

## The Global Contexts of Zainichi Korean Literature (July 29, 2023)

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### International Symposium Report

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The international symposium held July 29, 2023, “Reading Zainichi Korean Literature in Global Contexts,” represents a culmination of the Osaka University Global Japanese Studies Education and Research Incubator supported project “An International Collaborative Network for Research on Zainichi Korean Literature.” Under the leadership of Nicholas Lambrecht, the project has fostered collaboration and conversation among scholars working across the globe on topics related to Zainichi Korean literature. It was thanks to the project that I was also able to participate in a July 15, 2023 international symposium held at Dongguk University on “Intersectionality and Zainichi-ness.” Both events advanced the project’s goal of creating a global network of researchers of Zainichi Korean literature, especially in Korean-, Japanese-, and English-language discourses. At the same time, the collective work of scholars in this network has shown the importance of transnational and intersectional approaches to Zainichi Korean literature, situating Zainichi Koreans not simply as a minority within Japan, but in a global frame. Each of the speakers at the Osaka University symposium was in some way concerned with this global framing.

The keynote speakers in particular provided fertile ground for thinking through the ways that shifts in framing can illuminate or obscure certain voices and histories. Kim Hwangi’s exciting talk took listeners on a world tour, exploring a burgeoning archive of Korean literature in diaspora. This included not only Zainichi Korean literature, but writings by Chosonjok of China, Koryo Saram of Russia and Central Asia, and Koreans in Europe, Australia, and across the Americas. These diasporic literatures exist in Korean as well as the local languages, offering a rich vein of material through which to probe questions of migration, nationalism, (post)colonialism, and many others. Next, Nayoung Aimee Kwon offered a more cautionary approach to the archive, exploring the many ways that Cold War and post-Cold War American hegemony has excised certain material from the historical record, or kept those materials out of the hands of

certain scholars. Both presentations illustrated the urgency of collaboration across national borders, in order to do justice to the expansive yet necessarily incomplete corpus of narratives by Koreans in Japan and other locations in diaspora.

Panel presentations in the afternoon session took up specific case studies within the broader landscape laid out by the keynote speakers. My own presentation explored the distinction between postcolonial and global Japanophone literatures through the position of Muslims in Japan in the work of Kim Saryang and Iranian-born novelist Shirin Nezamafi. I argued that the global and postcolonial are not so easily disentangled in Japanese-language literature. Hosomi Kazuyuki approached the work of Kim Shijong from a fresh angle, through comparison with the German-language poet Paul Celan. Reading the two poets side-by-side allowed us to see Kim's struggle to mediate historical trauma through language, and to ponder the responsibility of readers and interpreters of such language. Finally, Sakasai Akito added crucial context to the question of why Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* did not garner a response in Japanese-language discourse, particularly compared to its popularity and impact in the United States and South Korea. Sakasai incisively situated *Pachinko* within a broader wave of Asian American literary and cultural phenomena in the United States, a push for greater representation of the often-invisible Asian minority that was largely illegible in Japanese-language discourse. The panel contributions were united by an impetus to draw connections across contexts, even—perhaps especially—where national, historical, or political differences stymie our efforts to draw straightforward conclusions.

In the discussion that followed the formal presentations, there remained a lingering sense that research on Zainichi literature requires a great deal of specificity. It is in many ways resistant to our efforts to situate it within broader contexts—the aim of this symposium and much of the contemporary scholarship on Zainichi literature and culture. The language politics vis-à-vis Japanese, the divided homeland, and many other factors create thorny issues for positioning Zainichi literature within global Korean literature in diaspora, Japanophone literature, or any larger framework we might choose. Still, as the ideas emerging from this event demonstrate, there is ample value in rising to those challenges. I look forward to continuing to build an international network of researchers committed to this mission.