

**The Power of Names as a Marker of Identity—  
Zainichi Koreans in Japan**

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## ABSTRACT

Zainichi Koreans, or Koreans in Japan have assimilated to Japanese society ever since their first mass immigration as forced laborers to Japan during World War I and during the Japanese colonization of Korea. Ever since then, they have experienced social discriminations, destitution, the division of Korea and so on. Most of these zainichi Koreans have Japanese names mostly to avoid social discrimination. It is the purpose of this thesis to explore how zainichi Koreans' decisions to go by their Japanese or Korean names serve to assert or hide their ethnic identity and ultimately benefit or harm zainichi Koreans in Japanese society, which is not highly tolerant of individual embracement of diverse ethnic identities.

Those who go by their Japanese names and therefore able to pass as ordinary Japanese are seen as betrayers of their motherland. Furthermore, those with Japanese aliases face uncomfortable realization that if they choose to become visibly Korean without going by their Japanese names, the advantages that have enjoyed so far in Japanese society might be forfeited. In contrast, those who go by their Korean names gain acknowledgements from other Koreans as ethnically conscious Koreans. However, those acknowledgements also act as pressures for those zainichi Koreans without much political inclination or desires, to serve as role models for zainichi community.

Japanese society is not embracing to zainichi Koreans who go by their Korean names, for Japanese society generally dislikes individual announcement of ethnic identity. Causes for the unwelcoming attitude can be traced back to Meiji Restoration (1868) and modern Japanese history that emphasized monoethnicity as a defining characteristic of Japan compared to other countries. Because of a long period of modern history that highlighted monoethnicity of Japan, Japanese public still believes in its homogeneity despite many existing minorities such as Okinawans, *Burakumin*, Chinese and *Nikkeijin*. Because of the prevalent belief and the history of instillation of such belief, zainichi Koreans and their decisions to go by their Korean names are met with apathy or hostility in Japanese society.

In conclusion, their names, whether Korean or Japanese, hold power as a marker of identity of how others perceive zainichi Koreans and how zainichi Koreans perceive themselves. For those with Japanese aliases, they are labeled by others as traitors, sell-outs or Japanese Koreans with thinned out Korean identity. Those with Korean names are identified by others as politically and socially active Koreans. These outside perceptions in turn affect zainichi Koreans own evaluation of themselves and their individual and ethnic identity.

Moreover, their names serve as a tool of both empowerment and resistance for the survival of zainichi Koreans in a discriminatory society. For zainichi Koreans with Korean names, the decisions mark their own form of self-empowerment through asserting their ethnic identity as well as their own survival method in a society. Their Korean names are also a tool of resistance against Japanese society that attempts to enforce a false image of monoethnic Japan. Similarly, for those with Japanese names, choosing to go by their Japanese aliases is another way of self-empowerment through passing as the ethnic majority. Furthermore, Japanese names also represent a form of resistance against expectations to be visibly Korean from zainichi Korean communities or Koreans in Korea.

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## INTRODUCTION

There are about 600,000 zainichi Koreans, or Japanese residents of Korean descent, living in Japan today. The vast majority of these zainichi Koreans are descendants of Korean nationals who were forcibly brought to Japan from Korea during World War I and during the Japanese colonization of Korea (1910-1945) and remained in Japan. Now, these Koreans “form the largest foreign minority group in Japan, accounting for 42% of foreign residents” (Donahue 2002, 184). However, these zainichi Koreans have also been subject to social discrimination despite their cultural assimilation, language fluency, and physical resemblance to Japanese people. Because of the discriminations they face, most zainichi Koreans go by their Japanese names instead of their Korean names. In my thesis, I will discuss how zainichi Koreans’ decisions to go by their Japanese names or to keep their Korean names serve to assert or hide their ethnic identity and ultimately benefit or harm them in Japanese society, an environment that is discriminating towards minorities and their embracement of ethnic identities.

The first part of my thesis will cover the general history behind zainichi Korean immigration to Japan and who zainichi Koreans are. Moreover, I will discuss Japan’s Meiji Restoration (1868) and the beginning of Japan’s emphasis on its false image of homogeneous society. I will later refer to this long history of instilling the idea of homogeneous Japan, to relate why zainichi Koreans’ resolutions to go by their ethnic names are interpreted as threats that expose the reality of multiethnic Japanese society, and as excessively political statements that challenge the society’s historical policy of emphasis on monoethnicism. In arguing so, I will make a frequent use of different

interviews and statistics from a Korean documentary called “I am me. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Zainichi Koreans’ new decisions.” This documentary about zainichi Koreans was aired in South Korea on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007 and was made by Seoul Broadcasting System, a South Korean private commercial broadcasting station, which produced the documentary in order to inform the Korean public who are ignorant towards zainichi Korean issues about who zainichi Koreans are. Different types of zainichi Koreans, from those who fully support complete assimilation of zainichi Koreans to Japanese society, to those who never change their nationality, citizenship, and names in order to preserve their Korean identity, appear in this documentary as it poses questions to viewers about what the future of zainichi Koreans should be or would be.

I will then discuss how zainichi Koreans’ decisions to pass or not pass as ordinary Japanese are symbolized by their decisions with names and how those names hold power as a marker of identity for zainichi Koreans. Although zainichi Koreans can enjoy the temporary benefits of passing as Japanese by deciding to go by their Japanese names instead of their Korean names, such decisions regarding names are a double-edged sword for them. In discussing the issue of names, I chose Kazuki Kaneshiro’s novel *GO* (2000), a love story about a zainichi Korean boy and a Japanese girl, as my primary source. By investigating different main characters and main occurrences in the novel, I will point out how zainichi Koreans come to grim realization of their limits and pitfalls of divulging their real identity from choosing to go by their Japanese names and enjoying benefits that only Japanese can enjoy. Similarly, I will also discuss how zainichi Koreans who choose not to go by their Japanese names experience discrimination and hostility from the Japanese society because it treats their decisions as political statements that embrace

ethnic diversity and individual identity. In exploring these ideas above, I will frequently refer to scholar John Lie's work, "*Zainichi (Koreans in Japan)*," that discusses the issue of invisibility of zainichi Koreans based on his various interviews in Japan.

In reading my thesis, it will be useful to note the different perspectives of the authors and producers of the main sources: the novel *GO*, the documentary, and the book *Zainichi (Koreans in Japan)*. The three main sources, to varying degrees, similarly attempt to explore whether name is a beneficial political tool for zainichi Koreans or a dangerous marker of their minority status. The documentary was produced by a South Korean broadcasting station in order to inform the Korean public about zainichi Koreans, whereas the novel *GO* was written by a zainichi Korean writer in Japan who is likely to have incorporated his personal experiences. Lie's findings are also distinct from the other two sources in that he is a Korean American scholar who studied Japanese and the zainichi matters.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ZAINICHI KOREANS

The first Korean immigrants to Japan in the twentieth century came as forced laborers or as cheap laborers who did lowly and dangerous works during the Japanese colonization of Korea. Because of the immigration history, Koreans were often associated with negative images as cheap laborers, poor immigrants and criminals. Moreover, since the vast majority of zainichi Koreans are the descendants of those Korean immigrants, zainichi Koreans are constantly associated with negative connotations and subject to discriminatory treatments by the Japanese. As Japan colonized Korea in 1910 and sought to utilize Korea's resources for their success during two World Wars until the end of World War II in 1945, many impoverished farmers from

rural areas in Korea were able to come to Japan easily as cheap laborers for economic reasons from 1910 to 1923. As much as there was a political route that created opportunities for these Koreans to come to Japan, since their main reasons for coming to Japan was economic, these Korean laborers saw Japan as a temporary working environment and regarded themselves as sojourners. More importantly, not only these Koreans but also the Japanese society viewed them as temporary foreign laborers who should eventually be sent back after Japan was done building its industries and militarizing for a series of wars. Because the majority of the Korean laborers arrived in Japan without any knowledge of conditions and the Japanese language, while the need for cheap labor decreased, these Korean laborers were unfairly treated at workplaces and received lower wages compared to Japanese laborers (Weiner 1997, 74). These unfair treatments included racist stereotypes of Koreans. For example, Japanese officials noted, “Compared with Japanese workers they [Koreans] are inferior in terms of physical constitution and vigour. Moreover, because they lack the self-discipline to take the initiative and better themselves, their efficiency does not improve” (Weiner 1997, 83). The quote represents the general atmosphere in the first half of the twentieth century when Korean workers experienced discriminations and stereotypes about their work ethics despite the existence of “evidence to suggest that Korean workers were as efficient as their Japanese counterparts in most types of work, and in some cases superior to them” (Weiner 1997, 84).

Because of such negative images of Korean immigrants, they rarely could rent proper houses and were ultimately isolated into their own ethnic and regional communities. “Koreans are basically different from Japanese, and, because their

everyday lives are extremely unclean and disorganized, it is only natural that they are rejected by people living nearby” (179). As the quote shows, Japanese landlords frequently refused to rent property to Koreans citing their unsanitary living customs and unreliability in terms of rent as reasons. Consequently, Koreans were segregated from the Japanese populations, and by 1923 in Osaka, there emerged “the largest immigrant community where the majority of Korean workers lived in tenements, cheap boarding houses, or in the homes of labor bosses” (87).

Apart from their initial history of immigration that exposed them to unfair treatments, the repatriation boom after World War II among *zainichi* Koreans is also worth noting. After World War I, II and the Korean War in 1950, *zainichi* Koreans were in a predicament where they were neither legal citizens of the divided Koreas nor Japan. Although Koreans automatically became Japanese citizens under the Japanese colonial rule (although they remained second-class subjects in many respects and were differentiated from Japanese regarding citizenship rights and duties), they were forfeited of their Japanese nationality because of the 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty between Japan and the United States (Kashiwazaki 2000, 17, 32). “Nine days before the San Francisco Peace Treaty went into effect, the Japanese government issued circular no. 438, which stipulated the uniform loss of Japanese nationality by Koreans and Taiwanese as a result of the Peace Treaty, regardless of their place of residence” and that Koreans and Taiwanese have to go through the process of naturalization just as other foreigners did (Kashiwazaki 2000, 22-3). The Japanese government did not put an effort to prevent statelessness upon territorial transfers and those people who did not acquire a new nationality were turned practically stateless. Furthermore, the San Francisco Peace Treaty

implied a consensus about the change in nationalities because there was no Korean government as a signatory power. The only logic in place was that Koreans were now independent from the Japanese control and that they were no longer Japanese nationals (Kashiwazaki 2000, 23).

What made matters worse for zainichi Koreans was that because Japan and South Korea resumed diplomatic relations only in 1965, zainichi Koreans in Japan had no state of residence as well as citizenship for almost two decades after the end of World War II (Ryang 2000, 33). Even after 1965, there were no unified solutions for zainichi Koreans to choose their residency, nationality or citizenship (33). Amidst such confusion, in 1958, “the North Korean premier Kim Il Sung officially stated that the North Korean state would welcome the repatriation of Koreans from Japan” (34). Prolonged poverty among the zainichi communities despite the economic boom in Japan, in addition to postcolonial patriotic zeal, and anticipation for the reunified Korea encouraged many first generation zainichi Koreans who came to Japan with sojourner mentality to repatriate to North Korea. The first mass repatriation of Koreans to North Korea in August 1959, took place with much excitement from the zainichi population, only to diminish in numbers as harsh reality of living in North Korea was gradually exposed to the rest of the world (35). Therefore, except for those who decided to naturalize and become Japanese citizens, zainichi Koreans were unable to become legal Korean citizens or Japanese residents with voting rights and health care benefits. Until recently, zainichi Koreans always had to carry their alien registration cards with them and faced imprisonment and fines if they were confronted by Japanese policemen without one.

After such turbulent years of colonization, seasonal immigration, series of wars, loss of nationality, and repatriation, zainichi population never attracted much attention in Japanese society until the turn of the twenty-first century when movies about zainichi Koreans such as *Go* (2001), *Patchigi* (2004), and *Blood and Bones* (2004) gained public attention by receiving renowned movie awards and mentions. These two movies about zainichi Koreans each reflect the social problems and inner dilemmas that the older and the current generation of zainichi Koreans have faced or still experience in Japan: their conflicting position in Japanese society as foreigners, identity crisis for young individuals, and confusion with choosing their nationality. Furthermore, there are notable changes in the zainichi population. It has been reported that the current generation of zainichi Koreans is changing their nationality from Korea to Japan at the highest rate. The biggest cause for the increasing rate is known as the Japanese government's encouragement and simplification of legal steps required for naturalization. In fact, it is implicitly stated that the Japanese government is trying to mitigate the diminishing population of Japan by encouraging naturalization of foreign residents, mainly zainichi Koreans. However, despite the permeation of popular Korean pop culture in Japan through "Korean wave," the issues haunting the zainichi population have failed to be resolved or mitigated. It is one of the objectives of my thesis, therefore, to analyze the difficulty zainichi Koreans face regarding names and identity.

## WHO ARE ZAINICHI KOREANS?

Before going into depth about the meaning of names and identity to zainichi Koreans in Japan, it is of critical importance to examine who zainichi Koreans are and what this denotation "zainichi" refers to. Examining these, on top of the historical

background of zainichi Korean immigration elaborated in previous paragraphs will facilitate a better understanding of past and present discriminations against zainichi Koreans in relation to zainichi Koreans' own understanding of their identity as well as others' perception of who zainichi Koreans are.

While there are several names that refer to zainichi Koreans, they are all identical in that all of them became to denote Koreans for no innocent reasons. Zainichi Koreans are also called Korean Japanese, resident Koreans, *zainichi chosonjin*, *zainichi kankokujin*, *zainichi kankoku chosonjin*, and *zainichi korian* (Korean) (Ryang and Lie 2009, 4). Furthermore, they are oftentimes also called “simply *zainichi* or *korian* (Korean), or more recently, *orudokamaa* (“old-comers,” which denotes former colonial immigrants and their descendants)” (Ryang and Lie 2009, 4). The Japanese term “*zainichi*” in essence means “temporary resident.” Therefore, calling these residents of Korean descents, whether they are first, second or third generation, can be discriminatory because the word implies that these residents are sojourners who will eventually return to their homelands. Similarly, Ryang believes that these names reflect futile attempts at escaping stereotypes and denying ethnic labels because these denotations are at the same time trapped in the vicious circle of reinforced stereotypes and ethnic segregation between the Japanese and zainichi (Ryang and Lie 2009, 4).

It is also important to note that there are terms like *zainichi chosonjin* and *zainichi kankokujin*, which refer to resident North Koreans and South Koreans, respectively. In the Japanese language, *chosonjin* literally translates to people of the Choson Dynasty and *kankokujin* means people of the Republic of Korea. The division of Korea after World War II generated three types of zainichi Koreans: those from the area that became parts

of South Korea, those from the towns that became North Korea, and those who identified themselves belonging to neither but as peoples of the Choson dynasty, or the united Korea. Because the second and the last categories of people are both called *zainichi chosonjin*, the term *zainichi chosonjin* does not automatically denote resident Koreans related to North Korea or communism. Currently, *zainichi* Koreans who hold North Korean passports have the option of going to the North-Korean-government-funded Korean ethnic schools in Japan. Unfortunately, because of that option and the fact that those ethnic schools are funded by the North Korean government, *zainichi* Koreans are frequently subject to unwarranted criticism from the Japanese public whenever North Korea is held responsible for abduction of Japanese citizens or nuclear weaponry tests.

#### OTHER MINORITIES IN JAPAN

This thesis attempts in part to examine in detail the causes for Japanese society's hostile or uncooperative attitude toward the minority's embracement of ethnic identity and *zainichi* Koreans' resolutions to use their Korean names. In order to do so, it is imperative to understand the types of minorities present in Japan and how the Japanese identity as a homogeneous nation evolved throughout pre-war Japanese history despite its multi-ethnic composition. Weiner in *Japan's Minorities* talks about different types of minorities such as Ainu, *Burakumin*, Okinawans, Chinese, *Nikkeijin* as well as *zainichi* Koreans. According to Weiner, 1.3 million Okinawans are counted in their home base (Amami Islands and Okinawan Prefecture) and an estimated 300,000 Okinawans can be found in other parts of Japan. The second largest national ethnic group is Koreans, who, counting both naturalized and alien-status residents, would exceed one million. These are followed by the several tens of thousands of Chinese, Ainu, and a host of other

nationalities and ethnicities. Both the Ainu and *Burakumin* populations have historically been subjected to diverse forms of discrimination and prejudice (Taira 1997, 142-3).

First, the Ainu are indigenous people of northern Japan and their subordination and dispossession under the colonial regime in Hokkaido are often compared to Native Americans, Australian Aborigines, Inuit, Maori, Sami and others (Siddle 1997, 17). “In common with these other groups, the Ainu were dispossessed of their ancestral land and resources by the expansion of a vigorous colonial state. Traditional lifeways collapsed as hunting and fishing territories were settled by waves of immigrants and transformed into agricultural land. Government policies of relocation and assimilation aimed at the eventual extinction of the Ainu as a people, aided by a system of ‘native education’ that actively discouraged Ainu language and customs” (Siddle 1997, 17). Although their long history of distinctive existence in the land of Japan is sufficiently supported by the historical record, the general Japanese understanding, guided by the “master narrative of seamless national homogeneity, denies the existence of the Ainu as an ethnic minority group but as either a totally assimilated or biologically extinct ethnic group” (Siddle 1997, 17).

The second type of minority is *Burakumin*, the outcasts of Japanese society whose ancestors used to have occupations that dealt with dead bodies or meat, which were considered repulsive and lowly. Even after Japan’s modernization, these *Burakumin* were subject to unfounded prejudice and discriminations. “Early this century there was the common belief that *Burakumin* were racially distinct from mainstream Japanese; that they were the descendants of slaves from the ancient period, descendants of Koreans, or

even descendants of the lost tribes of Israel that somehow ended up in Japan” (Neary 1997, 52-3).

Unlike the Ainu and *Burakumin*, Chinese Japanese are mentioned as minorities in Japan that deal with different types of discrimination as model minority. Vasishth in Weiner’s *Japan’s Minorities* describe that Chinese in Japan have to deal with problems of obscurity in its history of exclusion and exploitation in Japan because of their model minority status. According to Vasishth, emigration from China during the pre-war period was the continuation of a long tradition of internal and external Chinese sojourning and migration. Starting from the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1280), many Chinese immigrated to Japan and created significant communities of traders and entrepreneurs residing in major Chinese commercial centers (Vasishth 1997, 109). Their long immigration history as well as their well-developed mechanisms of social and economic organization that served to influence both patterns of settlement and the maintenance of a distinct identity ensured Chinese Japanese relative economic success and distinguished themselves as a model minority community (Vasishth 1997, 136).

Other ethnic minorities are the Okinawans and *Nikkeijin*. Okinawans are “the indigenous people of the Ryukyu Islands are ethnically distinct from the people of mainland Japan...who were regarded as members of an inferior race during the pre-war period. In Japan today, Okinawans constitute the largest minority group, with a population of about 1.3 million in their home base. *Nikkeijin* are the only group of foreigners who are allowed to work legally in the unskilled job sectors. *Nikkeijin* refers to descendants of Japanese who emigrated abroad between 1868 and 1973, but in the context of the issue of foreign migrant workers in Japan, the term *Nikkeijin* refers

specifically to South American-Japanese descendants up to the third generation and their spouses, mainly those from Brazil and Peru (Sellek 1997, 178-9).

Most of these ethnic minorities emerged as a result of Japan's modernization. Lie argues that the destruction of Tokugawa status hierarchies created a distinct minority group of Burakumin, who were former outcastes, while the annexed prefectures transformed the Ainu and Okinawans into minority groups (Lie 2001, 110). Japan's colonial expansion into Asia also resulted in large groups of Taiwanese, Koreans and other colonized people to settle in Japan (Lie 2001, 110). Therefore, Lie points out that the making of a modern Japan brought along the making of multiethnic Japan (Lie 2001, 110).

#### THE HISTORY OF "THE ILLUSION OF HOMOGENEITY" IN JAPAN

Despite these many types of minorities that emerged as Japan modernized, wartime nationalism and government propaganda stressed monoethnic characteristic of Japan and the idea of social Darwinism, as Japanese society gradually transformed to pride itself in its ethnic homogeneity. Lie states that the core idea of nationalism, especially among late developing countries, is the equivalence of a political entity with one nation, ethnicity, or people (Plessner 1959 quoted in Lie). In order to catch up with the already modernized West, Japan had to emphasize the homogeneity of the nation and make sure that ethnic boundaries within the state never interfered with the development of a strong sense of nationalism. In order to do so, the Japanese government ensured that its instillation of nationalism differed from that of Tokugawa Japan (1603-1868) whose sense of nationalism existed only within each village of domain called *han*. Therefore, the modernizing Japanese government then came up with the slogan *sonno joi* that

translates to “Respect the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians,” and sought to create a nationalist urge against foreign threat (Lie 2001, 120). The Meiji state also promoted educational and cultural integration through the national registry system that sought to account for and control every citizen and suppression of local religious beliefs and practices (Lie 2001, 120).

Although the new Meiji government did its best to instill a strong sense of nationalism in people as much as it could during the short period of time until the outbreak of World War I, it had to wait until the 1960s to witness the spur of nationalism oriented in the idea of homogeneity among its people. This postwar nationalism in the 1960s emerged in part because the society realized the limitations of traditional prewar nationalism. The postwar nationalism differed from the prewar nationalism in that it highlighted not what was intrinsic to Japan but what made Japan different from others (Lie 2001, 133). The new nationalism and the idea of monoethnicity strengthened the hegemonic postwar ethnonational worldview in opposition to the imperialist and multiethnic worldview (Lie 2001, 134).

Ruth Benedict, American anthropologist and a historian also contributed to the perpetuation of the new nationalism based on the idea of Japan’s monoethnicity by his writing of *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, his observation of Japan and its people published in 1954. Not only the book helped invent a new tradition for postwar Japan, but also led to the increase the momentum of a growing interest in "ethnic nationalism" in the country. Benedict’s work had so much influence that there was a surge of the publication of hundreds of ethnocentric study of Japaneseness, categorized as *Nihonjinron*, published over the next four decades. The new nationalism and the new budding interest in what

constituted Japaneseness remained strong in Japanese society and the Japanese academia until the 1990s, and the Japanese people were constantly reminded that Japan's distinct characteristic as a homogeneous nation is neither shameful nor criminal and that the Japanese people should claim Japanese particularity (Lie 2001, 134).

Although not as strong as the time when the new surge of nationalism swept across the country, there still exists "deep-seated social conviction that the "Japanese" are and should remain ethnically homogeneous" and that mentality complicates zainichi Koreans position in the Japanese society (Lee and De Vos 1981, 355). "The Japanese still pride themselves on their uniqueness and resist the idea of assimilating or accommodating any ethnic minority fully within a concept of citizenship that remains almost identical with a concept of racial purity" (Lee and De Vos 1981, 355).

Interestingly, Lie narrates his experience of interviewing Japanese people about their perception of Japan as multiethnic or monoethnic state and explains that many Japanese people were in reality aware of its homogeneity. However, he states that the Japanese people, when "confronted with evidence of ethnic diversity, most either ignored or denied it" (Lie 2008, 46). He argues that there is a "persistent fissure between the articulated assumption of monoethnicity and the tacit awareness of multiethnicity. Paradoxically, many people acknowledged the existence of one or another exception to the monoethnic rule, all the while insisting on it" (Lie 2008, 46).

Because of the history of nationalism that stressed ethnic homogeneity in Japan as well as the Japanese society's silence despite its awareness of the existence of many ethnic minorities, "Koreans in Japan today are still under constraint to use Japanese

names and to deny their origins to obtain even marginal acceptability as “Japanese” citizens” in order to survive in Japanese society (Lee and De Vos 1981, 355-6).

Before exploring the usage of Japanese names by zainichi Koreans, it is important to keep in mind the initial question about the impact of their decisions on the assertion (or suppression) of their ethnic identity in a society that is rather intolerant of embracement of ethnic identity.

## JAPANESE NAMES

Usually, zainichi Koreans are faced with the option of going by their full Korean names (Korean first name and last name), or Japanese names (*tsumei*). The option of going by a Korean name is a comparatively recent trend and the majority of zainichi Koreans choose to go by their Japanese names. For example, according to scholar Harjiri, less than a tenth of the zainichi population used their Korean names in the 1990s (Lie 2008, 140). However, such statistics do not indicate that zainichi Koreans devise inventive ways to taking names. Some zainichi Koreans resort to using a mix of both, for example, a Korean last name with Japanese first name or vice versa. They can also choose to write their names in Korean style *kanji* but read the *kanji* name in Japanese style. For instance, Masayoshi Son, the CEO of Softbank, which is one of the most powerful telecommunications and media corporation in Japan, is a renowned zainichi icon who goes by his Korean last name and first name but reads his Korean first name, Jong-eui, in a Japanese style, Masayoshi. Furthermore, many of those who go by Japanese names use their Korean names at home or within the zainichi Korean communities.

Whichever manner one decides to approach the decision of what to be called, zainichi Koreans find themselves caught in different types of problems that are all related to the idea of “passing.” Although the term, “passing,” is mostly familiar for its use in the United States where the member of a racial minority group like African Americans attempts to be accepted as a member of a racial majority group, scholar John Lie in his book *Zainichi*, defines the term specifically for zainichi Koreans’ situations. Synonymous to “invisibility,” “passing” denotes “the majority group’s inability to differentiate non-Japanese from Japanese people as well as the minority population’s ability to pass as normal Japanese people” (Lie 2008, 18-19). Their ability to pass as normal Japanese people illustrates the distinct type of problem zainichi Koreans have to face compared to minorities in other societies or other foreigners in Japan.

In other words, their decision whether to use their Japanese or Korean name revolves around the question of whether zainichi Koreans want to utilize the distinctive characteristic of “passing.” Unlike other foreigners, or *gaijin*, which in Japan usually denotes Caucasian non-Japanese citizens, or minorities such as African Americans or Mexican Americans in the United States, zainichi Koreans are highly similar to Japanese people in physical appearance. Although some Japanese individuals claim that they can distinguish Koreans from the Japanese, according to Lie’s experiment, Japanese people consistently failed to identify a Korean person from a group of five or six people better than the statistical likelihood (Lie 2008, 18). In addition to their high physical similarity to the Japanese, the second or third generations of zainichi Koreans are barely distinguishable from Japanese people because they are born and raised in Japan and have been deeply immersed in Japanese culture and language. Furthermore, the effect of their

“invisibility” is maximized by having Japanese names because it becomes virtually impossible for the majority group to identify a zainichi Korean. Nevertheless, zainichi Koreans are placed between an ambiguous boundary of the insiders (Japanese) and the outsiders (Korean, minorities, foreigners, non-Japanese) as a result of their invisibility. Therefore, for the ones who take on Japanese names, their actions, in a bigger sense, instantly enable them to pass as insiders and to enjoy the benefits of passing that the outsiders are deprived of.

In order to explain better how invisibility of Koreans can result in benefits, I will take several examples from Kazuki Kaneshiro’s novel, *GO*, which was published in 2000. Sugihara, the male protagonist, transfers from a Korean ethnic school to a Japanese high school of his own will although his friends and some teachers at his ethnic school accuse him as a traitor. Meanwhile, Sugihara’s father, a second-generation zainichi Korean, decides to change his nationality from North Korea to South Korea in order to take a trip to Hawaii (but later it is revealed that he changed his nationality for his son’s future because of negative associations with North Korea). Because of the change in nationality, Sugihara’s father never hears back from his younger brother who repatriated to North Korea during the repatriation boom in the 1970s. Sugihara, at school, faces discriminations and gets into numerous fistfights with other Japanese students. One night at a party, Sugihara meets a Japanese girl named Sakurai, who refuses to tell him her full name, and falls in love with her.

Although everything seems to go smoothly for Sugihara, a tragic incident happens. His best friend, Jong-il, from his former ethnic school is stabbed to death at a railway station during an attempt to protect a zainichi Korean female student being bullied by

Japanese boys. Sugihara is devastated and Sakurai offers to stay with him throughout the night to cheer him up. They get intimate but just when they are about to spend the night together, Sugihara light-heartedly tells Sakurai that he is *zainichi* Korean. However, the moment Sugihara tells her his ethnic background, Sakurai freezes and refuses to sleep with him.

Several other incidents occur after Sakurai's rejection of Sugihara. Sugihara's father is distraught to hear the news of the death of his repatriated younger brother in North Korea. When the father laments about the old days and becomes sentimental in the taxi ride back home, Sugihara yells at him and says he does not care about the older generation and their corny sentimentalist attitude. Because of his comment, the father and Sugihara get into a rather comic fistfight, followed by Sugihara's complete defeat. The novel concludes on a happier note, with Sugihara and Sakurai restoring their relationship in the end. Sakurai calls him six months later and tells him that she does not care whether Sugihara is Korean or Japanese. She tells him that she likes him no matter what.

A scene from the novel, when the *zainichi* Korean main character, Sugihara, visits his Japanese girlfriend, Sakurai, at her house for dinner, clearly illustrates the privileges *zainichi* Koreans can enjoy from passing as Japanese by using their Japanese names. At the dinner table, Sakurai's father, all of a sudden, asks Sugihara if he likes Japan or not. He asks Sugihara, "Do you like this country, Sugihara?" and without waiting for Sugihara's answer, goes on. "I have traveled all over the world because of my job and I have rarely seen a country like Japan, a country without 'policies.' It's almost embarrassing to say that I'm Japanese when I'm traveling abroad" (Kaneshiro 2000, 119).

Sakurai's father expresses his personal disapproval of his home country and shame of saying that he is Japanese in foreign countries. However, it is very unlikely that he would have expressed his personal feelings to Sugihara had he known that Sugihara was zainichi Korean for it is revealed later in the novel that Sakurai's father strongly discriminates against Koreans. Sakurai's father believes that Sakurai should not date Koreans because they have impure blood. His strong discrimination against zainichi Koreans as inferior to Japanese suggests that he would be very much less willing to openly criticize Japan to an outsider he deems to be much inferior. In other words, Sakurai's father openly criticized Japan and expressed his personal embarrassment for being Japanese because he thought that Sugihara also belonged to society's majority group as him. Sugihara was able to pass as ordinary Japanese because of his Japanese name, and was able to listen to Mr. Sakurai's personal thoughts about Japan. In a broader sense, Sugihara's ability to pass enabled him to enjoy the benefits of being included in the insiders' dialogues that would rarely be disclosed to the outsiders, like zainichi Koreans.

However, a closer examination of the scene demonstrates that such "benefits" manifest discriminations that zainichi Koreans who decide to embrace and proclaim their ethnic identity, have to face in Japanese society. For instance, later in the novel, Sakurai confesses her physical inability to sleep with Sugihara when he reveals to her that he is zainichi Korean. Sakurai explains that she is not physically aroused to be able to sleep with Sugihara because she has always been told by her father since childhood not to date Koreans and Chinese because of their impure blood.

"Why?" "I've always been told by my dad since I was little not to date Korean or Chinese men." "Are there particular reasons for that? Did he have bad

experiences with Korean or Chinese people?” “No.” “Then what?” “...My dad told me that Koreans and Chinese have dirty [impure] blood.” (Kaneshiro 2000, 178-9)

Sakurai's comments reveal that Sakurai's father is prejudiced against Koreans because he believes that they have dirty blood. Sakurai's confession also reveals that had Sugihara gone by his real Korean last name, “Lee,” Sakurai's father would not have disclosed his honest feelings about being Japanese to Sugihara, an inferior outsider with impure blood who fails to qualify to be invited to such discussions. Moreover, the father would not have let Sugihara date his daughter or have invited him to his house in the first place. Therefore, the dinner table conversations Sugihara had with Sakurai's father serves to represent not the benefits zainichi Koreans can enjoy when they are invisible but the discriminations and disadvantages that zainichi Koreans encounter when they expose their identity by their Korean names or by some other reasons.

The “benefits” not only remind zainichi Koreans of what they cannot have if they renounce their invisibility but also cause them more confusion about whether to express or repress their ethnic identity. Again in *GO*, after being rejected by Sakurai, Sugihara runs into a police officer and ends up having a conversation with him on the sidewalk. In that scene, Sugihara confesses his dilemma of identity that he wants to resolve. He says, “I sometimes wish the color of my skin was green. If then, people who want to approach me would approach me and those who do not want anything to do with me won't come near me. It will be much easier for them to distinguish me” (Kaneshiro 2000, 191). His comment about “green skin” precisely addresses the issue of invisibility. Because zainichi Koreans are physically similar to Japanese and are assumed to be Japanese until they are stripped away of the benefits that are replaced with discriminations, Sugihara

wishes that he did not have the ability to pass as Japanese by having green skin. He does not like the passing aspect of his ethnic identity as zainichi Korean, because he is put in a position where he eventually has to “come out” as zainichi Korean to witness and experience first-hand that privileges he enjoys for passing are disadvantages he really has to face.

A zainichi Korean scholar, Soo-im Lee, narrates her story of growing up as a minority in “Koreans—A Mistreated Minority in Japan,” and mentions many Korean youths questioning their own identities like Sugihara does in the scene above.

“I, however, was brought up in an assimilated environment. I speak no Korean and believed that I was the same as any other Japanese until I began to experience discrimination and prejudice later in my childhood. Being discriminated against caused me to question my own identity, leading me, and others like me, to develop an in between consciousness—one neither “Japanese” nor “Korean” (Donohue, 185).

Lee’s experience of discrimination leading to her questioning of identity is very similar to Sugihara’s situation where his encounter with prejudice from a girl he likes leads him wishing that he was not an invisible minority. Lee’s further statement that zainichi Koreans result in developing in between consciousness is also mentioned in *GO* when Sugihara quotes the Spanish phrase he learned from his second-generation zainichi Korean father: “*No soy coreano, ni soy japones, yo soy desarraigado*” (Kaneshiro 2000, 221). The phrase translates to “I’m neither Korean nor Japanese but a seedless grass.” As “Korean youths typically develop their consciousness of being non-Japanese and non-Korean under a fully assimilated system in their first phase of identity formation,” Sugihara experiences the same development of consciousness regarding his ethnic identity (Donahue 2002, 185).

Regardless of different aspects of problems zainichi Koreans confront from using their Japanese names as described above, the ultimate debate about their choices to go by their Japanese names concerns with the motivations behind their choices. Motivations behind their decisions to go by their Japanese arise not purely from personal preferences, technical simplicity or stronger identification with their Japanese side but more from their intentions for camouflage in order to be regarded as the ethnic majority. For instance, while decisions by Korean Americans in the United States to go by the American names can mainly be accounted for the fact that Korean names are harder to pronounce or spell, choices by zainichi Koreans to go by their Japanese names cannot be seen from a similar light because their decisions are largely derived from their desires to hide their ethnic origin and to be treated as Japanese. Whether such intention to hide their ethnic identity rises from desires to gain access to privileges only given to the majority or inferiority complex from long history of discrimination, it is undeniable that zainichi Koreans try to conceal their ethnic identity by using their Japanese names and that such aspect is what makes their decisions sometimes subject to criticism.

An example of such intentions is found when Sugihara tells Sakurai his real Korean name and leaves the room they were supposed to stay together for the night. He says, “My real name is ‘Lee.’ ‘Lee,’ as in Bruce Lee. It sounds so foreign that I feared losing you. That’s why I didn’t tell you my real name” (Kaneshiro 2000, 183). His remark reveals that he deliberately used his Japanese alias instead of his Korean name because he anticipated Sakurai’s negative response and her rejection of his love. Despite his long educational history at a zainichi Korean ethnic school before transferring to a Japanese high school, he hesitates for a long period of time until he discloses his real

name to her because he fears that the ability of the invisible minority to date anyone of his choice would be taken away once he comes out as the minority.

Another example of zainichi Koreans' desire to hide their ethnic identity by using their Japanese names is shown in Weiner's description of the interview with a zainichi Korean woman in the 1980s, when prejudice against zainichi Koreans was more pronounced. When he was interviewing the Japanese people who were learning the Korean language at a private institution, he met a woman, who revealed her ethnic origin as zainichi Korean with much emotional upheaval. He explains the psychological pain involved in attempting to bridge the divide between mainstream Japanese and resident Korean through denial of all aspects of ethnic identity from this encounter with the woman. "...I asked how she had become interested in studying the Korean language as a hobby. She was visibly shaken and soon on the verge of tears. She began to fidget, and then started making comments about how her older sister [who was also taking the same Korean class but they kept their relationship as a secret] warned her against doing an interview for questions like that might be asked." Weiner describes the woman's reaction filled with fears that her identity might be revealed and the physical manifestation of her anxiety. Her response illustrates that she was trying to pass as majority Japanese by hiding her identity, and their relationships as sisters as secret.

This example shows clearly that the main intentions behind using Japanese names is not because zainichi Koreans voluntarily choose to do so for they identify themselves more as Japanese but because they want to escape being labeled as an ethnic minority. Weiner concludes, "Just as these two women felt a need to keep their identities as sisters a secret, even their desire to learn Korean was experienced as problematic given the

desire to ‘pass.’” It is because of this aspect of concealing their ethnic identity to pass that makes zainichi Koreans’ choices of going by their Japanese names of different kinds that arise from lack of pride in their own ethnic identity.

Kang Sang-Jung, the first zainichi Korean Professor at Tokyo University comments on the shame aspect of zainichi Koreans going by their Japanese aliases and demands more pride and confidence asserting zainichi identity. He says, “Even if zainichi Koreans change their nationality to Japan, they should not forget about their identity. That’s why I say that they have to have ethnic names at least, and reveal their names while living in Japan. I’m not only talking about this concerning identity problems of Koreans, but I’m saying that the Japanese society has to change in that way”(I am me, 2007). His comment not only explains the reasons behind his personal decision to go by his Korean name upon his college entrance but also represents his message towards most zainichi Koreans with Japanese aliases not to conceal their ethnic identity but to accept it.

Another interviewee from the same documentary, Mr. Lee, who changed his name from Japanese to Korean, criticizes the escapist motivations behind zainichi Koreans’ Japanese aliases. He expresses his personal belief that zainichi Koreans with Japanese names should feel ashamed because they are trying to hide their identities. “When I’m sitting at my doctor’s office, the nurse calls, ‘you’re up Mr. Lee.’” Everyone can hear that. And I bet zainichi Koreans who are using their Japanese names hearing that announcement will get frightened and scared from embarrassment and would want to hide somewhere” (I am me, 2007) Moreover, when he was denied of his appeal to own Korean social security number and voting rights by the Korean government who urged him to assimilate to Japanese society, Mr. Lee expressed his frustration. He admitted in

the interview that there are minorities in other societies who can change their nationalities, names and become completely assimilated. However, he asserts that the reason he does not naturalize and become a Japanese citizen and use a Japanese name is because of its escapist aspect. He says, “Almost every zainichi Korean who naturalizes and takes on Japanese name does so out of escapism. They do not want to be revealed that they are Korean. They want to become Japanese so that they can enjoy the benefits that the Japanese people enjoy.” (I am me, 2007)

#### UNWARRANTED JUDGMENTS FROM OTHER KOREANS

Other arrays of problems that zainichi Koreans have to go through because of choosing to go by their Japanese names arise from unwarranted judgments from others, including their families, other zainichi Koreans, and Koreans in Korea. The main cause that their resolutions are met with judgments from those populations is that a zainichi Korean’s decision to go by his or her Japanese name instantly marks one as the betrayer (*uragirimono*). Of course, the degree of backlash a zainichi Korean undergoes because of one’s decision to use a Japanese name differs from individual to individual. However, despite such varying degrees of pressure, there inarguably exist negative consequences affecting zainichi Koreans for their personal decisions to go by their Japanese names.

First, depending on families, the decision could imply the denial of one’s family’s existence. For example, one of the greatest hero in Japanese popular culture of the late 1950s was Rikidozan, a professional wrestler who was said to restore Japan’s wounded pride by pummeling treacherous “foreign,” or white American wrestlers (Lie 2008, 21). However, Rikidozan was zainichi Korean, and was hardly alone in being at once popular in Japan and passing as Japanese (21). As Kim Ilmen states in “*Chosenjin ga naze*

“*Nihonmei*” o *nanorunoka*,” (quoted in Lie 2008, 21) like a lot of *zainichi* Koreans in the entertainment industry such as the sumo wrestler Tamanoumi and enka singer Miyako Harumi and Misora Hibari, Rikidozan denied his Korean descent. To prove their Japanese ancestry, Tamanoumi, Rikidozan and Miyako all claimed that their fathers—who were alive, well, and Korean—had passed away (21). In order for *zainichi* Koreans not only for those in the entertainment industry, to avoid risking their jobs or social status, they had to pass as Japanese and their Korean parents had to pass away (21).

Another repercussion that many *zainichi* Koreans encounter when they choose to go by Japanese names is frequent instances of being labeled as betrayers of their motherland or ethnicity. Just as being subject to guilt of betraying their families affects some more than others, feelings of remorse that stems from the idea of betraying one’s motherland varies from person to person. However, the idea that a personal choice of which name to be called could have ramifications that involves betraying one’s ancestral nation is undoubtedly daunting. For example, *zainichi* visitors and residents in South Korea were and still are often looked down upon and resented by ordinary South Koreans who consider them as nation’s sell-outs. *Zainichi* baseball players who played in the fledgling South Korean professional league in the mid-1980s were frequently and pejoratively called *Panchoppari*, which means in Korean “half-Jap” because most of them lacked Korean skills and had Japanese names (Sekikawa 1984a: 230, 267, quoted in Lie, 53).

Furthermore, for some Koreans in Korea and *zainichi* Koreans in Japan, the adoption of a Japanese name reminds them of the 1940 Japanese imperial edict that stripped all Koreans of their ethnic names [*soshikaimei*] and becomes the symbol of

Korean humiliation. Therefore, as Kim Ilmen states in “*Chosenjin ga naze “Nihonmei” o nanorunoka,*” what might simply seem to outsiders as a mere inconvenience or an understandable adjustment struck ethnically conscious zainichi or Koreans in Korea as an ethnic and a national betrayal (quoted in Lie 2008, 78). In this example, Lie and Kim both narrate how such passing, as much as it felt natural and comfortable for zainichi Koreans, was also unenviable, for it was equivalent to living a lie and giving up ethnic pride and dignity (Lie 2008, 53). The disparagement and the burden of having to worry about being judged for their “betrayal” by ethnically conscious zainichi Koreans or Koreans in Korea for going by their Japanese names are another unfortunate aspect of zainichi Koreans and their decisions with names.

Another relevant example of unwarranted ill-treatment and judgment zainichi Koreans face is shown in Kaneshiro’s novel, *GO*, when Sugihara recalls his first visit to Korea. When he visited Jeju Island, the southernmost island of Korea, to visit his ancestor’s grave, he got into a brawl with a taxi driver. Because he was with a group of other Japanese tourists as well as his parents, the taxi driver asked Sugihara, “Are you *zainichi*?” Sugihara narrates the incident onward.

“As I answered in Korean ‘Yes, I am,’ the driver scoffed and drove harshly. Koreans in Korea think of “zainichi” as those who don’t work hard and who get to enjoy all the freedom [(Korea was under the dictatorship by Park Jung-hee during the time of Sugihara’s visit to Korea in the novel)]. Therefore, some Koreans couldn’t hide their jealousy and hatred towards zainichi and this cab driver seemed to be one of those kinds. While driving to the hotel, the cab driver asked me many meaningless questions like ‘how old are you,’ ‘what do you think of Korea,’ or ‘can you eat *kimchi*’ and whenever I answered him in Korean he kept scoffing as if he wanted to say ‘what is wrong with your Korean pronunciation.’ The closer we were getting to the hotel, angrier I got.” (Kaneshiro 2000, 83).

After his questionable attitude toward Sugihara, the taxi driver refused to give him changes when they arrived at the hotel and Sugihara recounts that he punched the driver hard, screaming, “die!” in Japanese. He finished his story by saying that he hated adults, and he hated Korea and could not care any less about his motherland. Sugihara’s narrative shows that Koreans in Korea think of zainichi Koreans not as their fellow Koreans but as others with much Japanese influence displayed by their fading Korean language ability and their Japanese names.

#### MID-CONCLUSION

Whether zainichi Koreans select their Japanese aliases in order to hide and deny their ethnic identity to survive in Japanese society or simply because of daily convenience, they do not deserve to be subject to judgment by their counterparts or Koreans in Korea as betrayers, sell-outs, *uragirimono*, or people lacking in ethnic consciousness. The post-interview confession of the woman Lie interviewed illustrates that zainichi Koreans with Japanese names or those who do not necessarily have pronounced degree of ethnic consciousness are constantly under pressure of outside judgments. Lie writes that the woman who was interviewed by Lie and talked about hiding her Korean identity in a Korean language class told Lie after the interview that she enjoyed meeting with him despite her initial reluctance. The woman told him that she thought Lie (who is actually Korean American) was zainichi Korean for he had a Korean last name, Lie, spoke fluent Japanese and approached her through an acquaintance’s introduction and confessed that she had imagined “someone who was stern and would preach to her about zainichi matters” (Lie 2008, 101). Her confession reminds us that zainichi Koreans who choose to pass or who do not openly declare their Koreanness face

preaching or criticism from others who advocate ethnic consciousness. Nevertheless, what is important to keep in mind from this example as well as the above discussion is that even if some or most of those who are using Japanese names are doing so to pass as Japanese and to conceal their Korean identity, it is ultimately their individual choice and others, especially those in Korea who have never experienced the clash of the two troubling identities, or the prejudice against zainichi Koreans are in no position to condemn them.

## KOREAN NAMES

I explained so far why zainichi Koreans face problems by using their Japanese names. Although they are able to pass as the ethnic majority to enjoy certain privileges, those privileges turn out to indicate the discriminations zainichi Koreans have to face. These problems create identity crisis for zainichi Koreans and influence their decisions to use their Japanese names to function as ways to conceal their ethnic origins. Unfortunately, their choices with names are a double-edged sword and their decisions to go by their Korean names instead also present them with great difficulties.

Undoubtedly, when zainichi Koreans use their Korean names and declare their distinct ethnic identities, they have to deal with discriminations regarding dating, marriage, promotion and transferring at work. They also confront other fellow Koreans' expectations to serve for the greater good of the zainichi community or serve as role models for the rest of the zainichi population when their choices simply denote their personal preferences free from political thoughts.

Furthermore, what is more troubling is that their resolutions are instantly interpreted by the Japanese people and the Japanese society as declaration or public

embracement of ethnic identity. What is problematic about those unwarranted outside interpretations of their personal decisions is that these interpretations treat zainichi Koreans' decisions as defiance against an image of a homogenous Japanese society and in doing so, try to repress embracement of individual ethnic identity.

First, there emerge difficulties and disadvantages in everyday lives for zainichi Koreans with Korean names who openly renounce their ability to be invisible and to pass as Japanese. For example, in the documentary, when Mr. Lee, zainichi Korean, went to the municipal office to change his name to a Korean name, the officer warned or almost threatened him that the name change will result in regrettable consequences in daily life. "When I went to the municipal hall and said 'I am getting rid of my Japanese name (*tsumei*),' the Japanese officer told me in a half-threatening manner, 'if you get rid of your Japanese name, you'll face good amount of unequal treatment. Are you gonna be okay with that?'" (I am me, 2007) Mr. Lee says despite the threatening warning, he did not encounter much discrimination ever since he decided to come out as zainichi Korean and use his Korean name.

However, he later reveals in the documentary that his teenage son got a threatening phone call from an unknown Japanese who threatened to kill them because they are zainichi Koreans. The documentary plays the conversation between the phone caller and the son. "Hey, what's your nationality? –What school do you go to? –Why is that important? Are you gonna sue me, huh? Tell me in Korean. Go back to your country! If you wanna be forgiven, give me 500,000 yen" (I am me, 2007). The confession of Mr. Lee about the threatening phone call shows that zainichi Koreans have to risk undergoing

not only daily troubles but also extreme threats to their security for openly embracing their Korean identity.

Other examples of technical difficulty in everyday life indicate that *zainichi* Koreans who expose their Koreanness by Korean names or other means are often faced with bleak prospects for marriage. A clear example can be found in *GO* when Sugihara, as mentioned in one of the previous paragraphs, reveals his Korean identity and his Korean name only to be rejected by Sakurai. Another interviewee from the Korean documentary shared her reasons behind the decision to take on a Japanese name and to naturalize. “It was for my children. If I didn’t have any children, I would have gone straight back to Korea” (I am me, 2007). Mrs. Park explains that she decided to get a Japanese name and naturalize so that her two children could also be Japanese citizens and perfectly pass as ordinary Japanese and be eventually able to get married to people they love. “I was told by my boyfriend’s mom that I had dirty blood and that I do not deserve her son,” Mrs. Park’s daughter said in the interview. “My daughter’s ex-boyfriend’s parents apparently opposed the marriage because we were Korean. They said that they would rather see their son marrying a Japanese orphan or a Japanese homeless rather than a *zainichi* Korean” (I am me, 2007) When her children encountered rejections by their boyfriend and girlfriend’s families solely because of the children’s Korean background, Mrs. Park decided to naturalize and change her first name and last name to those of ordinary Japanese so that their children could conceal their Koreanness, and have better lives in Japan.

Apart from difficulties that stem from prejudice against *zainichi* Koreans, these Koreans who choose to signal their ethnic origin through names meet with burdensome

expectations by others, mainly other *zainichi* Koreans, who associate name changes to assertion of political activism when those decisions oftentimes only represent their personal preferences. As much as there are many active *zainichi* Koreans who frequently talk about *zainichi* issues, many of these them are also uninterested in such social and political aspect of their Korean names. Some are simply apolitical in general, regardless whether it is Korean or Japanese. Scholars Ryang and Lie similarly point out that “signaling Korean roots by name usage—which implies being socially a full-time Korean—itself does not automatically result in politically meaningful *zainichi* networking” (Lim 2009, 100). For example, Ryang and Lie cite the example of Akio, who has a Korean legal name (albeit with a Japanese pronunciation), and has some *zainichi* acquaintances, with no interest in politics, whether local, national, or global, either Korean or Japanese. “He is not particularly interested in getting to know other *zainichi*, either. His name is a matter of individual choice, and he does not attach any significant sociopolitical meaning to it—such as becoming a role model for other *zainichi*” (Lim 2009, 100). Because Lim cites the example of Akio as worth noting, for Akio is apolitical and does not attempt to be a role model for the *zainichi* Koreans despite his Korean style name, it can be stated that there exist expectations for *zainichi* Koreans with their ethnic names to be more politically active or ethnically conscious.

Apart from having to face technical difficulties or social discriminations, and despite the fact that *zainichi* Koreans with remnants of their ethnic background such as legal names or Korean acquaintances, *zainichi* Koreans are burdened with the Japanese society’s treatment of their decisions as actions that encompass ideas such as patriotism, political activism or declaration of individuality against the ethnically integrated and

standardized Japanese society. An example of a character from *GO* who is ultimately sacrificed for his pronounced Korean identity is Jong-il, Sugihara's best friend from Korean ethnic school. He is determined to improve the educational environment at his Korean ethnic school and explains to Sugihara why he is inclined to do to. "I was severely bullied as a kid when I went to a Japanese school before coming to an ethnic school. For kids like me, I want to become a teacher at a Korean ethnic school. I want to study hard at a Japanese college and bring that well-learned knowledge back as a "teacher" and teach my juniors to go out to a bigger world...I want to tell them to become stronger" (Kaneshiro 2000, 79). Kaneshiro's decision to give a Korean name the character who is not only diligent and smart but also vocal about one's ethnic identity and determination to strengthen ethnic identity shows that Jong-il serves as a symbol for all ethnic minorities in Japan who are concerned with furthering their ethnic matters.

However, unexpected and tragic death of Jong-il, the Korean named character who is most dedicated to accepting his ethnic identity and to enhancing such embracement, functions as an ultimate metaphor for how the embracement of ethnic identity is unwelcomed in Japanese society and can even be met with severe damages to one's chance of survival. In the novel, as Jong-il approaches the kid who was bullying a zainichi Korean girl wearing a traditional Korean dress (female students at Korean ethnic schools wear Korean traditional dresses as school uniforms), the kid strikes a knife on Jong-il's throat. While the zainichi Korean girl cries out for help, Jong-il dies at the subway station, bleeding to death. His death while trying to protect the zainichi Korean girl and the fact that he was most ethnically pronounced character in the novel illustrate

how exposing one's ethnic identity is a serious issue that can threaten zainichi Koreans' lives.

Despite the author's grim insinuations about Japanese society that is hostile to the upholding of ethnic identity, Jong-il's death represents a positive outlook of the author Kaneshiro that being more ethnically aware will prove one day to be successful. For instance, Jong-il's death encourages Sugihara to change his mind and continue studying for college as well as to think more deeply about the meaning of names. The readers can only conjecture that Jong-il wanted Sugihara to go to college so that Sugihara can live a better and a different life from those of most other delinquent zainichi Korean students, who usually end up in menial work or gangs. Nevertheless, it is without a doubt that Jong-il's presence influences those around him with a positive message about ethnic consciousness and embracement.

The most significant aspect of the problems that zainichi Koreans face for going by their Korean names relates to what was explained in the first half of my thesis about the history of the Japanese government's attempt to establish an image of a monoethnic, homogeneous society. As mentioned earlier, because of historical reasons, the Japanese society is not hospitable to those who proudly assert their ethnic identity and who disrupt the image of homogeneity. As "Japan's self-assertion of an imagined homogeneous self," persists, its minorities cannot avoid but continue to live in contradiction (Weiner 1997, 213).

Nevertheless, the concept of Japan as a homogeneous country has dwindled in the past twenty years. For instance, Mr. Pak Shil, one of the interviewees from the documentary, who naturalized and became a Japanese citizen in 1970, says, "the

Japanese government required at that time that if you naturalized, you must choose a Japanese name and have one entire hand, including your palm, fingerprinted.” (I am me, 2007) It is indeed true that the Japanese law stated that anyone who applies to become a Japanese citizen must choose a “Japanese-sounding” name, and that that clause forced zainichi Koreans who wished to naturalize to choose Japanese names over their Korean names. However, Mr. Pak was able to regain the right to use his real Korean name as a Japanese citizen after he sued the government. Mr. Pak was able to win the trial mainly because in 1985, the statement requiring Japanese names for those who applied for citizenship was removed. This legal change points out that Japanese society is becoming a more accommodating environment for ethnic minorities to retain their ethnic identities. However, as Mr. Lee, another interviewee from the documentary, confessed, Japanese officials still pressure or even threaten zainichi Koreans to take Japanese names over their Korean names. It is clear that the society’s attitude toward pronounced ethnic identity has not kept up with the legal accommodation that has taken place.

## CONCLUSION

Ever since their first mass immigration as forced laborers to the Japanese archipelago during World War I and during the Japanese colonization of Korea, zainichi Koreans have experienced not only social discriminations but also poverty, the division of their motherland, and forfeiture of Japanese citizenship followed by long period of statelessness. Japanese government’s systematic pre-war and post-war emphasis on Japan’s homogeneity also stifled any zainichi Korean voice to be heard in the society. In facing such obstacles, many zainichi Koreans resorted to and still resort to go by their Japanese aliases with few exceptions of those with Korean names.

Their decisions regarding names unfortunately present zainichi Koreans with problems as well as benefits by either highlighting or downplaying their ethnic identity. Those who go by their Japanese names and therefore able to pass as ordinary Japanese are seen as betrayers of their motherland and their own ethnic roots. Furthermore, those with Japanese aliases are met with uncomfortable realization that if they choose to become visibly Korean without going by their Japanese names, the advantages that have enjoyed so far in Japanese society might be forfeited. In contrast, those who go by their Korean names gain acknowledgements from other Koreans as ethnically conscious Koreans. However, those acknowledgements also act as pressures for those zainichi Koreans without much political inclination or desires, to serve as role models for zainichi community.

A quick look at how Japanese society treats zainichi Koreans who go by their Korean names exposes Japanese society's general dislike towards individual announcement of ethnic identity. Causes for the unwelcoming attitude can be traced back to Meiji Restoration (1868) and the prewar and postwar development of Japanese nationalism that emphasized monoethnicity as a defining characteristic of Japan compared to other countries. Because of a long period of modern history that highlighted monoethnicity of Japan, the Japanese public still believes in its homogeneity despite many existing minorities such as Okinawans, *Burakumin*, Chinese and *Nikkeijin*. Because of the prevalent belief, zainichi Koreans and their decisions to go by their Korean names pose great threat and discomfort to the Japanese public for their decisions disrupt the long-held image of homogeneous Japan.

The problems related to zainichi Koreans and their names prove to be more complicated if historical events such as Japan's thirty-six-year-long colonization of Korea, and the initial mass immigration of Koreans to Japan as forced laborers or cheap laborers are taken into account. Because the general history shows Koreans as victims of Japanese colonization, the decisions by zainichi Koreans to go by their Korean or Japanese names invariably hold political significance, whether those zainichi Koreans intend to or not. Because of the blurry boundaries between personal preference and political activism, zainichi Koreans' decisions with names still hold huge significance in current Japanese society that still retains its belief in homogeneous Japan.

Regardless of the different types of benefits and obstacles zainichi Koreans face from using Korean or Japanese names, one aspect of their decisions is evident; their names, whether Korean or Japanese, hold power as a marker of identity of how others perceive zainichi Koreans and how zainichi Koreans perceive themselves. For those with Japanese aliases, they are often labeled by others as traitors, sell-outs, or Japanese Koreans with thinned out Korean identity. Those with Korean names tend to be identified by others as politically and socially active Koreans. Those outside perceptions in turn affect zainichi Koreans' perspectives towards their individual and ethnic identity.

Moreover, their names serve as a tool for both empowerment and resistance in a discriminatory society. For zainichi Koreans with Korean names, going by their ethnic names is their own form of self-empowerment through asserting their ethnic identity and embracing their ethnic history. At the same time, owning Korean names is also a tool of resistance against Japanese society that attempts to enforce a false image of monoethnic Japan by socially and legally suppressing the embracement of ethnic identity. Similarly,

for those with Japanese names, choosing to go by their Japanese aliases is a distinctive way of self-empowerment by being invisible and being able to pass as the ethnic majority in a prejudiced society. Furthermore, Japanese names also represent a form of resistance against expectations from zainichi Korean community or Koreans in Korea for zainichi Koreans to be socially visible Korean despite the discriminations.

Whether they hold power as a marker of identity or serve as a tool for empowerment and resistance against Japanese society or Korea, zainichi Koreans' names are the ultimate manifestations of zainichi survival in Japan. Those, who decide to empower themselves by going invisible and risk being censured as traitors, have chosen their own method of survival in Japanese society. Those, who resist contributing to the seemingly homogenous image of Japan, thereby risking expectations from other Koreans to serve for the better good for the zainichi Korean community, have also chosen their way of survival in a society. Before their decisions are assessed by outsiders, zainichi Koreans and their names should first be approached as the ethnic minority's attempt at survival.

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