and discrimination. Through a content analysis of media sources, including journal articles, research papers, and other forms of academic discourse, this thesis seeks to provide insights into the ways in which systemic racism affects the lives of Zainichi Koreans, including its impact on their identity, mental health, and social mobility. Ultimately, this thesis contributes to a greater understanding of the challenges facing Zainichi Koreans and aims to provide recommendations for policy and social change to address racism and discrimination in Japan.

One of the key tenets of CRT is the idea that racism is not just a matter of individual prejudice, but rather a pervasive and enduring feature of social and political life. Racism is seen as a structural and systemic problem that is deeply embedded in society's structures and practices. This means that racism is not just perpetuated by individual actors, but also by institutions and policies that are designed to advantage some groups over others.

Applying CRT to the experiences of Zainichi Koreans in Japan provides a lens through which to view the ways in which systemic racism affects their lives. Despite Japan's claims of being a homogenous society, the experiences of Zainichi Koreans highlight the ways in which race and ethnicity intersect with other forms of oppression to produce and perpetuate inequality. Applying CRT to the Japane also allows for a critical analysis of the historical and political factors that have contributed to the marginalization and stigmatization of Zainichi Koreans.

This thesis examines the way in which Zainichi Koreans continue to face discrimination in Japan, today while drawing on its historical roots to determine and explicate why there is still significant animosity between Zainichi Koreans and Japanese. It will also discuss critical race theory's application to an Asian setting, and how the discrimination faced by Zainichi Koreans is not necessarily individually targeted, but rather a systemic focus on a specific minority group in Japan. Additionally, this thesis will explore the evolving depictions of Zainichi on screen as a way for them to reclaim their identities.

Critical Race Theory and Asia

One of the key challenges of applying critical race theory in Asia is the fact that many countries in the region have different racial and ethnic dynamics than those found in the United States, where the framework was first developed. In Japan, for example, the dominant racial group is Japanese, but there are also significant populations of Koreans, Chinese, and other ethnic groups. In South Korea, the majority of the population is ethnically Korean, but there are also sizable populations of foreigners, including individuals of Korean descent, migrant workers, and refugees.

Despite these differences, critical race theory has been used to analyze and critique racial and ethnic discrimination in Asia. In Japan, for example, scholars have used critical race theory to examine the experiences of Zainichi Koreans, who have faced discrimination and marginalization in Japanese society for decades. Some scholars have argued that the Zainichi experience can be understood in terms of a "racial caste" system, in which Koreans and other non-Japanese are seen as inferior and excluded from full participation in Japanese society.

Similarly, in South Korea, critical race theory has been applied to analyze discrimination against foreign workers and other marginalized groups. Scholars have highlighted the ways in

which race and ethnicity intersect with other forms of inequality, such as class and gender, to create systems of oppression that affect different groups in different ways. For example, female migrant workers may face gender-based discrimination in addition to racism and xenophobia.

One of the challenges of applying critical race theory in Asia is the fact that many countries in the region have different legal and political frameworks than those found in the United States. For example, in Japan, there is no legal concept of "race," which can make it difficult to address issues of discrimination based on ethnicity or nationality. This is rooted in the Japanese Constitution making no distinction between race, ethnicity, color, and national origin when considering elements of discrimination. Furthermore, the Japanese Foreign Ministry does not ask for race when conducting a census, instead using nationality, which can have serious ramifications when attempting to piece together the implications of racial discrimination in Japan.

Despite these challenges, scholars and activists in Asia have continued to use critical race theory to analyze and critique issues of racism and discrimination. By highlighting the ways in which race and ethnicity intersect with other forms of inequality, critical race theory can help to expose and challenge systems of oppression that affect marginalized groups in Asia and around the world.

Critical race theory provides a useful framework for understanding the experiences of Zainichi Koreans in Japan. The theory highlights the ways in which racism is embedded in social structures and institutions, and how it is reproduced and perpetuated through everyday practices and discourses. Iwabuchi and Takezawa (2015) discuss Zainichi Koreans, their status as non-citizens, and their historical legacy as a marginalized group are examples of how racism is institutionalized and perpetuated. Critical race theory also emphasizes the importance of

centering the voices and experiences of marginalized groups in discussions about racism and discrimination.

In the case of Zainichi Koreans, their experiences and perspectives have often been excluded from mainstream Japanese discourse and political decision-making. This exclusion has perpetuated their marginalization and made it difficult for them to advocate for their rights and challenge systemic racism. Moreover, critical race theory highlights the importance of intersectionality in understanding the experiences of marginalized groups. In the case of Zainichi Koreans, their experiences of racism and discrimination are shaped not only by their ethnic and national identities, but also by factors such as class, gender, and language proficiency. For example, Zainichi Korean women may face unique challenges in accessing education and employment due to gender discrimination and language barriers.

History

After the treaty of San Francisco revoked Japan's claim to the Korean peninsula, ethnic Koreans lost their Japanese citizenship. Zainichi Koreans have always held a precarious position in Japanese society because of the fact that they hold wavering identities that are not fully consistent with either Korean or Japanese, however, it was exacerbated by the statelessness of Korean immigrants.

Laurent and Martel (2022) cite the formation of the League of Koreans in Japan or Choren (旅日朝鮮人聯盟), as an early example of Koreans demanding better conditions in Japan. The formation of Choren was a response to the discrimination and marginalization that Koreans faced in Japan during the colonial era. Choren advocated for the civil rights of Koreans in Japan and worked to improve their living conditions

(Laurent and Martel, 2022, pp.12). This early example of resistance laid the groundwork for future social movements and activism among Zainichi Koreans. In the postwar era, Zainichi Koreans continued to push for equal rights and recognition, often facing opposition and discrimination from the Japanese government and society.

The Choren was eventually shut down in 1955 due to association with the Japanese socialist party and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, however, would soon reemerge as the Chongryon, short for Chōsen Sōren (朝鮮人総連). Ryang (2013) argues that Koreans in Japan who refused South Korean citizenship tended to be more associated with pro-North Korean groups as a form of resistance against the Japanese government.

While the Choren became closely associated with North Korea, many Zainichi would still want to associate with South Korea. In 1946, the Mindan (民團) was formed, with recognition from the Sygnman Rhee government. The Mindan would eventually grow to be the dominant group in representing Zainichi interests. One of the earliest rifts between the two groups was over the name of Korea. The Choren and Chongryon prefer the term Chosen (朝鮮) as it was the historical term to describe the Choson dynasty. Kim Myung Ja (2017) and Ryang (1997) both propose that this was due to independence activists, who tended to be more revolutionary and radical, supported Chongryon, who called for much greater action against Japan. The Mindan, on the

other hand, prefer Kankoku (韓国) when discussing Korea. The Chongryon support the North Korean stance of not recognizing the Republic of Korea and by proxy, they continue to push for the traditional name to be used. The Mindan argue that the term Chosen was derogatory because it was diminutive of the former Korean Empire, and it was the label placed on Zainichi Koreans before 1945, and used to discriminate against them.

In 1965, South Korea and Japan reestablished formal relations under the Park Chung Hee administration, and the Japanese government recognized the Mindan as the official group representing the interests of the Zainichi. After this, the identity of many Chongryon-affiliated Zainichi Koreans became firmly entrenched in pro-North Korean policies. Cho Kyung Hee (2020) notes that non-North Korean affiliated Chongryon members were marginalized by both groups. Cho notes that Mindan members accused them of being North Korean sympathizers and the Chongryon accused them of being traitors to the North Korean cause.

As a result, non-North Korean affiliated Chongryon members found themselves in a difficult position. They were not fully accepted by the Mindan, but they also faced suspicion and hostility from the Chongryon. Cho argues that this marginalization has had significant implications for the ability of non-North Korean affiliated Chongryon members to assert their own identity and pursue their own interests within Japanese society.

Integration vs. Active Resistance in Education

Shipper (2010) details how Chongryon and Mindan also differ in terms of their approach to education. Chongryon administers Korean ethnic schools, which do not follow the national curriculum in Japan and instead use textbooks provided by the North Korean government. These

schools are seen as a way for Chongryon to promote ethnic attachment to North Korea among Zainichi Koreans. However, because these schools are not recognized by the Japanese government, graduates of Chongryon-sponsored high schools are unable to take the entrance exams for Japanese universities, severely limiting their educational opportunities in Japan (Shipper, 2010, pp. 62, 66).

On the other hand, Mindan does not administer ethnic schools and instead encourages its members to attend Japanese schools. Mindan members have the freedom to visit and leave South Korea, which allows for greater exposure to South Korean culture and education. This approach has been more successful in terms of educational opportunities for Zainichi Koreans, as graduates of Japanese schools are able to take entrance exams for Japanese universities and have more opportunities for higher education and better job prospects in Japan.

Zainichi

One of the primary sources of discrimination faced by Zainichi Koreans is their lack of legal status as Japanese citizens. While some have applied for and been granted Japanese citizenship, many Zainichi Koreans are considered foreigners and are required to carry special identification cards. This status as non-citizens limits their access to employment, housing, and education, often leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by employers and landlords. Kim Woongi (2020) discusses the limitations that the Zainichi faced in the modern day due to changes in travel permits to South Korea. The Zainichi who refused to register and stayed as Chosen Seki had the ability to freely travel to South Korea without permits, however, the Lee Myung Bak government restricted their ability to do so in 2010. The Moon administration eventually reversed these restrictions in 2017, however, the Supreme Court of South Korea has

ruled that these Choson Seki do not qualify for South Korean nationality, leaving them effectively stateless.

Even among those Zainichi Koreans who have obtained Japanese citizenship, discrimination, and marginalization persist. Many face discrimination in the workplace, where they are often relegated to low-paying jobs with limited opportunities for advancement. Ryang (2013 also discusses the heavy discrimination that also occurs in the housing market, where landlords may refuse to rent to Zainichi Koreans or charge them higher rent. The Japanese Association for Refugees reports that over 40% of Zainichi Korean respondents reported experiencing discrimination when searching for housing, including being refused rental or being asked to pay higher rent than Japanese tenants.

Additionally, Zainichi Koreans face discrimination and prejudice in their daily lives. Many reports experience bullying and harassment at school, and some have been denied access to public services or faced discrimination when seeking medical treatment. Zainichi Koreans are also often subject to negative stereotypes in Japanese media, which perpetuate the idea that they are outsiders who do not belong in Japanese society. Furthermore, Zainichi Koreans face barriers to political participation and representation. Due to their non-citizen status, they are unable to vote in national elections or run for public office. While some have attempted to organize politically, they often face harassment and intimidation from right-wing groups, as well as skepticism and opposition from mainstream Japanese society.

Despite these challenges, many Zainichi Koreans continue to resist discrimination and fight for their rights. Through grassroots activism, cultural preservation, and political organizing, Zainichi Koreans have made significant gains in recent years. However, discrimination and

marginalization remain persistent issues, and the struggle for equal rights and recognition continues.

Despite some progress toward inclusion and acceptance, discrimination against Zainichi Koreans remains a persistent issue in Japanese society. Discrimination against Zainichi Koreans can manifest in a number of ways, including limited job opportunities, exclusion from mainstream society, and hate speech.

Zainichi Koreans often find themselves excluded from mainstream Japanese society due to their perceived "otherness" and lack of Japanese citizenship. Discrimination in hiring practices is a particular issue for Zainichi Koreans, with employers often showing a preference for Japanese applicants. As a result, many Zainichi Koreans are forced to work in low-paying jobs and are more likely to live in poverty than Japanese citizens. Additionally, Zainichi Koreans may face discrimination in housing, with landlords often refusing to rent to them. This lack of access to housing can create a cycle of poverty and marginalization, making it difficult for Zainichi Koreans to participate in society fully.

Hate speech and other forms of racism against Zainichi Koreans also remain prevalent in Japan. In recent years, there has been an increase in hate speech targeting Zainichi Koreans, particularly online. This hate speech can be both violent and dehumanizing, with some groups advocating for the expulsion of Zainichi Koreans from Japan. Despite efforts to address hate speech, it remains a significant problem, with little legal recourse available for victims.

The discrimination faced by Zainichi Koreans is often overlooked or downplayed in Japan, with many Japanese people believing that Japan is a homogeneous society. However, discrimination against Zainichi Koreans has deep roots in Japanese history and culture, and addressing this discrimination is crucial for building a more inclusive and just society.

Despite the ongoing discrimination faced by Zainichi Koreans, there have been efforts to promote greater understanding and acceptance of their community. In recent years, there has been a growing movement among younger generations of Zainichi Koreans to assert their identity and demand recognition of their rights as Koreans and Japanese citizens.

One key issue for Zainichi Koreans is access to education in their native language and culture. While there have been some successes in pushing for Korean language education in Japanese public schools, many Zainichi Koreans still attend ethnic schools run by Mindan or Chongryon. These schools are not recognized by the Japanese government and often face financial difficulties, leading to concerns about their sustainability.

Overall, while progress has been made in addressing discrimination against Zainichi Koreans, there is still a long way to go in terms of achieving true equality and acceptance in Japanese society. The ongoing challenges faced by this community highlight the importance of continued efforts to promote diversity and inclusion, both in Japan and around the world.

On the other hand, there are also those who believe that the solution to the discrimination faced by Zainichi lies in the assimilation and adoption of Japanese culture. This perspective argues that Zainichi should fully integrate into Japanese society by adopting the language, customs, and values of the majority culture, and thus erase the differences that set them apart. This approach emphasizes the importance of national unity and homogeneity, which is seen as essential for maintaining social order and stability. However, this perspective ignores the fact that the discrimination faced by Zainichi is not only based on cultural differences but also on historical and structural factors, such as colonization and unequal access to resources.

The discrimination faced by Zainichi is a complex issue that cannot be easily solved. It requires a nuanced understanding of the historical and social context, as well as a recognition of

the diversity and complexity of the Zainichi community. While various approaches have been proposed to address this issue, such as affirmative action, cultural preservation, and integration, it is clear that a comprehensive and sustained effort is needed to create a society that is truly inclusive and just for all its members, regardless of their background or identity.

Zainichi Today- Cradle to Grave

Zainichi Koreans in Japan face a range of discrimination throughout their lives, from birth to death. This discrimination is deeply entrenched and affects various aspects of their existence, perpetuating marginalization and hindering their full participation in Japanese society.

Starting from birth, Zainichi Korean children often encounter discrimination within the education system. Despite being born and raised in Japan, they face barriers in accessing quality education due to limited resources and discriminatory practices. Zainichi Korean students may be placed in special education classes or face linguistic and cultural challenges that impede their academic progress. This systemic discrimination limits their opportunities for advancement and perpetuates a cycle of disadvantage.

As they grow into adulthood, Zainichi Koreans face discrimination in employment and career prospects. Many employers exhibit bias and preferential treatment towards Japanese nationals, making it difficult for Zainichi Koreans to secure stable and well-paying jobs. This discrimination contributes to higher rates of poverty and economic insecurity within the community.

Zainichi Koreans also experience discrimination in housing, with landlords and real estate agents often imposing restrictive policies that limit their access to rental properties. They may face arbitrary restrictions or higher rent requirements solely based on their ethnic background. This discriminatory housing market exacerbates issues of residential segregation

and restricts Zainichi Koreans' ability to live in desirable areas or access suitable housing options. Moreover, Zainichi Koreans encounter discrimination in healthcare and social services. Language barriers, cultural insensitivity, and lack of cultural competency among healthcare providers can result in inadequate healthcare access and poorer health outcomes. They may also face difficulties in accessing social welfare benefits, leading to increased vulnerability and limited support systems.

Lastly, discrimination against Zainichi Koreans continues even in death. Funeral services and burial plots may be subject to discriminatory practices, with some cemeteries denying burial rights based on ethnicity. This exclusion not only adds to the emotional burden of grieving families but also reinforces the message of perpetual otherness and marginalization.

This discrimination leads to significant feelings of adverse discrimination among Zainichi of all ages. A study conducted on 184 Zainichi Koreans concluded that discrimination had a direct correlation to negative self-identity, especially among younger Zainichi Koreans who reported feeling a strong sense of confusion between divergent identities, being unsure whether to consider themselves more Korean or Japanese. The study terms this as “conflict”, and found that when coupled with lower levels of discrimination, it correlated with more “freedom” as an identity (Lee & Tanaka, 2017, pp. 49, 52, 58).

In the early 2000s, the image of Koreans in Japanese society improved coinciding with the *Hallyu (Kanryu)* wave. Kim Bumsoo argues that this was the inflection point where Japanese society no longer treated Koreans with outright hostility and discrimination, but shifted towards more subtle discrimination and mistreatment (Kim Bumsoo, 2011, pp. 296). According to interviews from both Mindan and Chongryon representatives, both groups agreed that the treatment of Koreans in Japan improved, however, employers still denied job applications for no

apparent reason, except for the fact that the applicants were of Korean ethnicity. Additionally, Zainichi Korean schools and homes were reported as being vandalized by graffiti. Furthermore, there have been numerous documented cases of physical violence and assault against ethnic Koreans (Kim Bumsoo, 2011, pp. 297).

Mental Health and Zainichi Koreans

One of the major impacts of this discrimination is on the mental health of Zainichi Koreans. The constant experiences of discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization take a toll on their psychological well-being. Studies have shown that Zainichi Koreans are more likely to experience mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress compared to the majority population in Japan.

The psychological distress experienced by Zainichi Koreans can be attributed to various factors. The persistent discrimination and prejudice they face contribute to a sense of social alienation and feelings of being unwanted or rejected in Japanese society. This sense of marginalization can lead to a negative self-perception and a diminished sense of identity and belonging.

Furthermore, the lack of social support networks and limited access to resources exacerbate the mental health challenges faced by Zainichi Koreans. The barriers they encounter in education, employment, and healthcare further contribute to their vulnerability and feelings of helplessness. The intergenerational transmission of trauma and historical memory of past injustices also play a significant role in shaping the mental health of Zainichi Koreans.

According to Taeyoung Kim, the mental health challenges faced by Zainichi Koreans are particularly concerning when it comes to suicide rates. Zainichi Koreans have been found to have higher rates of suicide attempts compared to the general population in Japan (Kim Taeyong,

2021, pp. 54). This alarming trend reflects the deep-seated psychological struggles experienced by this community due to discrimination, social exclusion, and limited access to resources.

One factor contributing to the mental health crisis among Zainichi Koreans is the lack of adequate mental health treatment and support. Historically, there has been a shortage of culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services catering specifically to the needs of Zainichi Koreans. This has resulted in significant barriers to accessing necessary treatment and care. Many individuals in the community have faced difficulties in finding professionals who understand their unique experiences and can provide the necessary support.

According to an examination of public health records by Gilmour et. al, in 2019, the suicide rate of ethnic Korean men in Japan was more than double that of ethnic Japanese individuals and nearly seven times greater than ethnic Chinese living in Japan. The figures for Korean women in Japan were double that of Japanese women and four times that of Chinese women (Gilmour et. al 2019, pp. 3-4).

Recognizing the urgent need to address these mental health disparities, efforts have been made to improve access to mental health services for Zainichi Koreans. One approach has been the establishment of peer support networks. These networks create a safe space for individuals to connect with others who share similar experiences, fostering a sense of belonging and reducing feelings of isolation. Peer support offers emotional support, validation, and understanding, which can be crucial in promoting mental well-being (Kim Taeyoung, 2021, pp. 98-101).

Tying into Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory in Japan has been applied to Zainichi Korean interactions in literature. There have been numerous documented cases of ethnic Japanese with very little connection to Japan being favored over ethnic Zainichi Koreans who have lived in Japan their

entire lives. In a very infamous example, the former President of Peru, Alberto Fujimori, was allowed to obtain a Japanese passport within a week of his disgraced resignation and claim the benefits of citizenship. This is despite the fact that as President of Peru, he was in direct violation of the Japanese Constitution's policy of prohibiting individuals from holding foreign office. Debito Arudou claims that this is called *Wajin Privilege* and it plays an active role in discriminating against ethnic Koreans in Japan (Arudou, 2015, pp. 160). Compare this to Zainichi Koreans of either the Mindan or Chongryon who were unable to legally obtain Japanese passports, despite many being born and raised in Japan. Due to their status as Choson-Seki, they were denied passports from both South Korea and Japan. Essentially, both Fujimori and Zainichi Koreans refused to claim Japanese citizenship, however, only Fujimori, an ethnic Japanese individual, was able to obtain a Japanese passport and enjoy the benefits of citizenship. This situation, as described, raises questions about discrimination and privilege based on ethnicity in Japan.

While this may be an extreme case, it perfectly demonstrates the implications of having Japanese blood over having roots in the Japanese community. The Japanese government shielded an impeached, and later convicted, politician simply for having Japanese heritage. Compare this to the treatment of Zainichi Koreans who attempt to exercise basic civil rights. They have been met with barriers at every step, including steep and heavy opposition from ultra-right-wing groups throughout Japan.

In many cases, Zainichi Koreans simply chose not to adopt Japanese citizenship, which right-wing Japanese nationalists have claimed demonstrates "disloyalty" or evidence that Zainichi Koreans do not deserve equal treatment. Makoto Sakurai, a far-right Japanese ultra-nationalist political figure established the Zaitokukai, which is short for *Zainichi Tokken o*

Yurusanai Shimin no Kai (在日特権を許さない市民の会) or Association of Citizens against the Special Privileges of the Zainichi, a group that is exclusively dedicated to restricting the rights of Zainichi Koreans throughout Japan.

The Zaitokukai regularly use racial slurs to describe ethnic Koreans and have called for violence and even the killing of ethnic Koreans. They were first founded by Sakurai in 2006 after he was unable to find anti-Korean internet groups. The Zaitokukai has used rhetoric comparing Zainichi Koreans to "cockroaches" and has called for their "expulsion" or even "extermination" (Laurent and Martel, 2021, pp. 10). The Zaitokukai escalated into in-person demonstrations and have no qualms against using hateful rhetoric in public. Their main problem with Zainichi Koreans is regarding the special status that the Zainichi hold, which they claim is being exploited for tax purposes and other economic gains. Sakurai himself has commented that he first founded the organization in response to reports of Zainichi attempting to claim pensions (Sakurai, 2014, pp. 159).

Zainichi Koreans are routinely faced with hateful rhetoric from right-wing politicians and pundits, but, incidents of violence are not unheard of. In 2013, Sakurai and members of the Zaitokukai were involved in an altercation with counter-protesters that resulted in eight arrests, including Sakurai himself. During the protest, the Zaitokukai was screaming hateful comments calling for the killing of Koreans or their removal from Japan (Fackler, 2013). In 2010, they organized multiple marches on a Chongryon-affiliated school in Kyoto, where they surrounded the gates and called school-age children "cockroaches" and "North Korean Spies". The Kyoto school sued the Zaitokukai and was awarded about $120,000 in compensatory damages by a Kyoto Court (Fackler, 2013). In August of 2022, a Japanese man was convicted of committing

arson in a historically Korean area of Aichi Prefecture and admitted to wanting to "scare off" ethnic Koreans from Japan, as well as having been radicalized by right-wing propaganda videos and forums, similar to the Zaitokukai (The Japan Times, 2022). The judge in the case acknowledged that the crime was motivated by prejudice against Koreans, but stopped short of classifying it as a hate crime. This is at least in part because Japan does not have hate crime sentencing enhancements, but in recent years, there have been renewed calls for its implementation. Interestingly, the man's legal defense argued that he should be given a more lenient sentence because of "social isolation", however, when looking at the numerous layers of anti-Korean sentiment in Japan, it becomes clear that there is no shortage of evidence to suggest that his views were not "isolated" but unfortunately, part of the norm. Most shockingly, the defendant openly admitted he had "no direct contact" with anyone of Korean descent but grew to hate them because of historical disputes about the colonial period (Kyodo News 2022).

The Zaitokukai and other right-wing groups have been promoting the spread of historical negationism, but through the influence and power of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, hate and anti-Korean sentiment permeated into mainstream consciousness. In 2017, Joongang Ilbo, the third largest newspaper in South Korea, reported that Japanese bookstores were selling "anti-South Korean" books, known as *Kenkan* (*嫌韓*), on separate sections of buildings as its own recognized literary category (Joongang Ilbo 2017). These books are often filled with revisionist or even denialist propagandized accounts of South Korea and pose an extreme risk of nationalizing ethnic Japanese who read them. Groups like the Zaitokukai amplify these racist and hateful messages by distributing and parroting incorrect, hateful comments.

Japanese history textbooks have also been the subject of much international criticism due to their perpetuation of revisionist and

negationist viewpoints. Under the Liberal Democratic Party, Japan adopted what they termed the "New History Textbook (新しい歴史教科書)", as an official government-sponsored history text for use in Japanese schools. The textbook was extremely controversial due to its denial of Japanese war crimes committed in Korea, China, and in the Pacific Theater. This sparked protests in South Korea, China, and even Japan itself, where many educators objected to the falsification of history, and the book was subsequently denounced publicly by the National Japanese Teachers Union and was only adopted by a handful of schools across Japan. Despite this major failure, under the leadership of Nariaki Nakayama, the Ministry of Education succeeded in striking all references to the sexual slavery of Korean and other Asian women during World War Two (Yoshida, 2011). Nakayama, alongside many right-wing politicians in Japan, is part of Nippon Kaigi (日本会議) which is an ultraconservative, nationalist organization that has been associated with the spread of misinformation and hateful rhetoric. Many members, including Nakayama, have been compared to Holocaust deniers, due to their insistence that most war crimes against China, Korea, and many other nations, are either exaggerated or completely falsified (Narusawa 2013).

It is not unreasonable to say that the Zaitokukai and other ultranationalist organizations see the policies of the Liberal Democratic Party and are encouraged that the government is in support of their hateful actions. Abe Shinzo failed to condemn their rhetoric even once throughout his nearly nine years in office as Prime Minister. It then informs that Sakurai and other Zaitokukai members started their own political party in 2016. While it has failed to get much electoral support, it still received over 100,000 proportional votes and 74,000 constituency votes in the 2022 general election.

Looking at the silence projected by the LDP and its supporters on the issue of anti-Zainichi and anti-Korean sentiment, it becomes clear that the political climate in Japan is not and was not conducive to Zainichi Koreans being able to express their ethnic identities. This is not helped by North Korea acting belligerently towards Japan, which in turn, fuels more and more anti-Chongryon and anti-Korean sentiment. As mentioned above, Chongryon is the spiritual successor of the Choren, which, while exhibiting certain sympathies with North Korea, was not wholly associated with the Kim Regime. Their headquarters were located in Seoul, not Pyongyang, in order to demonstrate solidarity with Mindan supporters and those sympathetic towards the Americans (Ryang, 2016, pp. 2). They had also assumed that the partition of Korea would be a temporary matter and that the United States and the Soviet Union would allow for Korean reunification. As Ryang mentions, many of these Choren were independence activists who were fundamentally opposed to both the Japanese monarchy as well as American or Soviet control but saw the Soviet's communist ideology as more in line with what they had been fighting for. However, while the Korean peninsula was divided between Cold War ideologies, Japan was not, and the Choren was dissolved by the US and Japan acting against communism. Ryang argues that this drove many Zainichi into joining the Japanese Communist Party (Ryang,

2016, pp. 4). In 1952, news of a potential establishment of ties between North Korea and Japan caused most Koreans to leave the JCP and establish Chongryon, as a means to secure their representation as a distinct ethnic minority. Chongryon was staunchly pro-North Korean, with its members caring less about securing rights for Zainichi and more about promoting North Korea abroad. Despite the growth of Chongryon and a favorable political climate in the 1960s, they never reached formal recognition between Japan and North Korea, and Chongryon members were left without citizenship. Chongryon was also funded in part by North Korea, who donated to building new campuses and schools which would promote their Juche ideology.

Chongryon sacrificed a significant deal of socioeconomic status in Japanese society through their rampant promotion of Juche ideology and North Korea. In contrast with the Mindan, who had mostly begun integrating into Japanese schools, businesses, and life, the Chongryon focused more intensively on promoting what they believed to be an inevitable future where the North would reunite the South. They gave up school accreditation in exchange for more autonomy over curriculum and less oversight from the Japanese government, and largely created isolated communities which emphasized the importance of being "Korean". Considering the fact that Japan had colonized Korea only 40 years ago, many Zainichi agreed with this messaging and Chongryon membership skyrocketed in the 1960s and 70s. This also explains why so many Chongryon maintained their Chosen-Seki status, as they were optimistic about a return to a united peninsula.

However, as North Korea's international reputation continued to slide and South Korean industrial policy and the economy continued to eclipse, Chongryon was faced with the reality that the utopic unified Korean future they wanted was not going to happen for many more decades, if at all. Coupled with the fact that many Japanese still held negative views about

Koreans in general, Chongryon could do little as its members continued to hold out against the Japanese pressure. As mentioned above, Koreans were denied equal protection and were discriminated against in all elements and aspects of their lives. Thus, Chongryon members tended to form businesses among themselves and hire within the group (Venkata et. al, 2018, pp. 251). This approach further cemented them as an isolated group within Japanese society, however, the alternative was arguably worse. Many Mindan members were denied jobs just the same, due to the Japanese government mandating ethnic Koreans to use their Korean names when they were applying for jobs.

Throughout the 1970s and onwards, certain restrictions on Zainichi Koreans became relaxed, however, discrimination continued in a *de Facto* setting. Bumsoo Kim (2011), cites Chong-so˘k Pak vs. the Hitachi Company as a landmark case in increasing the rights of the Zainichi. In Chong-so˘k Pak, the plaintiff Pak, sued the Hitachi Company on the grounds that he had been wrongfully dismissed for perjury when it was revealed he was ethnically Korean. He had successfully applied for a job through a Japanese surname, which was technically illegal at the time. The Yokohama district court ruled in favor of Pak, and wrote that they saw no reason for his dismissal except for “ethnic discrimination”. Additionally, government jobs became open to Zainichi Koreans as well. Significantly, the Japanese Supreme Court ruled in 1976 that Zainichi Koreans could become lawyers without forgoing their Zainichi status (Kim Bumsoo, 2011, pp. 292-294).

While conditions have improved in the twenty-first century, groups like Zaitokoku continue to attempt to fan the flames of regression and ethnic hatred. While the organization has mostly subsided in recent years, the LDP and Nippon Kaigi guarantee that there will likely not be any elimination of the anti-Korean biases in government in the near future. Kishida and his

three predecessors have all been members of Nippon Kaigi, and countless lawmakers, judges, and academics have continued to push for a more conservative and right-wing Japan.

This is the true tragedy of the Zainichi in Japan, in the twenty-first century. They are surrounded by a hostile nation, with limited access to resources and support. From being forced to register as foreigners and submit fingerprints, the Zainichi have routinely faced discrimination in Japan. Both the Chongryon and Mindan represent opportunities for the Zainichi to organize and continue to cherish their culture and ethnicity, but instead place targets on their back. Thus, although extremely unfortunate, it does not seem that much can be done to help the Zainichi claim back more rights and establish themselves within Japanese society until the LDP has been forced out of power, which when examining Japanese politics, may be some time. Furthermore, considering the considerable reach of Nippon Kaigi the number of far-right political parties has been steadily increasing, reflected by both Sakurai's party as well as similar smaller ultranationalist parties.

Growing representation: Zainichi in Film and Media

Despite the constant pressure, the Zainichi Koreans who are able to defy the societal stigma placed upon them by right-wing nationalists go on to accomplish great things for both themselves and the Zainichi identity as a whole. Masayoshi Son, whose Korean name is Son Jeong-ui, is a billionaire CEO of a multinational technology holding company known as Softbank. In interviews, Son has openly spoken about the negativity and backlash he faced as a third-generation Zainichi in Japan, stating that he felt some part of him was missing and that he felt uncomfortable when not at home. He chose to abandon his Japanese surname of Yasumoto and embrace his Korean name of Son in professional capacities (WuDunn, 1999). This mere act of changing one's name as a prominent Zainichi can serve as an inspiring reminder for future

generations of Zainichi. Similarly, Son's brother has also established himself as a Zainichi billionaire through his mobile game development company. Both have donated significant sums to advancing education, awareness, and community initiatives within Zainichi communities.

Additionally, there has been a significant paradigm shift in the depiction of Zainichi Koreans in media. Films portraying Koreans in Japan have been produced since the early 1920s, where they were portrayed as peripheral characters that played very little role in the actual plot of the film. Koreans are depicted as being poor and living in the slums of the Japanese Empire. This again has roots in the of Japanese cultural and social consciousness to address the idea of different races within society, especially because the Zainichi were brought to Japan as laborers and thus, second-class citizens by nature. An early depiction of Koreans in Japanese film is in the critically acclaimed *Mr. Thank You,* directed by Hiroshi Shimizu. The film focuses on the titular main character observing and interacting with a young Zainichi Korean girl who must deal with the consequences of her father's untimely death and is implicitly being forced into a life of prostitution in Tokyo. The film sets up the decision for the main character to save the young woman from a life of poverty and implied prostitution. This film highlights both the social conditions facing Zainichi during the colonial period and is also similar to the concept of the White Man's Burden in Western Literature and Media. It is the decision of the Japanese man to save this Korean girl.

In the postwar period, many films began to sympathize with the plight of the Zainichi in Japan, however, just as many, if not more films continued to depict Koreans as criminal blemishes within Japanese society. Many films of the era portray Zainichi Koreans as members of the Yakuza, and associate them with criminality and social rejection. Katō Tai's *Otoko no kao orikekisho* (*男の顔を履歴書 By a Man's Face You Shall Know Him,* 1966) and Izutsu

Kazuyuki's *Gaki teikoku* (*ガキ帝国 Empire of Brats/Kids,* 1981) both feature Korean Yakuza members in a tough and negative light (Ward, 2015, pp. 129).

One prominent example of the former actually satirizes its contemporary films for perpetuating the negative stereotypes of Koreans. *Death By Hanging (絞死刑, Kōshikei,* 1968*)* is a satirical film directed by Nagisa Ōshima, which explores a Zainichi Korean man, known only as R, who has been sentenced to death for his crimes. As the execution happens, R survives his hanging but loses his memory and recollection of events. The film then centers around the warden and other officials attempting to force R to remember his crimes so that they may continue with his execution. One of the ways they do this is by reenacting racist and prejudicial stereotypes that the Japanese held about Zainichi Koreans to stimulate memories of R's childhood. The film ends with R being allowed to leave as a free man but as he opens the door to reenter society, a blinding light drives him back into the prison, symbolizing the perpetual rejection faced by Zainichi individuals in society. While indeed an absurdist depiction of the Japanese criminal justice system, *Death By Hanging* poignantly articulates the cradle-to-grave nature of discrimination that Zainichi Koreans faced. It also significantly had a Zainichi Korean as its main character, demonstrating the shift towards more active depictions of Zainichi Koreans as an active part of society, even if as tragic figures.

In the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, more films about the Zainichi experience began to emerge as Japan began to look deeper at its own minority populations. Yōichi Sai's 1993 film *All Under the Moon (月はどっちに出ている)*, depicts a young Zainichi taxi driver who falls in love with a Filipina immigrant. The film notably centers completely around individuals who are not of Japanese ethnicity or descent and instead focuses on the stories of minorities and migrants. It also chronicles in significant detail the discrimination that these

minorities face as a result of their ethnicity. In 2005, the film *Break Through! (パッチギ!, Pacchigi!)* directed by Kazuyuki Izutsu discusses the impact of Chongryon's policies of segregating schools and the social impact it has on Zainichi. In this film, the Zainichi boys are portrayed as troublemakers, and the protagonist, a young ethnically Japanese boy falls in love with a Zainichi Korean girl. Significantly, this film does not have the Japanese boy attempting to civilize or change the ways of the Zainichi girl but instead focuses on him attempting to understand the ways of life observed by the Zainichi communities.

Most recently, *Pachinko (파친코* 2022*)* explores the lives and struggles of young Korean immigrants to Japan during the colonial era. While it is directed by a Korean and based on Korean source material, the television series actively advances Zainichi recognition by using the popular streaming platform in Apple TV to educate and inform the rest of the world about the struggles and plight of Zainichi individuals in Japan. The series actually depicts historical events that were not in the original source text, like the Great Kanto Massacre (関東大震災朝鮮人虐殺事件) of 1923, where many Japanese indiscriminately killed Zainichi Koreans based off a rumor that the Zainichi had poisoned the water supply in the aftermath of the Kanto earthquake.

This shift in the portrayal of the Zainichi from being impoverished criminals to more modern nuanced approaches highlights the potential for Japanese society to reject discrimination and prejudice against Koreans, however, whether it will actually occur is significantly more

dubious. As mentioned above, the Liberal Democratic Party and the many conservative political parties in Japan routinely engage in historical negationism, and like many other nations, Japan's film industry tends to be significantly more liberal than the political landscape. That being said, the positive portrayal of Zainichi stories is undoubtedly beneficial for Koreans, especially younger individuals, have the opportunity, for the first time, to actually explore their cultural history through media, something that had been denied to Zainichi for decades.

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