

Introduction

Eavesdropping on Zainichi Literature

It was a summer evening in Tokyo when three colleagues and I were jolted from our dinner conversation by an outburst from a woman at the adjacent table in the restaurant. She was not exactly eavesdropping—more likely overhearing. Seemingly out of patience, she nearly shouted, “*Zainichi* is offensive! You should say *Zainichi Kankokujin*.” The four of us had used the offending term repeatedly in the course of discussing our research, which for all of us touches on the ethnic Korean community in Japan. We referred to this community as “*Zainichi*” (在日), a Japanese term meaning literally nothing more than “in Japan,” but commonly understood as shorthand for Koreans residing in Japan. It is true, however, as the woman noted, that “*Zainichi*” is also used pejoratively, despite its widespread and casual use in English-language (and often even Japanese-language) academic discourse on the subject.¹ As I do throughout this book, we used this word not without a certain ambivalence, but out of a combination of necessity and convenience. After all, we had to call our subjects *something*, even if we would have no trouble recognizing the various problems with the term—one of which had just been brought inescapably to our attention.

This book is interested in the ethical contradictions this moment encapsulates. I suspect that all of us at the table that night do the work that we do in part to combat the discursive and material injustices that silence *Zainichi* Koreans and other marginalized communities. But there is no way to do that work, no way to give voice to these communities, outside a language that inevitably misrepresents them. There are no neutral terms. Knowledge production, I argue, necessarily involves negotiations of the violence inherent in both the failure to represent and representation itself. Innocence is untenable.

As a case in point, the woman calling us out offered the alternative “Zainichi Kankokujin” (在日韓国人), a phrase that employs “Zainichi” as a modifier of a Japanese term for “Korean,” in this case written with the sinographs preferred in the South. This longer phrase is preferred precisely because it provides this higher degree of specificity, avoiding the problem of lumping together “Zainichi Kankokujin” with “Zainichi Chōsenjin” (在日朝鮮人), the equivalent written with the sinographs preferred in the North.

However, it was this very specificity that made us unable simply to substitute “Zainichi Kankokujin” for “Zainichi” and continue our discussion. As we hastened to explain to our neighbor in the restaurant, it would be more accurate to say we study “Zainichi Kankoku-Chōsenjin,” a more inclusive if unwieldy term that acknowledges the existence of both modes of naming Korea. In fact, many Koreans in Japan identify as Zainichi Chōsenjin, including at least one of us at the table. Commonly misunderstood as necessarily implying allegiance to the North Korean state, this designation offers a means of rejecting the Cold War politics of division and imagining Koreans in Japan as the legacy of a unified Korea.² For them, “Kankoku” is a painful reminder that they exist on one side of a hierarchical division. “Kankoku-Chōsenjin,” despite its greater inclusivity, also serves as such a reminder. The ordering of the terms necessarily suggests a privileging of one over the other, even as the hyphen itself acts as a material representation of the division.

In short, although “Zainichi” has become the predominant nomenclature in English-language discourse on this group, its usage implies the existence of an internally cohesive group for which there is no name in Japanese, or even Korean. Whereas the English “Zainichi Korean” is agnostic to the politics of the divided states on the peninsula, the Japanese and Korean languages cannot help but acknowledge them, if not privilege one side or the other. To denote the entire community of ethnic Koreans in Japan regardless of citizenship or political affiliation, one occasionally sees alternative terms such as “Zainichi Korian” (在日コリアン) or “Korian-Japanizu” (コリアン・ジャパニーズ), but these share the English term’s problem of implying a sort of ethnicity-based unity that may not apply (not to mention its centering of the English-language world as global arbiter of what things are called).³

In Korean, one can avoid the distinction by using terms such as “Chaeil kyop’o” (재일교포) or “Chaeil tongp’o” (재일동포), both of which imply a biological kinship shared by Koreans across the world, thereby reaffirming ethnocentric or even racialized notions of Korean identity. On the other hand, to avoid “tongp’o” and “kyop’o” (literally “same womb” and “overseas brethren”), one has to specify which kind of Korean: Chosŏnin (조선인), the preferred term in North Korea, or Hangugin (한국인), the name for Korea in the South. In other words, the Korean language has the same pitfall as Japanese, albeit with more fraught political stakes. More suggestively, in contemporary Korean-language discourse on the Korean diaspora in Japan, one is increasingly likely to see “Chainich’i” (자이니치) rather

than “Chaeil” precede these terms. As opposed to the shared sinographic tradition underlying both the Japanese (Zainichi) and Korean (Chaeil) readings of the characters (在日), “Chainichi” is derived from the phonetic transliteration of the Japanese “Zainichi,” or perhaps even from the English-language adoption of this term. At some level, “Zainichi” as signifier has broken free of any specific national or linguistic context. Nevertheless, the heaviness of the specific discursive histories of the term in each of those contexts is still felt acutely, as it was in the restaurant that night.

All of the above terms shift in connotation as they are transformed in the process of translation, yet they each imply an internal cohesion in the “Zainichi” (or “Chaeil,” or “Korean-Japanese,” or “Chainichi”) community that collapses the moment it is called into question by that same process of translation. What struck me that night is that any given term my colleagues and I might have chosen, in any of the three languages to which we had access, would have inflicted violence on some potential bystander at the next table. These words are specters of historical violence as well as painful legacies of that history lingering in the present. And, importantly, that violence not only takes the form of exclusion—as in the pejorative implication of “Zainichi,” that those who bear the moniker do not belong in Japan—but also arises from misrecognition in the process of *inclusion*—as in the application of “Kankokujin” to that same community, despite many rejecting such a label.

Also inescapable that night was the conclusion that the specific valence of these words, and their potential to cause harm, are of course dependent on the positions—and respective languages—of the speaker and listener. As it happens, the woman at the next table was Japanese. Her act of attempted allyship on behalf of Zainichi Kankokujin put her in conflict with Zainichi Chōsenjin. In one sense, her endeavor to speak for the community was undermined by her position outside it, but more than that she was bound by the same problem we were: the violence embedded in the language itself. Although the Chōsen-Kankoku distinction completely collapses when one speaks, perhaps in English, of Zainichi Koreans or Zainichi full stop, it is not at all surprising that the salient dichotomy in that moment at dinner was not Japan(ese) versus Korea(n), but rather a Cold War inflected divide that saw Japan and South Korea (Kankoku) on one side and North Korea (Chōsen) on the other.⁴ These were the terms in which our language(s), and the politics from which they cannot be severed, allowed us to speak.

Finally, I would be remiss not to highlight the irony I experienced at that table as an American embedded in this conversation, yet somehow always outside it. On the one hand, the ambiguity of English allows the discourse on Zainichi Koreans in Anglophone academia to decenter the North-South Cold War division, a reframing of Zainichi issues that brings with it a great deal of potential for fruitful analysis, perhaps even a transformation and expansion of what can be said about these issues in Japanese and Korean. As I hope this story illustrates, to speak of

“Zainichi,” full stop, creates a fictively coherent community where none, in fact, exists. On the other hand, this tendency of English-language discourse, by its very nature, to de-emphasize the existence of two Koreas serves to elide the role of the United States in the entire fraught history of Japanese colonial contact with Korea and its continuing aftermath in the present day.

It is tempting—and easy enough, if one wishes—to see English-language interventions in discourse on Zainichi literature, culture, and history, as valuable precisely because they are removed from the Japanese and Korean language politics outlined above. The English language renders moot the dichotomies that Korean- and Japanese-language discourses cannot escape. However, as I have already suggested, this veneer of distance—or worse, “objectivity”—belies the profound entanglement of the United States and the English language itself in the very politics it conceals.

In the end, I am left with a dilemma that perhaps our neighbor in the restaurant shared. To speak *of*—much less *for*—the Zainichi community (whatever that means, and what that means is perhaps the central question posed by this book) is an inherently violent exercise, especially but not exclusively from a position outside that community. Yet at the same time, silence is also untenable, violent in itself. How, then, do we ethically engage in a conversation that is not meant for us, in which we cannot and should not be centered, but from which we can never be completely removed? As a sort of eavesdropper on Zainichi literature and criticism, what is the right moment and language in which to interject?

This book addresses these questions by attending to incoherence in Zainichi literature, where “incoherence” is deployed multivalently. In one sense, I am referring to the failure of the Zainichi community or its literary production to cohere, as the fluidity and inconsistency of the terms used to name this collective would suggest. Although I have thus far presented this incoherence in terms of the division of the Korean peninsula, the mapping of this geopolitical divide onto the Zainichi community is only a particular case of the intractable internal differences that characterize any identity community. Drawing on theories of intersectionality, my readings of Zainichi literature also think through the challenges posed by differences of gender, sexuality, disability, and language to the coherence of Zainichi as a category of analysis. At the same time, I want to conceive of the imbrications of Japanese and American imperialisms at the site of colonial Korea and its postcolonial diaspora as itself a form of intersectionality. These enmeshed imperial spheres, along with other interlocking forms of domination that intersectional discourse has illuminated, conspire to render incoherent, if not quite silent, the voices at their nexus.

Perhaps as a response to these representational challenges, the texts I take up in this book, ranging from the early years of Korean colonial modernity to the twenty-first century, contain language that is non-representational. I use “incoherence” in a second sense to describe a kind of writing that deliberately

defies smooth reading, interpretation, translation, or assimilation. The radical potential of this incoherence is particularly relevant where hermeneutical approaches to Zainichi and other marginalized literatures have demanded that they represent their constitutive communities, and that they do so transparently and coherently. This refusal to be understood may be read as a response to these impossible demands. But it also creates an opportunity for readers to recognize their own involvement in the production of incoherence. I argue that the opaque, illegible, absent, and incoherent in literature offer alternative ways of ethically engaging with texts, including or especially those never meant to be understood.

THE “DEATH” OF ZAINICHI STUDIES: LITERARY TAXONOMY AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

This is not a book about Zainichi literature. I begin with this caveat not only due to the problems with the term “Zainichi” detailed above, but also because, as I will argue, Zainichi literature fails to cohere as an object of study. Even if it did, the writers and texts I consider here would stretch the category into unwieldiness. This presents not an obstacle, but an opportunity: an opportunity to make visible the pitfalls and possibilities of literary taxonomies.

It should be mentioned, first of all, that writers and critics of Zainichi literature have been worried about its sustainability as a relevant category for at least a decade.⁵ As I discuss in detail in chapter 7, the publication of the anthology “Zainichi” *bungaku zenshū* (*Collected Works of Zainichi Literature*) in 2006 brought these worries to a head. Prominent younger writers declined to have their work included, while the canonical giants of Zainichi literature, responsible for forging the genre anew in the 1960s and 1970s, had aged into their eighties. In this moment, both groups seemed to concur that perhaps Zainichi literature had run its course, albeit with sharply different levels of nostalgia.

In this respect, these Zainichi writers are hardly alone. Consider the 2019 Association for Asian Studies conference roundtable provocatively titled “The Death of Japanese Studies” and the virtual roundtable “The Rebirth of Japanese Studies” organized in response for the 2020 iteration of the conference.⁶ Though differing in outlook, both conversations seemed to take for granted that Japan (or Japanese literature in particular) is a self-evidently valid object of study. Alternatively, participants worried that the erosion of disciplinary and area boundaries had contributed to the crisis alongside declining institutional support for the field.⁷ Either way, it was assumed that the death under discussion is one to be mourned.

Of course, this sense of loss is not the only way to process such an ending.⁸ Sinophone studies, to cite an adjacent field, begins by anticipating its own eventual irrelevance. As Shu-mei Shih explains, unlike the notion of Chinese diaspora, whose ethnocentrism leaves it unable to break loose from the totalizing and trans-historical tendencies of the Chinese nation, the Sinophone is grounded in the use of

Sinitic languages in specific times and places. In this way, “the Sinophone recedes or disappears as soon as the languages in question are abandoned, but this recession or disappearance should not be seen as a cause for lament or nostalgia.”⁹ Just as well, perhaps, as other such fields of inquiry and literary production have welcomed their own deaths from within, even if they have not yet died. The Francophone and the Anglophone, both more unambiguously situated as (post)colonial residues than the Sinophone, have produced “manifestos” calling for their demise.¹⁰

In 2007, one year after the release of *“Zainichi” bungaku zenshū*, a group of forty-four writers including Michel Le Bris, Jean Rouaud, and Édouard Glissant signed a letter to the French newspaper *Le Monde* titled “Pour une ‘littérature-monde’ en français” (“Toward a ‘World Literature’ in French”), arguing for “the end of ‘francophone’ literature” and a decentering of the French nation in French-language literature that the concept of the Francophone failed to achieve.¹¹ They suggested as a model the global and plural character of English-language literature, where “the children of the former British empire were, with complete legitimacy, taking possession of English letters.”¹² World Literature in English, of course, comes with its own internal hierarchies, though perhaps it is fair to say that critiques thereof entered the spotlight much earlier.

One of the best-known examples is Salman Rushdie’s 1983 essay “‘Commonwealth Literature’ Does Not Exist.”¹³ Writing in reaction to a conference on Commonwealth literature, Rushdie praises the event as a stimulating affair attended by brilliant writers from all over the English-speaking world. However, over the course of the conference, he writes, “I became quite sure that our differences were so much more significant than our similarities, that it was impossible to say what ‘Commonwealth literature’—the idea which had, after all, made possible our assembly—might conceivably mean.” Here Rushdie points out that the category of Commonwealth literature is held together by little more than an exclusionary logic that defines the writers under its purviews as outside English literature proper, “the great sacred thing itself.” If “Commonwealth literature” is to mean anything, it can only do so via such policing of its external boundaries coupled with the suppression of its internal differences, whose significance threatens to exceed that of its similarities.

Perhaps Commonwealth literature and Francophonie are particularly egregious examples of these internal and external exclusions, but the question I want to raise here is whether these same conceptual problems are not, in fact, present in *any* possible literary taxonomy. National literatures are perhaps less subjected to this kind of scrutiny than more marginal or expansive groupings, but the notion that the similarities of writers and texts taken up under a national framework are more significant than the differences can only be prescriptive rather than descriptive. I submit that no literary taxonomy can escape this conundrum. They all, including Zainichi literature, achieve coherence (to the extent that they achieve it) through the suppression of intersectional differences that remain salient nonetheless.

In that case, should we dispense with them altogether? Why use the word “Zainichi” at all, if the only reason for doing so is the utterly unsatisfying answer above—we have to call them *something*? Rushdie suggests a better kind of answer, ironically in the very same breath he denounces Commonwealth literature for failing to cohere: this concept was, despite its flaws, “the idea which had, after all, made possible our assembly.”¹⁴ If there is a purpose to literary taxonomy, it is not in finding the correct name for a cohesive, pre-existing body of texts, but rather in *creating* such assemblies, as opportunities for certain writers, texts, and readers to collide with one another. New ways of naming and categorizing create new pathways along which such collisions can occur. Moreover, when such a pathway emerges and new texts and writers find an audience (perhaps, though not inevitably, at the expense of works previously deemed canonical), the backlash that often occurs is frequently couched in the language of “coherence,” with little attention to whether the previous canon coheres, or, more importantly, to how it was *made* to cohere in the process of, rather than prior to, its interpretation.¹⁵

Japanese (literary) studies in particular, in the leadup to its “death,” has been reconfigured to open up many productive new pathways. The field has challenged the perceived singularity and homogeneity of “Japan,” not only in the Anglophone world but also in Japanese-language discourse. Pioneering works such as those of Harumi Befu and Oguma Eiji began to unpack the ideological aspects of *Nihon-jinron*, the belief in Japanese cultural essentialism and uniqueness, a hegemonic set of ideas in postwar Japan.¹⁶ These critiques spurred a wave of scholarly attention to Japan’s ethnic minorities and subcultures, including studies of the Zainichi community, arguing in favor of a multiethnic or multicultural lens on Japan.¹⁷ Of course, since their heyday in the 1990s, notions of multiculturalism have undergone extensive critiques, particularly with regard to the tendency of multiculturalism to reify essentialized difference and leave the hierarchical relationships inscribed thereon intact.¹⁸ Indeed, the case of Japanese studies demonstrates that increased representation of Japan’s multiculturalism has done little to dislodge “Japan proper” (envisioned as populated by Japanese-speaking, ethnically and culturally Japanese people) from its hegemonic position.

While so many fields and disciplines, including but not limited to Japanese studies, are either dying or refusing to die, Korean studies, on the other hand, is ascendant. Opportunities to study Korean literature and especially popular culture in English are expanding rather than contracting. Having relatively recently secured a significant presence in Anglo-American academia, Korean literary studies as a field is an exception that proves the rule. That is, even as Korean studies carves out a space alongside parallel nation-based fields of Japanese and Chinese studies, Korea’s divided status necessarily entails a more ambivalent relationship with the nation-state. Moreover, many of the central themes of scholarship in Korean literary and cultural studies are inherently transnational: the cultural production of the Japanese empire, divided Cold War ideologies, migration and

diaspora, and the global flows of digital and popular media. Korean studies today is also increasingly interested in multiculturalism, and Korea's own myth of ethnic homogeneity and uniqueness.¹⁹

One could reasonably predict that Korean studies will eventually arrive at the same point of "death" as Japanese studies, albeit belatedly. That said, to rehearse this history of the arrival of crisis and death—first to the Eurocentric canon of literary studies full stop, then to Japanese literary studies (particularly as a reflection of a monolingual and monoethnic Japan), and perhaps, eventually, to Korean literature itself—is a reflection of the imperial logic that views Korea as behind Japan, which is in turn behind the West. Of course, this logic breaks down with the recognition that the very distinction between Japanese studies and Korean studies is illusory to begin with. The two are so deeply intertwined with each other—not to mention countless other national and international languages, cultures, and powers—that one simply cannot be understood without an understanding of the other. Each field's coherence, to say nothing of their mutual exclusivity, is created by deliberately ignoring its intersectional and transnational aspects. The question remains: how to do otherwise?

TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE ETHICS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The search for alternatives to nation-state models for studying literatures and cultures is in large part the motivation behind what has been termed "the transnational turn," to which the discourse on the "death" of Japanese studies could be read as a kind of backlash. Zainichi studies has been deeply imbricated with broader trends toward transnational models.²⁰ As such, it would not be overstating the case to say that "Zainichi studies," even if it has not always been named as such across its history in English-language discourse, has both shaped and been shaped by larger debates on the ethics of knowledge production by the West about Asia, which is always already a transnational endeavor.

By the late 2000s, the nation-state area studies model had come so thoroughly under fire that one scholar was able to remark that the "myth" of Japanese cultural homogeneity had become a "straw man *par-excellence*."²¹ At the same time, a new generation of English-language scholars, much more likely than their predecessors to have facility in more than one Asian language, attempted to move beyond the question of what Japan's minorities could tell us about Japan, and committed much more seriously to transnational and translanguaging approaches to scholarship on East Asia, especially the Japanese empire.²² Serk-Bae Suh, Nayoung Aimee Kwon, and Christina Yi have also extended this rich analysis of imperial Japan to the postcolonial (or postimperial) Cold War reconfigurations of national, cultural, and linguistic identities, including the coalescence of the Zainichi community.²³

Much of this work engages explicitly with postcolonial studies, particularly the problematic of Japan's exceptional location or outright absence within. On the one hand, acknowledgment of Japan's particularity as the only non-Western imperial power of the twentieth century acts as a counter to the Eurocentric impulse within postcolonial studies to view the problem of empire through the lens of the West versus the Rest. On the other hand, insistence on Japanese exceptionalism returns us to something like *Nihonjinron* itself, viewing Japan as singular and incommensurable, uniquely unique. Thus, just as the expansion of Japanese studies to encompass the minor, the multicultural, or the diasporic fails to disrupt the centrality of Japan proper, the expansion of the boundaries of postcolonial studies to include the Japanese empire is perhaps preferable to its absence, but leaves intact the hierarchies that cause the absence in the first place.

As a case in point, one of the most intriguing possibilities to emerge from this work is the Japanophone.²⁴ As with parallel language-centered fields, the Japanophone offers the advantages and pitfalls of arranging a constellation of texts around a former (or not-so-former) imperial sphere of influence. The Japanophone foregrounds the (post)imperial language politics of the Japanese empire and its aftermath, highlighting the possibility of literary production in the Japanese language that is not necessarily by and for the Japanese ethnonation. Yet, Japanophone literature is no less prone than the Francophone or Anglophone to falling into the trap of reinforcing the central and privileged status of the former imperial power. Even in the decades-long Japanese-language discourse on *Nihongo bungaku* (Japanese-language literature) as opposed to or in opposition to *Nihon bungaku* (Japanese literature), a division of labor has emerged. That is, *Nihongo bungaku* offers a space for the exploration of writers and texts with roots in the former colonies or at the margins of Japaneseness, whereas the field of *Nihon bungaku* continues essentially undisturbed. Furthermore, in the view of Zainichi Korean writer Kim Sökpöm (who himself coined *Nihongo bungaku* as a means of distinguishing Zainichi Korean literature from Japanese literature), Japanophone studies have tended to focus on contemporary, cosmopolitan writers who move freely between Japanese and other languages, at the expense of a historical, postcolonial lens that can account for those writers who had no choice but to write in Japanese.²⁵ The Japanophone, then, is splintered along multiple internal hierarchies, one of which is still "Japan proper" and its others.

Perhaps the most radical attempt to redraw—or discard altogether—area and disciplinary boundaries is the emergent field of transpacific studies. Born at the nexus of Asian American and Asian studies, the transpacific framework offers a method of teasing out overlapping Japanese and American imperialisms in the Pacific region. As I will argue at length in the following chapter, it is impossible to position Zainichi literature without attending to this intersectionality of empires. Moreover, this reconfiguration of our understanding of postcolonialism in East Asia as constituted by the "complicity" of American neo-imperialism and

Asian nationalisms allows for the critical re-examination of American knowledge production itself.²⁶ In fact, many of the debates among early adopters of the transpacific lens revolve around the question of who constitutes the agent of knowledge in Asia and the Pacific, and how to shift that agency from the United States and its semi-colonial partners in East Asia to the historically marginalized and silenced voices of Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.²⁷

However, as soon as the issue of center and margin is raised within the transpacific frame, the same anxiety around unmanageability and incoherence—present across comparative, postcolonial, and area-based literary studies—rears its ugly head. In a volume that proposes no less than “to produce the trans-Pacific as a new paradigm of Area Studies that will overcome the dominant mode of imagining East Asia and discover the grid of new regional configurations beyond the neo-imperial design,”²⁸ the editors issue the caveat that they must “*delimit the scope of our discussion in Northeast Asia* since we deem a broader and thicker comparison to be in demand in order to extend our discussion over East Asia at large.”²⁹ A scope any larger than that which is already well represented is once again difficult to manage. Lisa Yoneyama echoes this sentiment in the very act of pointing out the danger of endlessly re-centering the center, even within transpacific studies: “Lest I be misunderstood, I am not proposing to solve the problems associated with the prefix *trans* by merely adding yet another subject to our research agenda.”³⁰ Even here, in a field that is boldly and unapologetically transnational and intersectional, the object of study must be “delimited,” in a way that inevitably invites the suppression of these exact forms of difference.

To issue my own caveat, let me be clear that these are exciting developments toward a more honest and ethical configuration of Anglo-American scholarship and the Asia-Pacific region. At a minimum, this work of transgressing the boundaries of fields of knowledge production has had enormous and undeniable value in terms of illuminating areas of human history, culture, and experience previously rendered invisible by the single-nation frameworks under which such knowledge was pursued for so much of postwar history in the United States. This scholarship enables my own. But the one nagging concern that remains with me is that representation—particularly representation in the service of *knowledge*—is ill-equipped to address the fundamental problems these scholars have identified. These emergent fields are at risk of being co-opted by the same kind of representational logic that drives the methodologies they are explicitly attempting to reject. That is, the postcolonial, the Japanophone, and the transpacific are in danger of becoming nothing more than new objects of study whose borders, centers, peripheries, and overall internal coherence *we* the knowledge-producers define without ever being accountable for doing so.

The anxieties plaguing area studies and adjacent fields in the post-Cold War era will not be alleviated by substituting a transnational but nevertheless internally coherent object of knowledge for the nation. The problem has always

been an ethical one: that the production of national knowledge conceals its own role in producing the nation. I submit that the transnational, the postcolonial, and the transpacific are just as susceptible to this kind of violence. What is needed, then, is a more radical transformation of the ways in which we think about the question of representation and engage with the texts we study. The salient questions are not how to draw the boundaries or how to name a particular field of knowledge, but rather the question of responsibility for who is doing the knowing and to what ends.

INTERSECTIONALITY AS ETHICS AND POETICS

This question of responsibility is what necessitates an ethical theoretical orientation. By invoking ethics, I do not mean to suggest that reading literature constitutes a moral good in and of itself. Rather, I am tapping a vein of criticism that is interested in ethics as a mode of insisting on positionality and relationality, of confronting the limits of knowledge and interpretation. At the theoretical heart of much of this criticism is the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, who in his argument for ethics as “first philosophy”—ethics as underpinning ontology, not the other way around—roots his critique in the irreducible alterity of the Other.³¹ For Levinas, the Other’s otherness is infinite, not subject to the totalizing capture (what he calls the “imperialism”) of ontological concepts, lest the Other become the Same.³² This line of thinking, particularly as taken up by deconstructionists, has opened up modes of approaching language—or literary texts in particular—that attend to the violence inherent in assigning ontological meaning.³³

Idelber Avelar’s “The Ethics of Interpretation and the International Division of Intellectual Labor” lucidly ties this ethics-informed skepticism toward totalizing knowledge to the politics of knowledge production I have been discussing thus far. Avelar offers a concise working definition of “an ethical relation to the academic apparatus” as “*the critique of a structure one cannot but inhabit*,” arguing that this kind of critical orientation is “the indispensable ethical foundation for future canon expansions, disciplinary and transdisciplinary revisions, institutional reforms, and curricular changes, as well as the necessary horizon for an ethic that could rethink the role not only of literatures in foreign languages but also of English.”³⁴ As the case of Zainichi literary studies so clearly demonstrates, neither the critic nor the language of critique has any neutral ground on which to stand, though the English language often masquerades as such. Of particular concern for Avelar is the way this inequity engenders a division of labor, “a split reproduced in the university between national traditions expected to produce thought (philosophy, ‘theory,’ etc.) and those traditions expected to provide objects for the thinking learned elsewhere.”³⁵ This refusal to see theory from outside those dominant national traditions *as theory* provides yet another illustration of how illegibility is structurally produced.³⁶

Of course, to state it in these words is to run the risk of suggesting that the only such intellectual division of labor is national, when there are so many other hierarchies along which such divides can occur. This is where intersectionality is once again instructive, not only in pointing out the divisions internal to the nation, but also as a case study in whose thinking can be read as “thought.” In fact, the constant calling into question of intersectionality as intellectual tradition has given rise to a posture of defensiveness, which Jennifer Nash characterizes as the primary affective valence of intersectionality scholarship.³⁷ Wherever conversations about intersectionality take place—activist circles, program-building efforts in the American university, journalism and media, or the pages of academic publications—the discussion anticipates its own backlash. As Nash describes the state of intersectionality in the context of women’s studies, “the field retains an ambivalent relationship with the analytic, always imagining it as simultaneously promising and dangerous, the field’s utopic future and its past tense.”³⁸ The emergence of a post-intersectional turn is coterminous with or even prior to widespread adoption of the term—to say nothing of its underlying methods and orientations.

This awkward temporal positioning of intersectionality is reflected by historiographic debates over its emergence in black feminist thought. As is well known, the term “intersectionality” itself was introduced in 1989 by American legal scholar and critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw,³⁹ but recent histories of intersectional thought have traced its roots to much earlier figures.⁴⁰ Despite this long and complex history, intersectionality has often been portrayed as the latest intellectual fad, a “buzzword” more notable for its popularity than its substance.⁴¹ In the same way that intersectionality is dismissed as both derivative of much older thought and shallowly trendy in its newness, it is accused of being both too academic to be useful for activists on the ground, yet not rigorous enough to be useful as theory. Not only is intersectionality thrown into the dustbin with “identity politics” as a fundamentally divisive idea, it is also accused of undermining unity and solidarity within feminist and anti-racist circles themselves.

I submit that these contradictions—intersectionality’s simultaneous datedness and futurity, oversimplification and excessive complexity, provinciality and lack of specificity—are themselves a product of intersectional incoherence. That is, because the women of color who have developed intersectionality (or the “matrix of domination,”⁴² or the notion of interlocking oppressions⁴³) are themselves subject to the structures of inequity their thought tradition identifies, for them there can be no separation between the theoretical and the object of knowledge. This is where I want to posit, perhaps rather obviously, intersectionality as a specifically *ethical* theory—to paraphrase Avelar, a critique of *structures* (plural) it cannot but inhabit. And here I hope it is clear that all of us inhabit these structures.

As such, by placing Zainichi literature in dialogue with intersectional discourse, I am by no means claiming that intersectional theory, an intellectual tradition emerging from black feminist thought in the United States and further developed

in transnational feminist contexts, somehow provides the terms to explain or understand Zainichi literature. But nor do I accept that such commensurability is a requisite for this kind of dialogue to take place. Audre Lorde, one of the central intersectionality thinkers, insists that what she is theorizing is not a cohesive black female experience—again, an impossibility on its face. Instead, it is the connections that can be forged not in spite of difference, but rather through the act of embracing it.⁴⁴ For me, then, reading Zainichi literature through the lens of intersectional feminist theory is a way of being accountable for my own position as a white woman within the American academy, which is no more a monolith than the community whose literary work I am reading.

Moreover, via this ethical theoretical orientation, I want to suggest that what is needed is a more profound skepticism toward the project of explaining or understanding in the first place. To explain, to understand, to grasp a subject is inevitably to suppress its internal incoherence and tame a radical difference that demands recognition of the unknowable into a domesticated difference that can be assimilated by a stable, independent knowing subject. Thus, when I describe the theoretical framework of this book as intersectional, I certainly do not mean to imply that intersectional theory speaks from a universalized subject position. Rather, I deploy intersectionality precisely because it offers a method for starting from the particular, for speaking not in a universalized language of mutual understanding that sets out to know and control the other as object, but for articulating relational positions that such language cannot accommodate. It is a way of naming the speech that is interpreted as incoherent because it is responding to a set of incoherent demands. It is a means of implicating the structural violence of hermeneutics in producing the failure to communicate.

In fact, although intersectionality in popular vernacular is shorthand for the need to think simultaneously in terms of race and gender, it ultimately provides a vocabulary for describing problems of representation that occur at the intersection of these and other axes of power. In the words of Crenshaw:

The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intra-group differences. . . . Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that *resists telling*.⁴⁵

Intersectionality is a strategy for approaching those stories that “resist telling.” It is a theory of whose narratives are *heard* by those in power: not necessarily a question of who can speak, but of how a too-blunt interpretive framework, in

its insensitivity to difference, proves unable to make sense of certain voices. A hermeneutics that demands that texts be read in terms of their difference from one or another form of dominance renders those voices resisting from multiple angles at once incoherent, if never quite silent.

Thus, I follow Mecca Jamilah Sullivan in thinking of intersectionality as a reading strategy for coping with what she calls “the poetics of difference,” defined as “a set of subversive aesthetic strategies that uses multiplicities of form and genre to respond to global discourses of antiracism, decolonization, feminism, and anti-heterosexism.”⁴⁶ Sullivan is primarily concerned with the genre-bending antinormative narratives of black feminists across the diaspora, who demand that their readers “develop queer reading practices, ways of reading that both apprehend and destabilize the workings of power continuously within and between words, phrases, lines, and sentences.”⁴⁷ I hope to expand upon the poetics of difference by further interrogating the multilingual aspects of texts that demand intersectional reading practices. Whereas Sullivan and the queer black feminist writers she examines work primarily in English, challenging its normative forms, the writers I consider are in many ways writing against English as itself a global norm. Rather than genre-bending, these writers operate at the level of style, orthography, and the materiality of the text on the page, which for them are sites of the interstices of power that have rendered them silent or incoherent. Even among writers who are not overtly radical in their approach, these “subversive aesthetic strategies” are present, resisting the normativity and appropriation of Eurocentric notions of style, literariness, translatability, and certainly representation.

For these reasons, these texts are ripe for intersectional reading.⁴⁸ At its best, this kind of reading strategy can move us beyond “the hermeneutics of suspicion,” beyond the demands of representational knowledge-making.⁴⁹ Instead of the violent suppression of incoherence that normative hermeneutic approaches rely on, intersectional reading asks us to linger with that which is different and perhaps even unknowable. Moreover, this kind of ethical encounter allows us to become accountable for our own implication in the text’s failure to cohere. Rather than interpreting or finding meaning in these texts, then, I am more interested in thinking through what these texts can make their readers feel, think, and do as they linger with incoherence and unknowability.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

I begin in chapter 1 by tracing the history of the emergence of “Zainichi” as a term as well as a mode of ethnic identification and category for literary production. I examine the continuities and disjunctures among Zainichi literature’s colonial origins, the elitist and exclusive genre of Zainichi Chōsenjin literature that arose in the postwar period, and the contemporary notion of a bracketed “Zainichi” literature as untethered to the ethnonational politics of the older generation’s canonical

writers. In the process of unpacking these literary taxonomies, I explore the varied historical conditions under which the writers encountered in this book wrote, particularly with respect to language politics.

Chapter 2 looks at one of the earliest examples of Korean literature under Japanese colonialism, Yi Kwangsu's *Mujöng* (*Heartless*, 1917). *Mujöng* is generally labeled as Korea's "first modern novel." The book starts here in order to consider the emergence of intersectional burdens of representation under the conditions of colonial modernity. This was the moment when Korean writers first began to discuss the need to assimilate the Korean language to the standards of modern phonocentric vernacular. For Yi, a leading figure in this discourse, this happens to be the same moment the queer figures inhabiting his texts are becoming taboo. Chapter 1 argues that the changing rules for who could be represented, and in what language, were internally inconsistent to the point of incoherence. The queerness of Yi's novel, then, arises not so much from its depiction of same-sex love as from its experimental prose, a product of its emergence within this contradictory alliance of colonial norms.

In chapter 3, I continue to interrogate the conflicting and mutually constitutive power structures present in colonial Korea through a reading of Kim Saryang's "Kusa fukashi" ("Deep in the Grass," 1940). This text, which depicts an almost ethnographic encounter between a colonial elite and the more profoundly marginalized subjects of the Korean hinterlands, is read in conversation with Kim's critical outlook on translation and World Literature. Kim's contributions to the discourse on World Literature in the 1930s and 1940s, much like the contemporary resurgence of World Literature models, raise ethical questions around appropriation and misrecognition in the process of translation and communication. "Kusa fukashi," in turn, shows that these ethical problems exist even on an intralingual and monoethnic playing field.

Kim Sökpöm, the focus of chapter 4, has written for decades about the representational impossibilities faced by postcolonial Korean writers in Japan, who can neither maintain a distance from the Japanese language nor take ownership of it. He calls this conundrum "the spellbinding of language" (*kotoba no jubaku*). I examine Kim's specific solutions to this critical impasse in his works of fiction, particularly *Karasu no shi* (*Death of a Crow*, 1957) and *Mandogi yürei kitan* (*The Curious Tale of Mandogi's Ghost*, 1970), demonstrating that Kim is able to destabilize the Japanese language of his novels by creating dissonance and incoherence between the main text and the fragments of Korean language embedded within.

In chapter 5, I discuss Kin Kakuei's *Kogöeru kuchi* (*Frozen Mouth*, 1970), narrated by a person who stutters. Kin was among the first prominent Zainichi authors to criticize the ethnocentrism of Zainichi politics as itself participating in intersectional incoherence, precluding or assimilating representations of disability. This chapter explores the politics of speaking as they act on the novel's narrator by delineating not only how his speech disability restricts him from articulating his

ethnic identity, but also, conversely, how his ethnic identity precludes him from articulating a disabled identity. Kin's stuttering narrator disrupts the flow of meaning from the visual medium of text to the reader's sonic imagination, creating an incoherent alternative to speech in which alternative modes of identification and (non)representation can be forged.

If the writers covered in the chapters above experiment with writing incoherently rather than with the goal of being understood, Yi Yangji puts the practice front and center in *Yuhi* (1988), the subject of chapter 6. The novella turns on the uncanny gap it creates between its narrating character, "Onni," a Korean woman with no Japanese ability, and the narrative itself, written almost entirely in Japanese. This leads to nonsensical moments in the text, such as the utterance, in Japanese, of the words "I cannot speak a word of Japanese." By presenting the text in pseudo-translation, Yi shifts the focus from language as conduit for communication or meaning to the inevitable aporias therein. Yi also explores the impacts of spoken and written language on the body, suggesting that the non-meaning sounds where languages overlap create a space for co-presence if not empathy.

Chapter 7 takes up the current state of Zainichi literature and the sense of crisis confronting its future. As mentioned above, contemporaneously with the release of the eighteen-volume "*Zainichi*" *bungaku zenshū*, discussions began to emerge as to whether the "end" of Zainichi literature was nigh. Compounding this anxiety was the refusal of high-profile writers such as Kaneshiro Kazuki and Yū Miri to have their work included. Yū's refusal, as well as her rejection of the Zainichi label, could perhaps be labeled "post-Zainichi," a play on the discourse of a "post-racial" United States—and with no less irony, given the emboldened nativist sentiments and hate speech campaigns targeted specifically at Zainichi Koreans in contemporary Japan. I conclude by arguing that Yū's use of silence, incoherence, and the abject body in *Hachigatsu no hate* (*The End of August*, 2004) offers a vision of Zainichi difference capable of articulating an unassimilated future.

In the epilogue, I consider Zainichi literature as a global, deterritorialized entity—both less coherent, and more visible, than ever before in its history. Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* (2017), translated into dozens of languages and adapted for streaming television, has done more than any text to bring the Zainichi community into the limelight. At the same time, it also embodies the central problem this book confronts: that to represent this community—perhaps especially to a global audience from nowhere in particular—is inevitably to misrepresent it. Through a reading of *Pachinko*, I tease out how the story it tells, and the story of the Zainichi community more broadly, is profoundly intertwined with American as well as Japanese imperialism. It is only through a situated, involved, and accountable mode of reading that we can begin to see their stories as our own, even if we can never quite *know* their stories.