

Representing Radical Difference

Kim Sökpöm's Korea(n) in Japan(ese)

Kim Sökpöm, one of the central figures of postwar Zainichi literature, describes the experience of writing in Japanese as a Korean author in the following way:

It is said that in Korea there is a strange-looking imaginary creature called a 'pulgasari,' which can dissolve iron and swallow it down, and I wonder, could 'Japanese' [Nihongo] be about to dissolve me, to swallow me completely into its stomach, 'Japaneseness'? Or rather, I wonder, say I were eaten by 'Japanese,' is there some way I could, as the 'pulgasari' does, chew my way through its iron stomach and break free? Could there be a way, somehow?¹

Aside from the visceral nature of the analogy, what is striking about this passage is the immense power ascribed to the Japanese language. It is an all-consuming force, relentlessly eroding the writer's Korean identity and pushing toward an inexorable "Japaneseness." Kim's goal is to "break free" from inside the mechanism of Japanese, but part of what complicates this process is that, unlike the "pulgasari" creature in his analogy, the Japanese language exists within Kim even as he exists within the Japanese language. As Japanese destroys him from the inside out, how can he do the same to it?

This is the central question of Kim's essay, "Gengo to jiyū: Nihongo de kaku to iu koto" ("Language and Liberty: The Act of Writing in Japanese," 1970), penned at a turning point in the history of Koreans in Japan. At the time of its publication, the past decade had seen the sharp decline of large-scale repatriation of Koreans in Japan to North Korea, normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea, and a general shift toward the assumption of long-term residence in Japan. In short, the Zainichi population was increasingly assimilating into

mainstream Japanese society, a throwback to the violent assimilation project of the Japanese empire. In this context, Kim's questions take on a tone of crisis. How can he maintain an empowering sense of difference in a (post)colonial assimilation regime? How can he effectively take on a Korean identity without reproducing the ethnonational hierarchies of difference that subjugated him in the first place? And how might he do this with only the language of the colonizer at his disposal, as a consciousness that cannot exist apart from Japanese?

These questions around postcolonial difference and representation echo one of the central tensions in the ongoing critical discussion, now in its fourth decade, of Fredric Jameson's essay, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," and its claim that "all third-world texts are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as . . . *national allegories*."² Aijaz Ahmad identifies a number of problems with this idea in his famous response to the piece, not least among them that the framework Jameson employs in his essay reifies the categories of "first-" and "third-world."³ However, as Jameson then responded, deconstructing these categories is not necessarily the more productive move.⁴ If his "othering" of the colonized world is problematic, then so too would be the collapse of its distinction from its former colonizers.

Though the critical discourse on national allegory is now itself an object of nostalgia, it continues to resurface even in much later works of criticism. This is perhaps especially true in Korean studies, where, as I discuss below, the lack of a clear referent for the "nation" of national allegory keeps the debate alive.⁵ But even in a much broader set of fields, rereadings of Jameson and Ahmad's debate continue to be produced.⁶ These various attempts to construct or deconstruct the nation, or to maintain or eradicate the distinction between first- and third-world literatures, reflect ongoing anxieties surrounding the coherence of disciplinary units and area boundaries. It is a debate fundamentally about the ethical configuration of knowledge-producers with respect to the knowledge they produce. As such, critics find themselves in the same double bind as the writers they examine. As in Kim's essay, the question becomes, what to do with difference?

In this chapter, I look to Kim Sökpöm's fiction and criticism for possible answers to this question. Kim's stories offer potential for "lines of escape"⁷ from this double bind—that is, the impulse to avoid an essentialist difference on the one hand, while resisting assimilation into bland and violent "sameness" on the other. While Kim's works of criticism directly confront this problem at a theoretical level, his fiction provides a glimpse of what one potential resolution might look like in practice. His writing is thus a productive site at which to consider some of the issues Jameson and his critics raise: not only the politics of difference, but also the more central issue of national allegory itself.

As it happens, Kim's work has frequently been read as allegory.⁸ However, his position as a Korean writer in Japan complicates any attempt to read his work through a first- versus third-world frame. As a legacy of Japan's colonization of the

Korean peninsula, Zainichi literature may occupy the position of “third-world” with respect to Japan, even as Japanese literature is in many ways itself a “third-world” literature with its own corpus of national allegories. Within this recursive structure, it is unclear what exactly a Zainichi allegory would allegorize. Whereas most allegorical readings of Kim and other Zainichi writers see them as thematizing hybrid or in-between identities, it is an open question whether that theme and its centrality are inherent in the texts or produced after the fact through their very framing as “Zainichi literature.” At least in the case of Kim Sökpöm, this kind of reading is somewhat counterintuitive in the context of the author’s explicit goal of maintaining a specifically Korean identity wholly apart from Japan.

For this reason, my approach is not so much to resist allegorical reading of Kim’s stories as it is to probe the historicity of the collective entity they are supposed to allegorize. In other words, my focus is on the nature of the “national” in Kim’s stories rather than the allegory. Over just the first half of Kim’s long career (now over sixty years), his relationship to “Korea” changed profoundly, and concomitantly so did his ways of imagining it in his texts. I argue that Kim manipulates the language available—ironically, the Japanese he so vividly describes as ravenous “pulgasari”—to create spaces to be particularly “Korean” in a way that may or may not be national, but is productively different.

KOTOBA NO JUBAKU AND THE NON-ESSENTIALIZED NATION

I will not rehearse at length the details of Jameson and Ahmad’s debate, which is by now familiar.⁹ Instead, I want to focus on the frequently reappearing question of what is meant by “nation,” and, by the same token, what constitutes a specifically “national” allegory. This question is a central pillar of Ahmad’s critique. He points out that although Jameson repeatedly and explicitly posits national allegory as the specific form of allegory inevitably produced by third-world writers, at the same time he fails to separate the category of nation from other possibilities for allegorical representation. More specifically:

Jameson insists over and over again that the *national* experience is central to the cognitive formation of the third-world intellectual and that the narrativity of that experience takes the form exclusively of a ‘national allegory,’ but this emphatic insistence on the category ‘nation’ itself keeps slipping into a much wider, far less demarcated vocabulary of ‘culture,’ ‘society,’ ‘collectivity’ and so on. Are ‘nation’ and ‘collectivity’ the same thing?¹⁰

Ahmad seems to suggest here that “nation” should be distinguished from collectivities in general, though he too does not specify precisely how. If Jameson’s usage of “nation” is fundamentally ambiguous, then in the end, so is Ahmad’s. Moreover, a similar slippage with regard to collectivities is still present in more recent

entries into the national allegory discussion, which are often much less focused on the “national.”¹¹

Even if the only kind of allegory up for consideration is specifically national, the kind of collectivity that might fall under the rubric of “national” is open to many possibilities. Of course, in its common usage today, the specificity of “nation” often arises from an implied connection with a state. But the case of Korea—and especially Koreans in Japan—shows that a nation is not simply shorthand for a nation-state. It is worth noting in the first place that the overlaps of terminology are especially difficult to sort out in Korean- and Japanese-language discourse, where the Korean word *minjok* or the Japanese *minzoku* (民族) serve as equivalent for both the English words “nation” and “ethnicity.” The words *kungmin/kokumin* (国民, the nation, the people) and *kukka/kokka* (国家, country, nation, state) also frequently stand in for “nation,” but only in contexts where a state is assumed, as they include the sinograph 国/國 (*koku/kuk*), implying sovereignty. For this reason, uses of these terms were censored during the Japanese empire’s colonization of Korea, leading to widespread use of *minjok* to refer to the colonized Korean “nation.” Even after decolonization, there is no such nation-state as “Korea,” only the two states on the divided peninsula, both laying claim to a larger Korean nation that exceeds the boundaries of their respective sovereignties.¹² If “Korea” is a nation, it is not in the *kukka* sense but only as a *minjok*.¹³

In fact, the concept of a Korean nation has been so thoroughly ethnicized that little or no effort is made to distinguish between the two, which is readily apparent in the rhetoric of Korea as ethnically homogenous (*tan’il minjok*). Meanwhile, the same belabored rhetoric is applied to Japan, where *tan’il minjok* becomes *tan’itsu minzoku* (単一民族), and the presence of the Korean minority is often one of the first points raised in its refutation. For Zainichi Koreans, “Korea” as nation or *minzoku* is that much more removed from statehood, especially for those, like Kim Sŏkpŏm, who maintain a defunct “Chōsen” nationality rather than adopting South Korean citizenship, thus remaining effectively stateless. At the same time, clinging to Korean ethnicity is not the empowering political move that it might be in a supposedly homogenous Korea, but instead serves to minoritize and oppress in the context of a supposedly homogenous Japan. In this way, if Zainichi writers like Kim wish to deploy the Korean “nation” in their work, there are obstacles to defining that nation in terms of either political sovereignty or ethnic heritage. On top of this, they may not have access to the Korean language, another commonly cited basis for the nation. This is exactly the problem that Kim grapples with in his critical endeavors.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a moment of transition for the field of Zainichi literature as second-generation writers like Ri Kaisei, Kin Kakuei, and Kim Sŏkpŏm started to come to the fore, Zainichi intellectuals debated the political implications of writing in Japanese.¹⁴ At present it may seem inevitable that

Zainichi literature should be written in Japanese. However, the language debate in the early decades of the postwar, itself a reiteration of the colonial-period debate in which Kim Saryang took part (as discussed in the previous chapter), reveals that this was not always the case, nor was the Zainichi community's framing as an ethnic minority of Japan. Both debates, then, were concerned with the specific nature of Korean difference in moments when that difference was subject to violent erasure via assimilation. Kim Sōkpōm was particularly active in the postwar iteration. From 1970 to 1972, he published many essays on the topic, which were eventually compiled into book form and published as *Kotoba no jubaku*: "Zainichi Chōsenjin bungaku" to Nihongo (*The Spellbinding of Language: "Zainichi Korean Literature" and the Japanese Language*, 1972).

In the main essay of this collection, "Gengo to jiyū," Kim starts by laying out the elements of the peculiar relationship that Zainichi Koreans have with language: namely, that while they experience Japanese as a foreign language, since it is the language of a foreign country formerly positioned as colonizing power, they also have no linguistic space outside of Japanese from which to be conscious of a distance from the Japanese language.¹⁵ These strange language politics, he argues, cannot help but affect the creative process of Zainichi writers, causing (at least in his case) no small amount of agony. He expresses a desire to have his work, which is inevitably positioned vis-à-vis Japanese(-language) literature and read by a Japanese-language audience, maintain a sort of particularity or strangeness within what he experiences as an oppressive Japanese-language frame. Kim emphasizes that this linguistic positioning of Zainichi Koreans, forced to be conscious of a "lack" of their so-called ethnic language, cannot be cut off from the history of colonialism, under which Koreans were forcefully robbed of their language and culture. Thus, he argues, the issue of language for them can never be entirely a personal one, but inevitably involves the ethnonation (*minzoku*).¹⁶

Importantly, even if this naturalized tie between language and ethnic identity is contrived, it still has the power to cause real suffering. Kim describes an intense emotional pain or even "self-hatred" at his own inability to write in Korean at a satisfactory level, or even to avoid the process of assimilation or "Japanization" of Zainichi Korean culture and literature.¹⁷ He calls this process "the spellbinding of language" (*kotoba no jubaku*),¹⁸ describing a double bind akin to the one Jameson raises in his response to Ahmad, that is, the impossibility of maintaining difference without reducing it to "otherness" when the only language available is already overdetermined by imperial history.

The key to undoing this spellbinding is what Kim describes as a process of transcending the particularity of the colonial history and postcolonial circumstances in which Zainichi Koreans are embedded and accessing the "universal" (*fuhensei*). Kim quickly stresses that this "transcending" is not tantamount to escaping or negating such particularities, and argues that in fact the experience of particularity or difference is itself a universal experience.¹⁹ It is for this reason that

Kim claims that a complete subjective consciousness is only possible for Zainichi Koreans through the becoming of a specifically Korean national subject, and it is the embrace of this national identity—not the rejection of it—that allows for a will toward the universal. Moreover, the transcendence of particularity (nationality) is not necessary for the achievement of autonomy; rather, the possibility of a turn toward the universal is, in and of itself, subjective autonomy.²⁰ In other words, rather than the universal itself, which Kim leaves vague and unproblematized in his essay, it is this orientation toward the universal that constitutes the possibility of radical Zainichi difference. As he searches for a space to occupy that escapes both the pressures of assimilation and the parochialism of national identity, the goal always remains slightly beyond his reach, just like the elusive universal. What matters is the will toward this deferred, alternative space rather than the actualization of the “universal.”

In the final section of his essay, Kim looks at the interface between the particular and the universal in the context of literary production. He makes reference to structural linguistics, and the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified in the creation of meaning. While recognizing that Korean and Japanese words differ not only at the level of signifier (particularly in terms of sound) but also at the level of signified, as even “equivalent” words will conjure up images, memories, and experiences that vary depending on the listener’s specific background, Kim draws on the translatability of languages to posit a space that is truly universal. In this universally commensurable space, the Zainichi author attains the freedom to create a specifically Korean world that exists within the boundaries of the Japanese language, while simultaneously exploding those very linguistic bounds. It is at this unreachable “universal” level, rather than the surface level of material words, that Kim calls for Koreans writing in Japanese to inscribe a “Korean flavor” (*Chōsenteki na taishū*; literally “Korean bodily odor”) into their writing to avoid being too “Japanized” by writing in Japanese.²¹

At first glance, this may appear to be an assertion of essential difference and a desire to maintain a pure and complete Korean ethnic identity. To be sure, Kim’s essay leaves the reader demanding to know what, exactly, constitutes a “Korean” flavor or the danger of a literary work being “Japanized.” Ōe Kenzaburō and Ri Kai-sei mention having these questions in a roundtable discussion with Kim printed in *Kotoba no jubaku*, but the latter refuses to answer them over and over.²² Therein lies the key to understanding Kim’s conceptualization of the Korean nation: it is not a reified entity with a set of cultural or other characteristics that can be defined and stereotyped. Rather, it is an imagined construct, deployed for the purpose of creating a space in which to articulate a specifically *non-reified* difference as an act of postcolonial resistance. In this sense, Kim Sōkpōm’s project could be productively compared to Spivak’s strategic essentialism, in that his nation is merely a tool for resisting postcolonial hegemonies.²³ Where he departs from such a strategy is in his unwillingness to actually essentialize his nation, ascribing to it no

homogenizing power. Kim's Korea is never immanent, but always elsewhere, and this gap enables the possibility of representing difference.

TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES AND THE POLITICS OF READING DIFFERENCE

In this way, Kim's grappling with language politics illuminates the underlying question in the discourse on Jameson's statement on national allegory: what can be written (or read) into a text, and by whom? Jameson's essay is less about the relative merits of national allegory than the question of what is possible for third-world authors to write in the first place. Where Jameson concludes that a first-world libidinal narrative is an impossibility for the third-world writer, Kim's question is, predictably, even more desperate: is even the national narrative Jameson describes a possibility for the Zainichi writer? In other words, is it even possible for Kim to articulate a Korean identity in any language—in language itself—much less in Japanese?

These questions highlight the specificity of Kim Sökpöm's position within Zainichi literature and the status of Zainichi literature as "third-world" without necessarily having access to a "nation" to allegorize. Kim is acknowledged as a kind of exception within the genre of Zainichi literature for writing mainly about the events of the 4.3 Incident (in which thousands of residents of Cheju-do, an island off the southern coast of the Korean peninsula, were massacred following an armed uprising to protest the 1948 elections that set up two divided Korean states) rather than about Korean characters in Japan.²⁴ The 4.3 Incident is the setting of the two major works from the early part of Kim's career, *Karasu no shi* (*Death of a Crow*, 1957) and *Mandogi yūrei kitan* (*The Curious Tale of Mandogi's Ghost*, 1970). *Karasu no shi* tells the story of Kijun, who is employed as an interpreter for the military police, but acts as a double agent, passing secrets to rebels hiding in the mountains. Meanwhile, he is in love with their leader's sister, Yangsun. The story reaches its climax when, in order to maintain his cover as a spy, Kijun must watch in silence as Yangsun and her elderly parents are killed in a mass execution. *Mandogi yūrei kitan*, on the other hand, chronicles the life of Mandogi, a "dimwitted" temple boy who unwittingly becomes involved in the uprising and is arrested by the police. He, too, is to be shot in a mass execution, but the bullet fails to kill him, and he returns as a "ghost" to wreak havoc on the authorities. Eventually, he burns down the temple he has served for so long and is seen going into the hills, presumably to join the guerrillas there in their fight.

Both novels have been read as allegories for the Zainichi experience. These readings attempt to domesticate Kim's work—to locate in his writings on Cheju-do an underlying concern with Japan or its Korean minority. Elise Foxworth, for instance, suggests that Kijun in *Karasu no shi* is representative of Koreans in Japan, who are similarly caught in a marginal or intermediary position, and

have the option of “passing” for Japanese just as the spy character must “pass” before his American employers.²⁵ Christopher Scott makes a similar argument, viewing *Mandogi yūrei kitan* as a rewriting of the 4.3 Incident into the history of Japan, rather than as a novel of Korea to be dismissed as “foreign” by its Japanese-language readership. Scott further relates the novel to Japan by once again reading Mandogi as an allegory or stand-in for resident Koreans, “focusing on the narrative representation of Mandogi’s ‘ghost’ (i.e., ghost writing) as an allegory about the identity and agency of the Zainichi Korean writer (i.e., ghostwriting).”²⁶ He summarizes his own position as follows:

Mandogi is first and foremost an allegory about the 4.3 Incident. . . . Kim has been writing about the incident in Japanese for nearly fifty years, but Japanese critics often see his work as far removed from Japan or Japanese literature. *Mandogi*, in particular, has been read as a foreign text. I, however, see *Mandogi* more in terms of its hybridity, its double-ness, or what one critic has called its “zainichi-ness.” . . . The mystery of Mandogi also haunts the narrator, who is unable—or, as I will contend, reluctant—to retell Mandogi’s story accurately or faithfully. This unreliable narrator embodies the dilemma of the zainichi Korean writer, who often feels fake or inauthentic because of living in Japan and writing in Japanese.²⁷

Through his incisive analysis, Scott is able to see the allegory operating at a higher level: not only is Mandogi’s ambiguous identity a comment on Zainichi identity, the narrator, too, stands for the Zainichi writer and his fraught position within Japanese or Japanese-language literature. In either case, the novel is rescued from its status as a “foreign text” and its “Zainichi-ness” is reasserted.

While such allegorical readings of Kim’s work are certainly productive, revealing a depth in the texts that is not readily apparent, they may run the risk of reproducing the structures of power and privilege critiqued in the context of Jameson’s original deployment of national allegory. What is especially visible in these readings of Kim is what Shu-mei Shih calls the “time lag” or “nostalgia” of allegory:

Allegory is only one kind of meaning-producing form, and it is also but one of the hermeneutical codes we can bring to the reading of texts. Clever readers can, I would suggest, interpret any text as an allegory, as long as they labor to do so. The temporal gap between the literal and the allegorical meaning of a text is then the designated field of interpretive labor. In the end, it is in the politics of allegorical interpretation as a value-producing labor—who has the privilege of doing it, who is forced to do it, who has the luxury not to do it—that the nostalgia of the First World theorist becomes legible and can be fruitfully critiqued. The time lag of allegorical meaning production in the movement from the literal to the figural evokes the belated temporality of Third World culture in modernity.²⁸

To be sure, this “interpretive labor” is highly visible in attempts to read Kim Sŏkpŏm’s Cheju-do fiction as Zainichi allegory, even where such a figurative

meaning is not obviously present. As readers labor to interpret Kim's stories in this particular way, they reproduce a narrow conception of what Zainichi literature categorically is: representative of the Zainichi experience. They participate in a circular process, in which the very coherence of the genre of "Zainichi literature" is constituted by a specifically ethnic experience, and the framework of "Zainichi literature" inscribes that same coherence of "Zainichi-ness" onto the texts within its purview.

Where these readings depart from the national allegory framework is in the entity that is ostensibly allegorized. Rather than allegories of the broader Korean nation—whatever that might entail—the collectivity that Kim cannot but represent in his stories is specifically the Korean minority in Japan. However, it is clear from his essays that Kim is not interested in espousing this kind of hybrid identity. As soon as Japan becomes part of the equation, Kim already feels a loss, able only to view his existence in Japan as a painful legacy of colonial injustices that created the Zainichi situation in the first place. Moreover, for Kim, accepting Zainichi identity is tantamount to accepting the permanent division of the Korean peninsula and the impossibility of a whole and complete Korean nation. Although Kim's position on this issue is not mainstream in the Zainichi community, it offers one potential scenario in which a minority or ethnic identity may be expressly at odds with the nation. While adopting a hybrid identity like Zainichi may be a liberatory or empowering stance in many situations, in this case at least it also runs the risk of foreclosing other potential options for identification, such as the Korean nation of Kim's imagination.

This is not to suggest that the category of Zainichi be dropped in favor of reinforcing normative national or nation-state boundaries. The Korean nation-states established on the peninsula in the wake of the Korean War have provided ample evidence that such a model is more than capable of producing oppression. In the first place, Zainichi identity is a perfectly valid option, which members of the community choose to perform in any number of diverse and empowering ways. But a non-reified nation like the one Kim sets out to create in his fiction has its own liberating potential. In fact, the thorough ethnicization of the Korean nation(s) and the Zainichi community can reproduce the same imperialist rhetoric that these groups set out to refute. The nation, carefully deployed, may offer more potential to be explicitly imaginary, to wear its unreality on its sleeve.²⁹

Thus it becomes crucial to unravel the Zainichi community's contingent transformation from displaced or exiled members of a Korean nation at large to a minoritized ethnic group, defined always within and with respect to Japan. This brings us back to one more potential problem with reading *Karasu no shi* and *Mandogi yūrei kitan* through the same lens of Zainichi allegory: its ahistoricity. That is to say, "Korea" (not to mention "Zainichi") simply did not mean the same thing to Kim when he debuted with *Karasu no shi* in the late 1950s that it did during his re-entry into the Japanese-language literary scene with *Mandogi yūrei kitan*

in the early 1970s. Over this decade-plus, during which Kim Sökpö̃m attempted and abandoned a writing career in the Korean language, the “Korea” that acted as the binding force for the coherence of the Zainichi community underwent a shift from nation to ethnicity, and in a parallel process, the collective itself shifted from one of exile to one of minority—where “exile” is understood as emphasizing physical displacement from the real or imagined space of a nation, and “minority” as emphasizing the hereditary difference of ethnicity. These shifts took place due to a range of Cold War political factors and in parallel with postwar struggles to disavow the colonial past in both Koreas and Japan,³⁰ but most illuminating for our purposes here is the shifting politics of language.

Kim Sökpö̃m’s early career in particular demonstrates that authors like himself, who would eventually be called Zainichi, were not always so isolated, linguistically and otherwise, from the Korean peninsula, especially in the first decades following the end of World War II and the collapse of the Japanese empire. It was only later, toward the 1970s, that Zainichi literature became codified as a minority literature of Japan. Kim’s fiction and essays reveal the situation to be more fluid and complex in the early postwar years, and they shift in response to political changes and new understandings of the position of Koreans in Japan. In Kim’s novels, we can see the manifold ways that the politics of language are intertwined in Kim’s struggle to enunciate a liberating Korean identity in response to what he sees as a deepening crisis of assimilation.

BEING AS RESISTANCE: KOREA(N) IN THE SPACE OF JAPAN(ESE)

This deepening sense of crisis, as Kim Sökpö̃m perceived his choices as Zainichi Korean narrowing to assimilation and minoritized difference, manifests itself in the struggles encountered by the characters in *Karasu no shi* and *Mandogi yūrei kitan*. The ethnicization of Zainichi Koreans is readily apparent in the gap between the positions of Kijun and Mandogi, the protagonists of the two novels. As noted above, both men occupy a tenuous or ambiguous position that can be likened to that of the Zainichi community in general (with the above caveats about allegory in mind). However, the specific circumstances in which these characters find themselves differ significantly in a way that corresponds to differences in the political conditions of the novels’ respective historical moments.

In *Karasu no shi*, Kijun’s lack of power arises, counterintuitively, from his role as a spy. In fact, much of the drama in the novel turns on this irony: even as Kijun’s spying places him in a dynamic position, allowing him movement across languages and spaces, its pressures in turn impose restrictions on his speech and actions. His indispensability as a double agent forces him to place the needs of the party before his own, and results over and over in his inability to say or do what he wishes. Though he is loyal to the cause of the partisans, led by his dear friend

Chang Yongsök, Kijun at one point grumbles to himself, “Ah, I want to be freed from this mute-like existence, and I too want to pick up a gun and fight with all my heart like him,”³¹ emphasizing his “mute-like” silence as the symbol of his lack of freedom as a spy. The novel follows Kijun through increasingly difficult moments of forced silence, culminating when he must watch, without revealing his inner anguish or compassion, as Chang’s family is massacred by his employers.

The novel brings home the tragic irony of Kijun’s position in a scene in which he is confronted by Yi Sanggün, the dissipated son of a wealthy islander, who suspects that Kijun is a spy. Sanggün taunts Kijun by mentioning that he is thinking of becoming a spy and elaborating on how liberated and powerful spies must be. Being aligned with neither side of the conflict, he says, is real power: “My actions have nothing to do with either of them, and in that way, I’m free. It must be the same way for a spy” (90). Kijun’s only option is to respond vaguely lest he reveal too much, but his inner monologue is narrated as follows:

Yi Sanggün could know nothing of the nebulous world of the spy. He could know nothing of that dark part of your mind . . . where you struggled with an unseen tension, constantly wracked with horror by a sense of yourself as a tiny hero and then a demon. Kijun was barely able to suppress his voice, rising sickly sweet in his throat to say, ‘You know, real spying isn’t like that at all’ (91).

Again, Kijun finds himself unable to speak his mind, reprising the very powerlessness he faces as a spy. However, at every turn, including this climactic scene, Kijun’s silence is ultimately voluntary. The powerlessness, silencing, and marginalization that he experiences are, in the end, the result of a political position he has chosen for himself, whereas in *Mandogi yūrei kitan*, Mandogi’s very birth is seized upon to subject him to ridicule and exclusion.

In the first place, Mandogi is intellectually disabled, frequently addressed by characters in the novel simply as “dimwit” (*usunoro*) or “stupid” (*baka*). If Kijun suffers from an excess of linguistic ability, doomed to spying by his knowledge of English, Korean, and presumably Japanese, then Mandogi certainly lies at the opposite end of the spectrum. The narrative specifies more than once that Mandogi does not “understand a word of Japanese,”³² and his Korean (uncannily represented in Japanese) seems somewhat limited, with Mother Seoul, his abusive mother figure at the temple, once exclaiming that she thought he was mute (32). Mandogi’s biological mother is also described as “nearly mute” (15), suggesting that Mandogi’s own impairment is hereditary. This word “mute” (啞, *oshi*) is the same that Kijun uses to lament his obligatory silence in *Karasu no shi*, but in the case of Mandogi, that silence is embodied. The linguistic impossibilities faced by Mandogi are no longer a matter of choice or even the illusion of choice, but instead are inscribed on his body and obliquely attributed to heritage. If Mandogi is to be read as an allegorical Zainichi figure, he is a thoroughly ethnicized one.

Mandogi is also marginalized in other ways by the circumstances of his birth, namely his lack of official parentage or place of origin. As the novel explains in its very first pages, Mandogi was dropped off at a temple as a small child by his mother. Mandogi's father is given no name, ethnicity, or other identifying markers, and is described only as having appeared one day at the Osaka temple where his mother was employed, eventually raping her in a closet. Mandogi's "identity," then, at least in terms of ethnic or social origins, is completely ambiguous. This alienates Mandogi not only at the affective level, but also at an official level, as it excludes him from the *koseki* family register system. Nonetheless, just as Kijun's "power" as a spy turns against him, Mandogi's marginalization is flipped around, becoming a disruption for the systems of power he encounters. For instance, the novel opens with a discussion of Mandogi's namelessness and mysterious origins, but quickly hints that this may be more of a problem for the police than for Mandogi himself.

He had been nameless since birth, with no family register, so when he was asked for his name, age, parents' names, and permanent residence, he didn't have a good answer. This kind of person, the kind without any distinguishing data, became a nuisance for the draft officials making the lists. The vagabonds with no addresses were no problem, as they could be arrested and sent straight to the work camps, but those without definite birth dates, and especially those without definite names, were even difficult to put on the draft list (11).

Whenever Mandogi encounters bureaucracy, on the occasion of his conscription into forced labor at a Hokkaido mine or his arrest in the middle of the 4.3 Incident, his lack of "data" up to and including his name becomes a kind of guerrilla tactic. Later, after Mandogi's botched execution, his continued actions after his disappearance from all records create an even graver problem for the police. As a "ghost," Mandogi's marginal status is *disembodied*, which renders him impossible to control. Eventually, Mandogi burns down the temple headquarters and goes up the mountain to join the resistance, all made possible by his reduction (elevation?) to a non-entity. Even as Mandogi is thrown into greater crisis, he is able to maneuver into a position of resistance.

The same type of reaction to crisis can be seen at the stylistic level in the bilingual play that Kim includes in both novels. The hybrid nature of the language in these texts could itself be seen as a representation of sorts of the Zainichi experience, the caught-between positionality that is so often supposed to define what it is to be Zainichi and to write Zainichi literature. Indeed, the insertion of Korean words into the Japanese text, the non-standard glosses of Japanese words, and other moments of heteroglossia in Kim's texts locate them within a genealogy of linguistically hybrid literature going back to the Japanese empire.³³ However, the uncanniness of the language in Kim's texts goes beyond a simple admixture of Korean and Japanese, and instead radically challenges the spatial consistency of those languages. Kim fights in the texts against the "spellbinding of language," and

works to destroy the Japanese language, along with its ethnic logic, from the inside out. Although this labor is evident in both *Karasu no shi* and *Mandogi yūrei kitan*, a closer examination reveals different strategies in play between the two novels according to the language politics of the moment.

The complicated language that Kim employs in *Karasu no shi* reflects the ongoing complexity of the linguistic environment into which it was published in 1957. On one hand, the work is clearly intended for a Japanese audience, and it includes explanatory notes for Korean concepts and objects that may be unfamiliar. For instance, Kim uses the word *paji* for traditional Korean trousers, and includes a note explaining that they resemble Japanese *monpe* pants (45). On the other hand, he peppers his Japanese with Korean place and personal names, all glossed with katakana, a practice that serves as a constant reminder that the story is somewhat removed from Japan and assumes a certain knowledge of the Korean peninsula. In other cases, he glosses a known character with a phonetic representation of a Korean word. For example, in dialogue, Kim uses the character for “red” to indicate the communists, but he glosses it with the katakana *barugan’i* for the Korean *ppalgaeng’i* (commie): バーガンイ (40). This device adds little to the understanding of readers who do not already know the Korean word in question, beyond the simple reminder that the speech is taking place in Korean. In the most extreme case, it may even slow down a monolingual reader, who must supply the meaning for the gloss. For the bilingual reader, however, it points to a more colorful term than the “red” of the main text. At some level, then, the novel is intended for or at least offers a richer textual experience to bilingual readers.

One of the most interesting examples of this kind of playful or disruptive linguistic practice comes from a work published just months before *Karasu no shi*, Kim’s earliest attempt to fictionalize the history of the 4.3 Incident: “Kansha Paku-soban” (“Pak-sōbang, Jailer,” 1957).³⁴ A prisoner insults the title character’s pock-marked face by calling him *nassumikan*, referring to a citrus fruit with a rough, lumpy rind. In Japanese, the fruit is called *natsu mikan*, the closest Korean phonetic approximation of which is *nassū mikan*. What appears in the story, *nassumikan* in Japanese katakana, is a Japanese approximation of the Korean approximation of the original Japanese. Kim draws extra attention to these layered contortions within the plot of the story, as Pak is initially confused by the word and consults an acquaintance about its meaning and origins, suspecting it to be a word from the Cheju dialect. He tells his friend, Chin, that he has heard people saying that Chin’s face looks like a *nassumikan*, distancing himself from the insult, and asks if he has any clue what it means. This leads to a humorous scene in which the two puzzle over the meaning of the word with similar *mikan* fruit literally right in front of their noses. Eventually one of the local government officials who was educated in Japan stops by and solves the mystery, explains that a *nassumikan* is a Japanese word, and adding that “oddly enough, Pak-sōbang’s face looks just like one” (13). Again, the linguistic play in this scene is certainly not confusing enough

to leave readers with only the Japanese language out of the joke, but those who can hear the Korean pronunciation behind the Japanese representation of the word spot right away the source of Pak's confusion, and get to enjoy an additional layer of ironic humor. Though this kind of bilingual text may seem inscrutable decades later in the absence of a substantial Korean-Japanese bilingual readership, at the time there were plenty of readers who would have fully appreciated it.

In *Mandogi yūrei kitan*, however, rather than assuming a bilingual audience, Kim writes largely for readers, both Korean and Japanese, who have little or no familiarity with the Korean language. This is not to say that *Mandogi yūrei kitan* contains none of the linguistic complexity and playfulness of earlier works like *Karasu no shi* and “Kansha Paku-soban.” Kim still includes many Korean words in the text, but rather than inserting Korean by glossing standard Japanese words or compounds with phonetic Korean readings, Kim uses unfamiliar compounds of Chinese characters that stretch the boundaries of Japanese. For example, Kim repeatedly refers to Mandogi's fate using a four-character compound (四柱八字 ^{ヨシチュハツ}) found in Korean but not Japanese, sometimes glossed in katakana as *saju parucha* for the Korean *saju p'alja*, and elsewhere glossed in hiragana as the Japanese word *unmei* (fate) (12–13).

If the insertion of Korean into earlier works seems almost like a game, simply providing additional layers of meaning and humor for an assumed audience of bilingual readers, then the device at work here betrays a greater sense of crisis. Whereas before both reader and writer could be comfortable in the existence of a linguistic space outside the range of either Korean or Japanese ideological monolingualism, now Kim seems to be desperately trying to create such a space, to push back against the bounds of a language that suddenly feels oppressively Japanese. He is attempting to teach a Korean word to his readership, in a way; and indeed, on numerous other occasions in the novel, he goes out of his way to provide extensive definitions and notes on Korean words that appear in his text, sometimes in long, awkward parentheticals, and other times digressing for paragraphs at a time in the narrative itself. Now one senses the author in battle with the Japanese language. Kim's greatest weapon in this battle with Nihongo is the potential of these linguistic acrobatics to create the new, imaginary space that he seeks as other potential spaces of identity close off around him. He plays with the visual and oral elements of text in a way that violates the boundaries of the Japanese and Korean languages, occupying the always particular “universal” space of literature that Kim refers to in “Gengo to jiyū.”

If we return to *Karasu no shi* with this line of thinking in mind, we can see how Kim creates a “Korea” in his work that is liberated from claims to authenticity or truth. This freedom arises as the text draws attention to its own uncanniness by never allowing the reader to forget that what is being represented in Japanese is Korean speech in a Korean setting. Nearly all of the character and place names in the work are glossed with katakana representing the Korean pronunciations of

the names, such that the sense of place in the novel is tightly tied to the sounds of the Korean language. But the more interesting device is the insertion of Korean glosses into the spoken lines of the characters themselves.

For instance, in one scene in *Karasu no shi*, two minor characters have the following brief exchange:

「へへへっ、おてんとさんもちと情^{じょう}がねえな、たまにあおらでも洋煙草^{ヤンナム ペー}を
ふかすんでさあ. . . いっひひひ」
「ははっ、令監^{ヨンガム}（爺い）」

‘Heh heh heh. The sun, he’s a bit of bastard, eh? Sometimes even I smoke the *yang-dambae* [Western cigarettes], y’know. Ee hee hee hee.’

‘Ha ha, *yōnggam* (*jijii*) [old man].’ (54)

This brief dialogue embodies the many facets of the language play present in the novel. First, the *furigana* Japanese gloss of the word *jō* (情^{じょう}), the contractions and elisions of sounds (“tama ni wa” pronounced as “tama ni a,” for example), and the phonetic representations of laughter lend an overall oral quality to the lines, causing the reader to hear them rather than just reading or seeing them, even as the parenthetical gloss of *jijii* (爺い, old man) indicating the meaning of the Korean word *yōnggam* (令監^{ヨンガム}) interferes with this mode of reading by adding untransmittable, strictly visual or semantic information. But then, the Korean *furigana* glosses have the potential to cause the reader not just to hear the words of this conversation, but to hear them in Korean. If the creation of a Korean space within a Japanese-language work of fiction is the definition of “Korean flavor,” then *Karasu no shi* can clearly be seen as a successful implementation of this “flavor.”

In the end, however, we are forced to remember that the Korean space and Korean sounds created in the novel are nothing more than fiction. Even if the Japanese text of the novel represents in reality an audible Korean language, ultimately that “reality” is not actually real. But what is crucial here is not that these Korean sounds do not exist, but that even in their utter emptiness they have the power to destabilize the imposing presence of the Japanese language and to open up new possibilities within it. In the same way, it is precisely the fundamental incoherence and unreality of the Korean “nation” of Kim’s imagination that allows it to become a weapon against assimilation and the erosion of productive difference. The “Korea” that Kim posits in the tension between the orality and visuality of the words on the page has radical potential as a space of escape from the “spellbinding of language.”

Kim pushes this space further in *Mandogi yūrei kitan*. Its narrator has a much more oral storyteller quality; the long, sometimes rambling paragraphs, rhetorical questions, and speculative sentence endings create a character within the narrating voice itself, and its indirect style of quotation that foregoes quotation marks blends characters’ voices directly into the narrative. This style makes it difficult to parse

whether characters have actually “said” their quoted lines, adding another layer of ambiguity to that arising from the translated nature of the dialogue, which, as in *Karasu no shi*, must have occurred initially in “Korean.” Even in the absence of quotation marks, however, the dialogue retains a direct quality due to its marked orality. Or, interpreted another way, the dialogue is indirect, but reported with a high degree of oral flavor by the narrator—either way, it goes out of its way to report sound, not just meaning, to the reader.

As in *Karasu no shi*, this “oral” Japanese paradoxically creates the imaginary space in which the reader can “hear” the Korean sound of the dialogue even as it stands in for and covers over that “original” Korean in its position as pseudo-translation. At certain moments in *Mandogi yūrei kitan*, however, the two languages seem to come into competition with each other for primacy. In one such moment, Mandogi is calling out for Mother Seoul as he chases her down the mountain: “ソウルぼさつまァ！ (*Souru bosatsu samaa*)” (30). The lengthened vowel at the end of his exclamation emphasizes that this is spoken language, directly quoted even if not punctuated as such. Mandogi then discovers that at some point he has switched to shouting for his mother: “おっ母さん (*Okkasan/Ömöni*)” (30). If Kim is assuming a generally monolingual Japanese-language reader, the “ömöni” (omoni) gloss can only be there to offer the Korean word as a potential or prescriptive phonetic reading of the characters “おっ母さん.” However, this puts the original (?) Japanese word in a peculiar position, because “okkasan” depends on its own orality to distinguish it from the more neutral “okaasan” for “mother.” That is, if we assume a sort of division of labor between the “Japanese” and “Korean” words in the dialogue, wherein the Japanese represents the translated meaning of the characters’ speech and the Korean sounds reflect the actual linguistic environment of the story’s reality, then that logic necessarily breaks down here. The Japanese “okkasan” clearly takes on a phonetic role in addition to its primarily semantic role, just as the Korean “omoni” gloss influences the reading at the level of the meaning in addition to sound. Not only does this situation exemplify the inseparability of sound from meaning—signifier from signified—in a linguistic sign, it also locks the Japanese main text in dialectic with its Korean rubrics, an unresolvable conflict over which is the “original” and which is “translated.”

The most enticing example of this kind of device, however, is Mandogi’s name itself. Kim invites a careful consideration of the function and composition of Mandogi’s name by discussing it frequently and at length, including the very opening of the novel, which explains that Mandogi is simultaneously “nameless” and has many not-quite-names, including “dimwit,” “temple boy,” and “Keiton” (Korean “kaetiong,” glossed as 犬糞 “dog shit” in the text). At one time the narrator notes that the main utility of Mandogi’s name is as an audible signal (*oto no shirushi*) to come when he is called (10), and the pronunciation of his name is very much at issue when his name is changed in a reference to *sōshi kaimei*, the imperial policy under which many Koreans were forced to adopt Japanese names:

そのとき「一郎」という日本式の名を「万徳」という名の下にくっつけて、つまり名である「万徳」を姓に変えて当局は、万徳一郎^{まん とく いちろう}という妙な名前を付けた。ところが万徳はまるっきり日本語を解さない。わっしは万徳一郎ではない。それは自分の名前ではない。自分の名前はマントクではなく、法名といってマンドギの「万徳」なんだと、漢字のその二文字を、わざわざ紙を置いて、鉛筆を舐め舐め、ていねいに書いて見せる。

At the time, the officials attached the Japanese given name 'Ichirō' to the name 'Mandogi,' making his given name 'Mandogi' into his surname, and they gave him the strange name 'Mantoku Ichirō.' But Mandogi couldn't understand a word of Japanese. 'I ain't Mantoku Ichirō. That's not my name. My name's not Mantoku, but the priest's name, "Man . . . dogi."' Licking the pencil, he painstakingly wrote down the two Chinese characters and showed the page to the official (11).

Invoking the memory of *sōshi kaimei*, Kim is able to show how essential the pronunciation of a name is to someone like Mandogi. Even if the characters remain the same between "Mantoku" and "Mandogi," they are, in both political and affective senses, completely different names—different identities, perhaps. At the same time, because it exists in a written medium, strictly speaking, Mandogi's name is represented (or exists) only as a visual sign. Though it occasionally appears in katakana, in almost every instance it appears only in sinographs, which, as is demonstrated in this very early scene, contain the potential for "misreading." Indeed, Kim plays with this potential by very selectively glossing the name. It is glossed in its first appearance in the text, but thereafter almost exclusively in instances where it is spoken aloud. Considering the fact that Kim glosses frequently-used Korean words like "kongyangju" and "Halla-san" in nearly every single appearance, it is possible that he leaves the characters in Mandogi's name without gloss specifically to emphasize the multifarious possibilities for its reading.

To further complicate the matter, it should be pointed out that "Mandogi" is not a possible Korean reading for the characters 万徳, which would be read "Mandōk." "Mandogi" is the product of the addition of a diminutive suffix "i," which can be added to names ending in consonants, in this case causing the preceding consonant to be voiced. In Korean hangŭl, this looks like: 만덕 (Mandōk) + 이 (i), 만덕이 (Mandōgi). In katakana, on the other hand, the final consonant of the Korean reading of the Chinese characters gets attached to the vowel sound in the diminutive suffix and represented in a single character: マンドギ (ma-n-do-gi). The katakana gloss is not simply representative of the Korean pronunciation of Mandogi's characters, then. Not only does the gloss overload the characters with more than their reading would produce in Korean, it creates a wholly new name in the process, one that would not be possible in normative Korean or Japanese.

Whereas *Karasu no shi* posits an imaginary Korean space that manages to escape the pressures of assimilation, *Mandogi yūrei kitan* offers not only the space but the possibility of a being or non-being that occupies that space. Mandogi, even

before he takes on his “ghostly” form, is never quite present in the text. There is always an element of Mandogi that is deferred to another plane, but never wholly absent either. In a sense, this is the source of Mandogi’s marginalization: just as his lack of proper name, birth, heritage, and *koseki* prevent him from enjoying complete “existence,” disenfranchising him with respect to the various systems in which he is embedded, the uncanny representation of his name, which can never be fully accommodated by the system of language in which it is embedded, makes it a non-name—yet one more way in which Mandogi, with his surplus of names, is nameless. Nevertheless, just as Mandogi’s “ghost” lives, and through his very existence as a non-entity comes to disrupt the political system that seeks to kill him in the first place, Mandogi’s name, as a non-name, haunts the Japanese language without retreating to an equally “spellbinding” Korean. What begins as marginality, in the unique space created by the text, can become empowerment: a radical mode of being or becoming *in* a space of non-existence.

. . .

I return now to Kim Sŏkpŏm’s utilization of the pulgasari in his illustration of the problem of the “spellbinding of language.” The image of an otherworldly ravenous beast allows Kim to vividly describe the sense of crisis imposed by the Japanese language and the colonial and postcolonial conditions that made Japanese the only linguistic space available to Kim as a writer. However, from this position of vulnerability, Kim himself sets out to be the pulgasari, to somehow take back the upper hand despite having already been completely devoured. As with Mandogi, who can pick up a weapon and fight back only after he is “killed,” it is from the moment of greatest crisis that Kim qua pulgasari can explode the system from within.

Yet the passage quoted at the outset also offers a more subtle clue as to how that escape might take place. Within the first mention of the pulgasari is a strangeness that hints at the radical space of difference that Mandogi comes to occupy. “In Chosŏn there is a strange-looking imaginary creature called a ‘pulgasari.’” In other words, a creature that explicitly does not exist still manages to be “in” Korea without ever being at all. It is in this imaginary but still particularly Korean “space” that a radical, productive difference—ever elusive—may be located.

This radical difference is the key to unraveling the double binds that trouble both the aftermath of Jameson’s thesis on third-world literature and the discourse surrounding Zainichi literature. The debate over national allegory struggles to treat the “first” and “third” worlds as at once commensurable and historically different, whereas Zainichi writers struggle to maintain an unassimilated particularity within the Japanese language and culture without embodying the essentialized difference that created Korea as ethnic other in the first place. What is needed in both cases is an empowering sense of difference that operates outside the bounds of the (post)imperial hierarchies that simultaneously subsume particularities

while maintaining inequity. The imaginary space produced in literary text offers the ground on which to build this unruly sense of difference.

What makes Kim Sökpöm's literary project particularly radical is that the Korean space he produces ironically depends on the Japanese language in order to come into existence. With only the language of the colonizer available, the violent reification and exclusion of difference has already been carried out. Nevertheless, Kim is able to create imagined, non-reified difference in the moments of unresolvable dissonance—incoherence, perhaps—embedded in his hybrid text. By radically representing Korea(n) in Japan(ese), Kim suggests a path outside the overdetermined mode of national allegory and a potential escape from the incoherent constraints that bind the third-world writer.