
The Literature of Migrant Women in the Postcolonial Period: On the Writings of First-Generation Korean Women in Japan

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Explanatory Note

This study elucidates the relationship between literature and the first-generation (*ilse*) Zainichi Korean women living in Japan during the colonial and post-colonial periods. The “double colonization” arising from imperialism and feudal ideology meant that many Korean women were denied the opportunity to write about themselves, seldom appearing in public or private records. As of the liberation of Korea in 1945, *ilse* Zainichi women remained illiterate due to the influence of the educational system under Japanese colonial rule and of traditional Korean gender norms.

Previous studies have suggested that *ilse* women vanished away, leaving nothing in writing, after the liberation of Korea. In fact, immediately after the liberation they began acquiring literacy in Korean and Japanese and learning how to write. Being novel in its focus on the early writing practice of *ilse* women, this study elucidates the historical narrative of these women’s attainment of literacy while also unearthing letters, personal records, contributions to newspapers, and poems written in Korean and Japanese, seeking to construct a literary history as written by *ilse* women. The diversity of these women is also revealed, moving beyond the existing one-dimensional image that has been ascribed to them—an image of strong and resilient mothers who survived in the face of discrimination, poverty, and feudal ideology. Furthermore, this study examines the particular post-colonial circumstances of these women, in which their ideas and identities were significantly and inevitably shaped by what languages they learned, as well as the places where they learned these languages and the people who taught them.

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Introduction

Women’s “double colonization” under imperialism and patriarchy remains an ongoing issue around the world. One of the worst consequences of double colonization is the isolation of colonized women so that they were unable to express themselves. There is little statistical or documentary evidence of them in government archives.

The Korean women described in this paper are “Zainichi Korean *ilse*” (first-generation Korean residents in Japan) women—most of whom arrived in Japan during the colonial period from 1910 to 1945. As a result of the Japan’s hierarchical and male-dominated education system and traditional Korean gender norms, which considered education unnecessary for girls, these women had little if any schooling. For this reason, the theme of *ilse* Zainichi women and literature may seem rather odd.

This paper traces the trajectory of *ilse* women’s acquisition of literacy after the liberation of Korea. This is accomplished through an analysis of previously overlooked texts, such as ego documents including personal correspondence and memoranda, letters to newspapers and works of literature.

The structure of the paper is as follows. It begins with an examination of trends and issues regarding the representation of *ilse* women. Next, after describing the historical relationship between *ilse* women and literacy education, the discussion turns to an analysis of writings by *ilse* women. Finally, while identifying the unique char-

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acteristics of the postcolonial situation of these women, the paper explores how they felt about writing. Through these steps, a textured portrait of *ilse* women emerges that differs from the monolithic image of them, as mothers and grandmothers from a former colony who lived strong and stalwart lives despite discrimination, poverty, and Korea's feudal ideology.

I. Literature Review

How have *ilse* Zainichi Korean women been represented and discussed?

The mainstream approach to these women's experience has been through biographical interviews. Aside from the pioneering efforts of the Mukuge no kai (Everlasting Flower Society) in the mid-1960s, most interviews and research took place in the first decades of the 21st century, when *ilse* women were already quite elderly¹.

A wealth of research devoted to *ilse* women who attended Japanese *yakan chūgaku* (night junior high schools) has been amassed since the 1980s. In the 1980s and 1990s, *ilse* women were discussed by Japanese *yakan chūgaku* instructors from the perspective of discrimination and Japan's responsibility for the war². Since 2000, this research has been informed by a gender perspective, such as the rethinking of the relationship between *ilse* women and *yakan chūgaku* in terms of a "counter-public"³ and a focus on the silencing of Zainichi Korean women in Japan's public sphere⁴.

In the mid-2000s, Song Yōnok astutely pointed out the double oppression of *ilse* women under colonialism and patriarchy, noting that Zainichi Koreans longing for a nation state of their own, even a divided one, accepted Japan's ideology of national integration on the basis of the pre-modern Confucian morals to which they were already accustomed⁵. Furthermore, since the living space of Zainichi Koreans was subject to the social and economic conditions of the exclusive and discriminatory suzerain nation, they had no choice but to strengthen the patriarchy to protect their families, sects, and communities⁶.

Around the same time, Kim Funa concluded that *ilse* women had died without leaving any writings behind, deprived of opportunities for expression⁷.

These studies have focused only on what was written or spoken in the Japanese language. Even though *ilse* women inhabited a linguistic space between Korean and Japanese, the aspect of their Koreanness has been ignored in favor of a focus on oral history collected in the Japanese language.

In fact, the linguistic environment of post-liberation Zainichi Koreans was quite complicated. For those who aspired to decolonization, the Korean language became a symbol of Korean nationalism. Even so, Japanese was

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1. Mukuge no kai, ed., *Shinse tāryon: Zainichi Chōsen josei no hansei* [Hard-luck stories: A half a lifetime for Zainichi Korean women] (Tokyo: Tōto Shuppan, 1972); Ilpun Pak and Yunsun Kim, *Shōgai gen'eki: Zainichi chōsenjin ai to tataikai no monogatari* [A life of service: A story of love and struggle of Zainichi Koreans] (Tokyo: Dōjidaisha, 2004); Ilpun Pak, *Itsumo otento-sama ga mamotte kureta: Zainichi harumoni haraboji no monogatari* [providence always protected us: The stories of Zainichi Korean grandmothers and grandfathers] (Tokyo: Nashinokisha, 2011); Kawasaki no harumoni haraboji to musubu 2000-nin nettowāku seikatsushi kikigaki henshū iinkai, ed., *Zainichi Korian josei 20-nin no kiseki: Kokkyō o koe, watakushi wa kō shite ikite kita* [The paths of 20 Zainichi Korean women: Crossing borders, I have come to live this way] (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2009).
 2. Yoshiko Iwai, *Omoni no uta: 48-sai no yakan chūgakusei* [a mother's song: A 48-year-old night junior high school student] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1984); Yoshiko Iwai, *Omoni no hitorigoto: 56-sai no yakan chūgakusei* [A mother's soliloquy: A 56-year-old night junior high school student] (Tokyo: Kara Bunka Jōhō Sentā, 1988); Susumu Inatomi, *Mugunfa no kaori: Zenkoku Zainichi chōsenjin kyōiku kenkyū kyōgi-kai no kiseki to tenbō* [The fragrance of mugunghwa: The trajectory and outlook of the national Korean education and research council in Japan] (Tokyo: Yōjisha, 1988); Inatomi, Susumu, *Moji wa kūki da: Yakan chūgaku to omonitachi* [The written word is the air we breathe: Korean mothers at night junior high school] (Tokyo: Yōjisha, 1990).
 3. Akwi Sō, *Zainichi Chōsenjin josei ni yoru "Kai no taikō-teki na kōkyōken" no keisei: Ōsaka no yakan chūgaku o kaku to shita undo* [Creating Subaltern Counterpublics: Korean Women in Japan and Their Struggle for Night School] (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 2012).
 4. Yamane Miki robunshū henshū iinkai, ed., *Omoni ga utau Takeda no komoriuta: Zainichi Chōsenjin josei no manabi to posuto shokuminchi mondai* [The lullaby of Takeda mothers sang: Learning among Zainichi Korean women and postcolonial issues] (Tokyo: Inpakuto Shuppankai, 2017).
 5. Yōnok Song, "Zainichi Chōsenjin no josei to wa dare ka [Who are the Zainichi Korean women?]." In *Keizoku suru shokuminchishugi: Jendā/minzoku/jinshu/kaikyū* [Enduring colonialism: Gender/ethnicity/race/class] (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2005), 262-263.
 6. Ibid.
 7. Funa Kim, *Zainichi Chōsenjin josei bungakuron* [Theorizing Zainichi Korean women's literature] (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2004), 18-19.

indispensable as the primary language in daily life and was essential for access to Japan's majority culture. Zainichi Koreans, even as they sought to establish Korean ethnic education and an ethnic literature, were torn between these two languages. Although the Zainichi Korean society was divided, reflecting the north-south divide in the Korean Peninsula, only ethnic groups supporting the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) endeavored to pass on the Korean language.

Unlike the men, *ilse* women, who lived in small Korean enclaves and had little contact with Japanese society, used Korean in their daily lives. They possessed a practical mastery of Japanese but were unable to read in either Korean or Japanese at the time of the liberation.

II. A History of Korean Women's Literacy Education

(1) Literacy education during the Korean colonial period

Under Japanese colonial rule, many factors prevented Korean women from having formal education. Imperial Japan, a patriarchal society with the emperor at the top, placed no emphasis on the education of colonized girls. By 1942, two out of every three Korean women had never attended school⁸. Most Korean women had been engaged in productive and reproductive labor since they were young. This was due to Korea's feudal gender norms, poverty exacerbated by the colonial rule that put pressure on women to marry at an early age, and during the war, the fear of being trafficked as sex slaves (or "comfort women") for Japanese soldiers.

The situation of Korean women in Japan was also stark. The history of their migration began around 1915, when they began coming to Japan to work as *henyo*, or female divers or as spinners in Osaka's textile mills. From the late 1920s, with the recovery from the postwar recession, an increasing number of married women began crossing the sea to join their husbands, who were already working in Japan. These women had neither the time nor the means to study. According to a 1934 study conducted by Osaka Prefecture, of the 10,593 Zainichi Korean women surveyed, 10,097 (95.32%) had not received any formal education at all⁹. In short, the literacy rate was less than 5%.

(2) The formation of the Korean Democratic Women's Alliance and night classes for women

After the liberation of Korea, Zainichi Koreans were enthusiastic about securing an ethnic education for their children. In fact, literacy education in the Korean language was being offered to adult (presumably married) women in Zainichi Korean ethnic organizations.

In response to the division of Korea, Zainichi ethnic organizations — all of which tended to be male-dominated — became polarised into the South Korea-affiliated Mindan (*Chaeilbon taehanminguk koryumindan*, or the Republic of Korean Residents Union in Japan) and Choryŏn (*Chaeilbon chosŏnin yŏnmaeng*, or the League of Koreans in Japan; *Chŏren* in Japanese [1945.10-1949.9]). Choryŏn initially emerged as popular movements, then gradually strengthening their ties with the DPRK. It was later reorganized into Minjŏn (*Chaeil chosŏn t'ongil minju chŏnsŏn*, or the United Democratic Front of Koreans ; *Minsen* [1951.1-1955.5]), followed by Ch'ongryŏn (*Chaeilbon chosŏnin ch'ongryŏnhaphoe*, or the General Association of Zainichi Koreans; *Sŏren* [1955-]). As many young Korean intellectuals were anti-imperialist and leftist, few joined Mindan, which was more conservative and anti-communist. Only organizations affiliated with Choryŏn-Minjŏn-Ch'ongryŏn were engaged in educational and cultural activities.

A women's section was established under the auspices of Ch'ongryŏn in February 1946. Its goals were to raise the literacy rate and bring about women's liberation, gender equality, decolonization, and the abolition of superstitions, antiquated customs and "semi-feudal slavery conventions", which had treated women as the property of men.

In October 1947, the women's section was renamed Nyŏmaeng (*Chaeilbon chosŏnin minjunyŏsŏng dongmaeng*, or Korean Democratic Women's Alliance in Japan). Nyŏmaeng's primary activity was a series of evening

8. Puja Kim, *Shokuminchi-ki Chŏsen no kyōiku to jendā: Shūgaku fu shūgaku o meguru kenryoku kankei* [Korean education and gender in the colonial period: Power relationships over enrollment and non-enrollment] (Tokyo: Seori Shobō, 2005).

9. Ōsakafu gakumubu shakaika [Ōsaka prefecture department of academic affairs, social affairs division], "Zaihan Chŏsenjin no seikatsu jōtai 1934 nen [Living conditions among Ōsaka's Korean residents]" (Ōsaka: Ōsakafu gakumubu shakaika, 1934).

lectures and seminars for Korean women. At these seminars, lectures on dressmaking techniques to earn additional income were held at the same time as Korean-language and consciousness-raising classes.

Nyōmaeng members were also active in the ethnic education of Korean children. During the crackdown on Korean ethnic education by the General Headquarters (GHQ) Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) and the Japanese government after 1948, Nyōmaeng mothers waged a fierce resistance. At this time, women took over from the male activists who had been arrested, preparing for protest rallies and organizing relief, raising funds, and collecting signatures for the release of those who had been detained.

As the Cold War between the USA and USSR deepened, Choryōn was forcibly dissolved by the Japanese government in September 1949 under Article 4 of the Organization Reformation Order (Cabinet Order No. 64), and its assets were confiscated. As a result, Korean communities that had taken shape immediately after liberation were broken up, costing many people their jobs. In October, most Korean schools nationwide were shuttered, with the exception of a few that were not labelled as communist.

Having lost the organization that protected their interests, some Zainichi Koreans, found a way to continue their struggle by joining the Japanese Communist Party. A report on Nyōmaeng's activities for 1953 states "A society without women's rights begets a difficult life, growing unemployment, and ethnic discrimination."¹⁰ This indicates that Zainichi Korean women in the early 1950s were strongly influenced by the Japanese Communist Party's policy linking issues of class and gender.

(3) Schools for Learning Korean Literacy

Immediately after liberation, many *ilse* women were forced to take on low-paying jobs. Many of their Korean husbands who worked for Japanese employers had been fired and replaced by Japanese men who were returning from the war. The most common jobs for Zainichi Korean women in the 1950s were home-brewing sake (*doburoku*), working in spinning mills or as day laborers on construction sites through the Public Employment Security Office, and earning additional income as dressmakers.

When Minjōn was formed as the successor organization to Ch'ongryōn in January 1951, at the height of the Korean War, Nyōmaeng was brought into the organization. Around this time, Nyōmaeng was trying to establish schools for adults, especially women. The campaign was called *senhwal hakkyo undong*. The purpose of the movement was to promote "a learning movement with the aim of raising women's consciousness in subjects connected to daily life, including the Korean language, social awareness, Korean history, customs, habits, needlework, cooking, knitting, and hygiene, as well as culture and the arts."¹¹ Across Japan, nearly 1000 students were enrolled in 83 such schools.

The obstacles to learning for the *ilse* women amounted to more than just poverty or a lack of motivation due to fatigue. Kim Min's short story "Pubussaum [A Marital Quarrel]" (1953) begins with Mr. Mun, furious with his wife (she is not given her name in the story) for attending a Korean language class accuses her of infidelity and beats her. The wife, who spends her days at her job, in addition to doing all of the housework and childcare, drags herself to the evening class with a burning desire to learn. The move to combat illiteracy (*monmō taiji*) on the part of Zainichi Korean women in the postcolonial period, beyond being a conceptual struggle against pre-modern Korean feudalism and Japanese imperialism, was also a real daily struggle against the women's closest male companions, their Korean husbands.

The environment for *ilse* women's acquisition of literacy improved drastically in 1955, following the formation of Ch'ongryōn, which declared that Zainichi Koreans were now citizens of the DPRK¹² and strongly promoted

10. Chaeilbon chosōn minju nyōsōng tongmaeng che 5ch'a chōn'guktaehoe [Fifth Nyōmaeng National Assembly], "Tangmyōnū ilbon chōngseūi t'ūkchingwa chaeil chosōn puindūrūi hyōnsang [Characteristics of the current state of Japan and Zainichi Korean women]." in Ilban chōngsewa hwaltong pogo mit kūmhu pangch'im-sōnōn, kangnyōng, kyuyak [Report of general situation and activities with future policy directions (Declaration, platform, and covenant)] (Tokyo: October 21 and 22, 1953), 43.

11. Ibid.

12. Although 98 percent of Zainichi Koreans had their original home in what later became the Republic of Korea, many of them chose DPRK as their homeland in the 1950s and 1960s.

literacy education as part of their North Koreanization programme. At this time, Nyōmaeng, which decided to ally with Ch'ongryōn, contemplated what it saw as “the truly shameful situation of illiterate and ignorant Zainichi Korean women who lacked firm awareness of their status as citizens of the DPRK.”¹³ Here, Nyōmaeng attributed the problem of illiteracy among Zainichi Korean women not to external factors such as feudal Confucianism or Japanese imperialism, but rather to Zainichi women's internalized shame toward their new “homeland” (*choguk*). At that moment, what had been an ethnic perspective, and a gender perspective aimed at women's liberation, was replaced by a new nationalism centered on the DPRK.

Ch'ongryōn redeveloped and expanded its educational and consciousness-raising activities. A pillar of this effort was the establishment of schools (*sōngin hakkyo*, *seijin gakkō* in Japanese), primarily for women. The purpose of these schools was “to give Zainichi Koreans above the age of 15 who were unable to read the Korean language or alphabet the ability to do so, so that they come to have a sense of honor and high moral character as citizens of the DPRK.”¹⁴ From that time onward, the Korean language was positioned as the “North Korean language,” and a prerequisite for “arming oneself with a socialist and patriotic ideology,” a phrase that was used frequently among people associated with Ch'ongryōn. In other words, the ability to understand and internalize information transmitted in Korean from the “homeland” through books, newspapers, radio broadcasts, and other media had become essential for Zainichi Koreans to maintain their expatriate nationalism.

(4) The Rise of Sōngin Hakkyo

The number of Zainichi Koreans studying at *sōngin hakkyo* soared late in 1959, encouraged by the exodus (*kikoku*, meaning “repatriation”) of many Zainichi Koreans to the DPRK. By 1961, 4,000 students were enrolled¹⁵.

The results of the acquisition of literacy by *ilse* women quickly became apparent. Learning was facilitated by the phonetic nature of the Korean alphabet and by the DPRK's policy of abolishing Chinese characters and replacing the Sino-Korean vocabulary, heavily influenced by Japan and China, with words of Korean origin. Moreover, as observed by Sonia Ryang, political jargon also resolved some dialect-based communication difficulties between Zainichi from Cheju Island and Gyeongsang Province¹⁶.

The following is a recollection of a second-generation Korean woman who taught at a *sōngin hakkyo* in the 1960s.

I'd teach for about two hours, but it was tough, as this was the first time any of them had even held a pencil. It was a mix of older women and young mothers. They would tell me things like, “Even at my age, thanks to Chairman Kim Il Sung, I'll be able to learn Korean, which not even my parents ever taught me” and “I don't want our children and grandchildren to go through the anguish that we have.” [...] The old folks used to quickly forget what they had learned, but they never failed to show up to class, regardless of wind and rain. They said that they enjoyed learning alongside the younger people. The women happily told me that now that they could write, they would be able to correspond with people back in their hometowns¹⁷.

As this teacher stated, learning to read and write in Korean gave *ilse* women a sense of moral liberation. At the same time, literacy education at *sōngin hakkyo* was inextricably tied to the political ideological education of

13. Chaeilbon chosŏn minju yŏsŏng tongmaeng chungang wiwŏnhoe che 7ch'a chŏnch'e imshidaehoe [Seventh plenary session of the Nyōmaeng central committee]. “Yŏsŏngdŭrŭi chŏngch'i munhwa kyoyang saŏp kanghwa palchŏnŭl wihayŏ [Toward the strengthening and development of women's political and cultural education programs]” in Ilban pangch'im (Ch'oan) [*General policy (draft)*] (Tokyo: Nyōmaeng Central Committee, 1955).

14. Sŏren chūō iinkai dai 16 ji kakudai kaigi [Sixteenth extended session of the Ch'ongryōn. central committee], Seijin gakkō secchi yōkō [Guidelines for the establishment of adult schools] (Tokyo: Sŏren chūō iinkai), quoted in Kim Tŏng-nyong, Chŏsen gakkō no sengo-shi: 1945–1972 [A postwar history of Korean schools, 1945-1972] (Tokyo: Shakai Hyōron-sha, 2002), 182-183.

15. Chaeilbon chosŏn minju nyŏsŏng tongmaeng, Che 12 ch'a chungang taehoe. kyŏlchŏngsŏ [Resolutions of the 12th Central Convention] (Tokyo: Chaeilbon chosŏn minju nyŏsŏng tongmaeng, May 1961).

16. Sonia Ryang, *North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology, and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 102.

17. Mukuge no kai, *Shinse taryon*, 146-147.

Ch'ongryŏn and the DPRK. Accordingly, a natural consequence of Ch'ongryŏn-sponsored literacy education was the internalization of the DPRK's unique gender norms for women, which combined Korean feudalism and socialism. This trend became more pronounced from the late 1960s, when Kim Il Sung consolidated his power.

(5) The Establishment of the DPRK's Monolithic Ideological System and Enrollment in Japanese *Yakan Chūgaku*

When Kim Il Sung's Ten Major Guiding Principles were proclaimed in 1967, ushering in the Monolithic Ideological System, education at *sŏngin hakkyo* shifted to stress loyalty to Kim Il Sung. From February 1968, a new educational campaign focused on teaching students about Kim Il Sung's mother, Kang Bangsŏk. She became the exemplary wife of a revolutionary husband, a mother to budding revolutionaries, and an inspiration to patriots. In this way, she became a role model for all North Korean women.

Other major changes were taking place in Zainichi Korean society in the late 1960s. These included a drastic decrease in the number of people repatriating to the DPRK and the improvement of economic conditions for Zainichi Koreans who were benefiting from Japan's economic growth. In this context, the generational shift from first- to second-generation *ilse* Zainichi and the declining power of Zainichi ethnic organizations as a unifying force also contributed to the rapid integration of Zainichi Koreans into Japanese society. In addition, popular interest among Japanese people in the ROK became more prominent around the time of the signing of the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea in 1965. Zainichi Korean writers who distanced themselves from Ch'ongryŏn in opposition to Kim Il Sung's absolutism also began to gain recognition in Japan's literary establishment.

Around the same time, more night classes at Japanese public junior high schools, called *yakan chūgaku*, began to be offered, influenced by the rise of the Buraku Liberation Movement¹⁸. *Yakan chūgaku* were initially intended for Japanese national minorities who had been deprived of an education as children, due to factors such as the war, poverty, or discrimination. These were the schools in which *ilse* women living in Korean neighborhoods in cities like Osaka and Tokyo could sign up for classes. For *ilse* women who had little connection to the Ch'ongryŏn organization, *yakan chūgaku* was their introduction to formal education. From that point, *ilse* women began composing essays, poems, and autobiographies in the Japanese language.

From the 1970s, the sites of literacy education for *ilse* women were divided between Ch'ongryŏn's *sŏngin hakkyo* and Japanese public *yakan chūgaku*. Shortly afterwards, Japanese-language literacy classes for mainly *ilse* women also began in Osaka and Kawasaki, the concentration areas for Zainichi Koreans. It bears repeating that the vast majority of these women had never attended school, because they could not afford it, because they were expected to work, or because their fathers or husbands were opposed to education for girls and women.

III. Analysis and History of Writing

This section focuses on an analysis of writings produced by *ilse* women who had become wives and mothers (it was almost impossible for a Zainichi woman to remain single). To reiterate, writing by *ilse* women can only be found in media published by Ch'ongryŏn.

(1) A Silent Period for Women

Between 1945 and 1950, very little writing by Zainichi women was published. The one exception was articles published in *Nyŏmaeng sibo* (*Jomei jihō* in Japanese, or Women's Alliance Times), a newspaper that appeared from the end of 1947 to September 1949. The paper was published by Kim Ŭnsun, the chair of Nyŏmaeng, and had a circulation of approximately 5,000. It carried reports by Nyŏmaeng officials, and essays on the role of mothers in their children's education. Most of the content consisted of articles about women's lives in North and South Korea,

18. Masao Takano, *Yakan chūgakusei Takano Masao: Buki ni naru moji to kotoba o* [A night junior high school student, Masao Takano: My letters and words as weapons] (Tokyo: Kaihō Shuppansha, 1993).

on Nyōmaeng's activities, household tips, columns on learning the Korean alphabet and Chinese characters, poems and reviews. Although women were the intended audience, the features were written by men.

The first known reference to writing by women appeared during the backlash against the suppression of Korean schools by GHQ and the Japanese government. A 1949 report by Nyōmaeng describes how 30 Korean women living in Hyōgo wrote letters of support to their compatriots who had been imprisoned by the authorities, using the Korean language they had just learned in night classes¹⁹.

(2) The Critique of Male Compatriots and Support for the Publication of Books of Poetry

In the early 1950s, readers began to see occasional contributions from women in the correspondence sections of *Haebang Shinmun* (Liberation Newspaper; *Kaihō Shinbun* in Japanese), which was a staple media for Zainichi Koreans.

Most of the articles submitted by these women pertained to men. Ch'oe Chōngja, for example, listed three ways which men needed to improve: 1) they needed to understand their families better and take on more responsibility for housework and parenting; 2) they should abandon the Korean custom of inviting guests over for meals without consulting their wives; and 3) they needed to realize that women's liberation was also beneficial to them. She also demanded that husbands keep their wives apprised of what was happening in society outside, and to take them out to the cinema²⁰.

Ri Sunja criticized male activists who were praised in public for their bravery and skilled oratory but who not only neglected housework or parenting duties at home but could also be abusive to their families in private.

[...] Have you ever felt grateful for the women in your households who toil all day long, accepting an impoverished life and bearing the education of your children and all other aspects of life on their fragile shoulders? All you male activists! Do you have the courage to wage a campaign to thank the women?²¹

Another noteworthy event with relevance to Korean women that took place during this period was the support for the publication by Nam Siu of a Korean-language poetry collection entitled *Pom sōsik* (*Tidings of spring*) in 1953. The collection, written by a teacher who taught at a Korean school that had weathered under suppression by the Japanese government, was written out of a desire that Korean children would grow with a powerful sense of national pride as Koreans. The Tōkyō-toritsu Chōsenjin gakkō hahayōya renraku-kai (Tokyo Metropolitan Korean School Mothers' Liaison Association) is presumed to have been responsible for fundraising efforts supporting the publication and circulation of the collection. The "Afterword" written by representatives of the Liaison Association contains a message for younger readers, asking them to read the book aloud to mothers who could not read Korean. From this, it is conceivable that one of the aims of the publication of the poetry collection was the simultaneous education of both children and their mothers.

Ultimately, *ilse* women were unable to form an active literary community in the 1950s. Instead, they threw themselves into the world of language and literature by supporting ethnic education for their children and reading the work of Korean authors.

(3) Women's Writing in Chosŏn Shinbo

In the 1960s, as the Korean language learning movement was gaining momentum, reading campaigns took literacy education even further. At the time, the most widely read work was probably Kim Myōnghwa's memoir *Pulgul ūi nolae* (Song of Fortitude, 1961), about a woman who leaves her children to take up arms and fight for her

19. Nyōsōng dongmaeng che 5ch'a chungang wiwōnhoe chean pogosō mit ūian [Fifth Nyōmaeng national assembly, Proposed Report and Agenda] (Tokyo: Chaeilbon chosŏn minju nyōsōng tongmaeng, February 1949); Gyusang O, *Dokumento Zainihon Chōsenjin renmei: 1945-1949* [Document Zainihon Chōsenjin renmei: 1945-1949] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009), 390.

20. Chōngja Ch'oe, "Kajōng saenghwarūl kaesōnhaja [Improve your home life]," *Haebang Shinmun*, February 4, 1950.

21. Sunja Ri, "Namsōngdūre taehan yōsōngdūrūi put'ak [Women's requests to the menfolk]," *Ibid*, April 16, 1953.

homeland's independence.

The situation for *ilse* women can be followed in the pages of *Chosŏn Shinbo* (The Korean Newspaper; Chōsen Shinpō in Japanese), Ch'ongryŏn's official newspaper. The back page of the paper, tailored to female readers, carried daily articles on family life and Nyōmaeng's activities.

Chosŏn Shinbo initially featured interviews with *ilse* women who had attended *sŏngin hakkyo*. One article introduced a New Year's greeting card — the first that the author, an *ilse* woman, had written. The article was accompanied by her assertion that “*Sŏngin hakkyo* not only gave me the ability to write but also opened my eyes to having pride as a human being as well as the pride of having my own country.”²²

It was not long before the paper began publishing the writings of other *ilse* women. Mun Okch'e, a resident of Tokyo writing for the first time in her life, submitted an essay titled “This Cheerful, Tranquil World Is Like a Dream.” She wrote, “Though I could only dream of learning to write, I am now able to write freely. What a wonderful world it is!” She continues, “This is the same Japan that I have lived in for a long time, but our circumstances as Koreans have changed. We are now legitimate citizens of the DPRK. We will make even more flowers bloom with our own hands on the territory of our beautiful land, ruled by our Dear Leader.”²³

The acquisition of Korean literacy imbued *ilse* women with confidence as members of the DPRK. Zainichi women at the time uniformly wrote that their ability to read and write was “thanks to Marshal Kim Il Sung.” As also noted by Mun Okch'e, the discriminatory conditions that surrounded Zainichi Koreans in Japanese society did not improve. Rather, Zainichi Korean women had come to consider themselves citizens of the DPRK. As a result, they studied and became literate in the Korean language. In other words, with their incorporation into Ch'ongryŏn's “North Koreanization” program, these women simultaneously acquired and achieved both literacy and a transformation in their sense of national belonging.

The pages of *Chosŏn Shinbo* in the 1960s saw the development of a campaign to encourage women to keep diaries. The diaries featured in the newspaper recorded the daily lives of women, including those of women who devoted themselves to Nyōmaeng activities despite their responsibilities for housework and childcare, and the writings of teachers at Korean schools, who shouldered the dual burden of work inside and outside of the home.

In addition to essays and diary entries, there was poetry, including a Korean verse form known as *kasa*. The following is a 1964 poem written by a 56-year-old woman who had studied at a *sŏngin hakkyo* in Shimonoseki.

It runs, it runs / The unification train
 We want unification here / We want unification there
 In every village, we want unification / In every city, we want unification.
 All in unison / we raise the cry of unification
 The unification train running north and south / Runs with the happiness of our 30 million compatriots
 The unification train runs / The train that harries U.S. imperialism runs.
 Begone, U.S. imperialism! / Get out of Korea now!
 Lightning will strike the back of U.S. imperialism.

— Kim Nami, “Hoping for unification”²⁴

Despite its rudimentary form, the poem still expresses a Korean's desire for the reunification of North and South Korea. The core idea of the poem, that the U.S. is the principal cause of Korea's division, is consistent with the stance of Ch'ongryŏn. However, the author uses the metaphor of a speeding train to express her hope for a rapid reunification. From this, the reader can infer her pride and elation that she is playing a leading role in the reunification of her country.

22. *Chosŏn Shinbo*, December 30, 1961.

23. *Ibid.*, December 5, 1964.

24. *Ibid.*, April 11, 1964.

The *ilse* women writers discussed here were participants in ethnic organizations. In the 1960s, these were the only venues for learning the Korean language and finding expression through it.

(4) The Monolithic Ideological System and *Yakan Chūgaku*

After the establishment of the DPRK's Monolithic Ideological System in 1967, the writing style of Zainichi Koreans affiliated with Ch'ongryŏn became standardized as writers began to use a very limited vocabulary, with stock phrases like "Dear Leader Marshal Kim Il Sung." Likewise, the themes raised in their writing became aligned with the campaigns that Ch'ongryŏn had led. The campaigns include sympathy for compatriots in the "living hell" of the ROK under the puppet regime propped up by U.S. imperialism, demands to extend the agreement on the repatriation of Korean residents in Japan to the DPRK, demands for freedom of movement between the DPRK and Japan, opposition to the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the ROK, and opposition to the Japanese government's Foreign School Bill, which targeted Korean schools affiliated with Ch'ongryŏn. The authors attributed their happiness entirely to the good graces and leadership of Kim Il Sung.

A similar phenomenon was reflected in Zainichi women's writing. The following is a *kasa* written by a woman in 1968, "Song of the 100 Days of Innovation Campaign."

Let us be loyal to our Leader Kim Il Sung
 I engrave this pledge on my heart
 Let us emphatically promote the 100 Days of Innovation Campaign that blazes in the breasts of 600,000 people
 Let us victoriously celebrate our country's twentieth anniversary
 Let us use this campaign to defeat our enemies
 And hasten the Day of Reunification
 Our Leader's state ideology of *juch'e* (self-reliance) is a grand ideology
 Let us bravely move forward
 By learning more and more and arming ourselves with theory
 Let us abandon all old ideologies
 Let us aim for the reunification of the homeland [...]

— Ri Pangja, "Song of the 100 Days of Innovation Campaign"²⁵

Ch'ongryŏn's first Chairman, Han Tōksu, described the 100 Days of Innovation Campaign (June to September 1968) as "a popular patriotic movement intended to direct all Ch'ongryŏn activists and Zainichi Koreans to study the ideology of Chairman Kim Il Sung, to rally them firmly around his leadership, and to defend democratic ethnic rights, as well as to promote the independent reunification of the homeland."²⁶ This poem thus fully reflects Ch'ongryŏn's policies. However, unlike Kim Nami's poem, it is difficult here to find any spark of originality.

From the 1970s, the number of articles about *ilse* women featured in the pages of *Chosŏn Shinbo* dropped, as did the number of articles showcasing their writing. These were replaced by writings of young female students and Nyōmaeng activists who had studied in Ch'ongryŏn's education system. The outlets and means available for *ilse* women to express themselves and describe their experiences were thus diminished.

Around this time, *ilse* women began enrolling in Japanese *yakan chūgaku*. The following Japanese poem, composed by an *ilse* woman, expresses her excitement over her newfound ability to write in Japanese.

A sheet of paper changed me
 Now a light shines here and there

25. Ibid., July 3, 1968.

26. Tōksu Han, *Shutaiteki kaigai kyōhō no shisō to jissen [Ideas and Practices of the Subjective Overseas Compatriots Movement]* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1986), 223.

Now I can see both black and red
 When I think
 Was this, was that, my life?
 But still I have a long way to go
 — Mun Kūmpun, “My Path”²⁷

Despite its limited vocabulary, this poem is quite a striking expression of the joy felt at broadening one’s own horizons by learning to write. This poem was introduced by Chong Ch’uwōl (Sou Shūgetsu in Japanese), a female poet who made conscious use of pidgin Japanese influenced by the Korean language. This second-generation Korean woman found beauty in the simplicity and starkness of how *ilse* women made use of Japanese.

Chong Ch’uwōl discovered the unique allure of this awkward use of Japanese by *ilse* women. However, in exchange, she ended up overlooking the fact that *ilse* women were living in a world in which Korean and Japanese intermingled. She relates an episode in which Mun Kūmpun says that “I’m studying Japanese at school at the moment, but those are not the words of our country. It’s Japanese. I also learn Roman letters at school, but I can’t learn Korean there. That’s why I’m going to study Korean language and the Korean alphabet someday.”²⁸ What Chong Ch’uwōl failed to recognize was that this comment was a sharp critique of a Japan-centric ideology.

Essays and poems written by *ilse* women in Japanese began appearing in print from the 1970s and 1980s, Autobiographies and *tanka* poetry collections by *ilse* women were published with the assistance of their children and Japanese collaborators. These included accounts by: Kayama Sueko (born 1922), who was diagnosed with leprosy in Japan at the end of the colonial period and who began writing poems in Japanese while recuperating in Kusatsu; Cho Kyuyu (born 1923), who published an autobiographical novel in the quarterly journal *Kikan Mintō* founded in the 1980s by the Akutagawa Prize-winning author Yi Hoesōng (Ri Kaisei in Japanese); and Yanagawa Fukushin (born 1924), who wrote about her life as a scrap metal collector.

Meanwhile, *tanka* and poetry collections had begun to appear in Japanese and Korean by *ilse* women who had just arrived in Japan from the ROK in the 1960s and 1970s. Among these newcomers were Son Hoyōn, Ch’a Yun-sun, Yi Sūngsun, and Kim Jiyōng.

Conclusion: Possibilities and Impossibilities for an *ilse* Women’s Literature

Ilse women picked up their pens to write about their own experiences after Korea’s liberation from Japan. Initially, this writing took place exclusively inside Zainichi ethnic organizations, using the Korean language. The themes of these writings inevitably conformed to the policies of the male-centric ethnic organizations, which aspired to decolonization and the celebration of ethnic nationalism. An emerging structural problem was that the ethnic agenda took priority over allowing women to express the diversity of their own ideas and ways of life.

Even so, this does not necessarily mean that these women were able to write whatever they wanted in Japanese. From the 1970s onward, an image began to take shape in *yakan chūgaku* of Korean female students who abided by the teachings of their progressive and conscientious Japanese instructors. These instructors came to see their students as victims of ethnic discrimination within Japan. As evidence, they cited the women’s tendency to write fondly in *yakan chūgaku* of “the good old days” in Korea and to castigate the racism and prejudice they encountered in Japan.

Thus, the thematic content of the post-liberation writing of Zainichi Korean women, even those who were fortunate enough to become literate, was heavily influenced by the language they studied, where they studied it, and from whom they learned it. Apart from that, their ideologies and identities were determined by the schools they attended. This attests to the unique postcolonial situation of these women, whose homeland was divided by the Cold War.

27. Ch’uwōl Chong, “Mun Kūmpun omoni no ningo [Mun Kūmpun’s apple],” in *Ikaino t’aryōng [Ikaino stories]* (Tokyo: Shisō no Kagakusha, 1986), 231.

28. *ibid.*, 239.

This paper has brought to light the *ilse* women who became capable of expressing themselves and of struggling for decolonization and for personal and ethnic liberation by learning to read and write. Still it cannot be denied that the number of works known to have been written by *ilse* women is limited, and *ilse* women cannot be said to have produced any major works that have been widely read in Japan, South Korea, or North Korea.

Finally, why did *ilse* women decided to learn reading and writing? There must have been a combination of factors, from practical exigencies of work and daily life or communicating with family and friends still living in the ROK and DPRK to ideological and abstract reasons such as decolonization and women's liberation. In this context, *ilse* women's desire to write, which is to say their desire to create literature, may have been rooted in a desire to make themselves visible. For these women, writing was the ultimate affirmation of their own existence in Japanese society, which considered them beneath notice.

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