This chapter focuses on a body of texts historically marginalized in modern Korean literary studies: Zainichi literature, or the literary production of the Korean diaspora in Japan. Nonetheless, I begin with a question that is central rather than marginal to the field as a whole. Namely, what counts as modern Korean literature? This question or its counterpart—what counts as modern Japanese literature?—implicitly underpins much of the discourse on Zainichi literature, situated at the intersection of two national literary traditions. Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to say that the field of Zainichi literature is driven by this question of national identity, specifically through the lens of its own ambiguous positionality. However, my purpose here is to argue that the same can be said of modern Korean literature more generally. In this way, Zainichi literature offers a powerful lens for parsing the fundamental question of where—or when—modern Korean literature itself begins and ends.

Leaving aside questions of the “modern” or the “literary” for the time being, even the question of what is “Korean” about modern Korean literature is ideologically fraught. One standard, if rather dated, answer arises from the national literature model that has been the basis for area studies in the United States, including Korean studies. This ethnocentric narrative sees the boundaries of Korean literature as self-evident, maintaining that Korean literature is literature written by and for the Korean people, in the Korean language, and encapsulating a unique and immutable Korean cultural essence. Even from an anti-imperialist nationalist position, in which the essentialism of this narrative is deployed strategically rather than adopted unreflexively, the Korean (ethno)nation and its links to a particular ethnic language remain paramount. The notion of Korean ethnic or cultural essentialism has been so dominant in area studies for so long that even today, when it is nearly universally rejected, its validity (or lack thereof) remains a topic of discussion.

More recently, however, critics of area studies and nationalist narratives have questioned the whole project of positively defining Korean literature while attending to the global and transnational flows of literature and culture across the boundaries of a necessarily dynamic, historically contingent “Korea.” This transnational turn coincides with increased interest in Zainichi literature in the rubric of modern Korean literary studies, particularly in the past decade. Before
this wave of Korean-language scholarship, Zainichi writers and texts typically fell in the pur-
view of Japanese studies, wherein Zainichi studies gained a degree of recognition during the 
reign of “multiculturalism” as the critical buzzword of the 1990s.2 Whereas the foregrounding
of Zainichi (minority) culture in Japan undercuts the myth of the homogenous nation-state by
acknowledging the presence of others within, the view of Zainichi culture from the Korean per-
spective is filtered through lenses of migration and diaspora, perhaps performing a similar myth-
busting function but in a necessarily more transnational manner than that of a multiculturalist
framework. In either case, inquiries into the placement of Zainichi literature within the respec-
tive national literature frameworks vexes the question of where Korea ends and Japan begins.

However, it is not only national or cultural boundaries that Zainichi literary studies has the
potential to trouble. I argue in this chapter that Zainichi literature can draw critical attention to
the temporal as well as national parameters for modern Korean literature. Colonial Korean writ-
ers in Japan shared with writers on the peninsula a perception of their own literature as abjectly
“behind” that of Japan and the West. This internalized sense of immaturity and illegitimacy
persisted into the postwar period, though more conspicuously in the case of Zainichi writers. In
this way, integrating Zainichi literature into the field of modern Korean literary studies places
greater emphasis on the shared postcoloniality of Korean literature both on the peninsula and
in the diaspora, and it suggests alternate possibilities for Korean literature’s postwar trajectory.
I must stress, then, that it is not so much shared ethnicity as shared history that makes Zainichi
studies salient to the question of modern Korean literature as a whole.

In the remainder of the chapter, I offer a brief discussion of Zainichi literary history and its
intersections with peninsular and Japanese historical narratives and then discuss the critical writ-
ings of three Korean authors active in Japan during the transition from the late colonial period
to the early years of the postwar period, when the community we now call Zainichi began to
emerge: Kim Saryang (1914–50?), Chang Hyŏkchu (1905–97; later Noguchi Minoru), and Kim
Talsu (1919–97). I argue that their diverging paths in the postcolonial liberation space illustrate
a variety of alternate futures for colonial-period Korean literature that have been disavowed by
Cold War South Korean literary history. These postcolonial futures offer us a more-nuanced
understanding of the origins of modern Korean literature under the conditions of a multiling-
gual, multiethnic empire.

Zainichi: postcolonial, prepositional

The standard narrative of the origins of the Zainichi community is a testament to the impos-
sibility of disentangling modern Japanese and Korean histories. The term *Zainichi*, which litera-
ly denotes nothing more than “in Japan,” has connotations much more historically particular than
its common translation as “Koreans in Japan”3 would suggest. The term refers in most cases to
the “oldcomers” among the Korean population in Japan, those who migrated (or were forced
to migrate) to Japan during the period of its colonization of the Korean Peninsula (1910–45)
and to those who fled to Japan shortly thereafter, in the turmoil leading up to and including the
Korean War (1950–3). Zainichi Koreans disproportionately trace their origins to Cheju Island,
in many cases to the refugees of the 4.3 Incident. The 4.3 Incident, which was taboo in South
Korea until the 1990s and was thus narrated by Koreans in Japan to the extent that it was nar-
rated at all, refers to the eruption of violence on Cheju Island starting on April 3, 1948, when
armed guerrillas attacked police stations, killing several officers, possibly in retaliation for the
shooting of peaceful protestors demonstrating against the establishment of divided states on
the peninsula. With the backing of the US Military, the police and right-wing vigilante groups
violently crushed the rebellion, resulting in 14,000–30,000 casualties.4
This Zainichi connection to colonialism and the not-so-cold violence of the Cold War era is not merely ancestral, however. Even today, the politics of citizenship and belonging for Koreans in Japan reflect the Cold War conditions under which the Japanese Empire was dismantled and the newly “liberated” Korean Peninsula divided. Upon the 1952 signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, which formalized Japanese defeat in World War II, formerly colonized people remaining in Japan lost their Japanese citizenship. Ethnic Koreans in this group became effectively stateless, their nationality designated as Chōsen (Korea), which no longer existed as such due to the establishment of separate states on the peninsula. Until 1965, when Japan normalized diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea (South Korea), these individuals had essentially no viable path to citizenship. In fact, some remain stateless to this day, opting to maintain the Chōsen designation rather than opting for Kankoku (South Korean) citizenship or, as is becoming more popular with younger generations of Zainichi Koreans, naturalizing as Japanese citizens.

The logic of these various affiliation decisions gets at one of the central and ongoing debates in the Zainichi community concerning its positionality vis-à-vis the Koreas and Japan. Naturalization and assimilation clearly come with practical benefits for Koreans—particularly second-generation and younger—for whom Japanese society is the only home they have ever known. South Korean citizenship brings its own set of benefits, though obviously through the conduit of the South Korean state, which has only recently been in a position to offer much support to its citizens in diaspora. This was especially true for Koreans in Japan, where North Korean state support was much more forthcoming, at least until the collapse of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, perhaps the most quintessentially Zainichi members of the community are those who have opted to forego these benefits and maintain the stateless Chōsen designation. As one such member, Kim Sŏkpon, wrote in an open letter to his fellow second-generation writer Ri Kaisei on the occasion of the latter’s adoption of South Korean citizenship in 1998, the Chōsen nationality allows the Zainichi community to maintain ties to a unified Korea of the past, even as the possibility of such a Korea in the future has faded from vision. This designation, along with continued use of the Korean language, particularly through textual heteroglossia in the case of Zainichi writers, is one avenue for refusing to surrender to the arc of assimilation, which began to bend under the conditions of colonialism and has continued inexorably for the Zainichi community ever since. Debates over the relative justice of inclusion in Japanese society, perhaps at the cost of assimilation into the same, versus maintaining strong affective and political ties to one of the Korean states or the imaginarily unified Chōsen, versus the embrace of in-betweenness, hybridity, or an alternative mode of self-identification, make up the core questions of Zainichi studies, literary or otherwise.

This raises the question, then, whether including Zainichi literature under the umbrella of modern Korean literary studies reinforces the very ethnocentric logic of Korean literature as the literary production of the Korean people (regardless of the diverse geopolitical spaces that they occupy) that the transnational turn has sought to override. The problem of the (ethno)national literature model is not solved simply by expanding its boundaries to include writing in diaspora. If the consideration of Zainichi literature is to contribute to a better understanding of modern Korean literature, then it must be more than merely a reminder that Korean literature exists outside of the peninsula. In other words, just as the assimilation of Zainichi literature into the broader category of Japanese literature is not necessarily an improvement over the status quo, the mere inclusion of Zainichi literature within the rubric of modern Korean literature does little to productively destabilize the latter.

Rather, Zainichi literature is fruitful to consider as a part of Korean literature only insofar as it forces scholarly self-consciousness about literary categorization writ large, serving as a
constant reminder that the answer to the question “what is modern Korean literature?” is not self-evident. Moreover, Zainichi literature, at least when placed at the center rather than on the margins of Korean literary studies, illustrates the peculiar temporality in which “modern Korean literature” is and has always been embedded. We might term this temporality *postcoloniality*. The usage of the term here is paradoxical, because it applies to times both before and after the end of formal colonization of the Korean Peninsula, but then, this is certainly not unique to the Korean situation. As Anne McClintock and other critics of postcolonial discourse have observed, the postcolonial is by nature a paradoxical time that is always already after colonialism but never beyond it. Decolonizing nations across the globe continue struggling to dismantle imperial power structures well into their ostensibly “postcolonial” histories. In many cases, including that of the Korean Peninsula, formal colonization has been replaced with military occupation and other forms of subjugation—imperialism by any other name. Postcolonial time remains untenable as long as colonial time is not yet over.

However, perhaps the most vexing conundrum of postcolonial time arises from its prepositionality. Its prepositional relationship to colonialism has the totalizing effect of re-centering colonial power even in postcolonial narratives. McClintock writes,

> The “post-colonial scene” occurs in an entranced suspension of history, as if the definitive historical events have preceded us, and are not now in the making. If the theory promises a decentering of history in hybridity, syncreticism, multi-dimensional time, and so forth, the singularity of the term effects a re-centering of global history around the single rubric of European time. Colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance. The word “post,” moreover, reduces the cultures of peoples beyond colonialism to prepositional time. The term confers on colonialism the prestige of history proper; colonialism is the determining marker of history. Other cultures share only a chronological, prepositional relation to a Euro-centered epoch that is over (post-), or not yet begun (pre-).

In other words, postcolonial theory inadvertently flattens out the differences among the non-European entities that it attempts to bring under its umbrella. Furthermore, this totalization has the effect of reinforcing the West as the driver of world history, with all the “others” positioned with respect to the Euro-American center. The case of Korean postcolonialism is emblematic of McClintock’s positing of postcolonial history as never quite “post” colonialism, since the “end” of colonialism on the Korean Peninsula coincided with the beginning of American and Soviet neocolonial occupation. On the other hand, the colonial power that they supplanted was non-European, complicating the notion of postcolonialism as subordinately defined in relation to a monolithic Eurocentric colonial *history proper*. This always-triangulated and paradoxical relationship of the Korean modern to Eurocentric notions of modernity and history via Japan makes Zainichi literature central to the question of what modern Korean literature is—particularly when it begins and what its future holds. The peculiar prepositional time of the Zainichi helps us to tease out the temporal contradictions of the notion of modern Korean literature: not only the tensions embedded in the notion of modernity itself but also the temporal inconsistencies of the ethnic, national, and linguistic logics that go into establishing the boundaries of Korean literature specifically.

It is worth asking, then, when does Zainichi literature begin? Despite the fundamental nature of this question, there is little agreement on its answer. This ambiguity belies broader anxieties concerning the boundaries of Zainichi literature, temporal and otherwise, so often assumed to be self-evident. For instance, collected works of Zainichi literature in both Japanese and English
include writing from the period of Japan’s colonization of Korea, specifically works by Kim Saryang and Chang Hyŏkchu, the two most prominent Korean fiction writers as recognized by the Japanese-language literary establishment. At the same time, while recognizing the importance of the colonial period to understanding the history of Zainichi Koreans in postwar Japan, many scholars explicitly locate these writers before the emergence of Zainichi literature proper. John Lie states rather definitively, “there was nothing approaching Zainichi identity in the pre-war period.” Kawamura Minato describes Kim Saryang and Chang Hyŏkchu as precursors to Zainichi literature, better categorized as “ethnic literature” (minzoku bungaku) or “colonial literature” (shokuminchi bungaku), and argues that by this logic, “Zainichi Korean literature cannot be said to start with Chang Hyŏkchu, nor Kim Saryang, but rather Kim Talsu.” Despite this evident concern for establishing the contours of Zainichi literary history, a more recent intervention, Song Hyewŏn’s “Zainichi Chŏsenjin bungaku shi” no tame ni (Toward a “History of Zainichi Korean Literature”), rests on the premise that a proper history has yet to be written, arguing that efforts to do so have been hampered by the privileging of elite male writers publishing in Japanese, to the exclusion of works by women or those published in Korean. According to Song, the practice of writing literary history is an exercise in “drawing sharp lines between what is legitimate (seitō) and what is illegitimate (hiseitō) on the basis of nationalism.” In many ways, the ink spilled over the question of what constitutes the beginning of Zainichi literature is a product of an anxiety about “legitimacy” that pervades the discourse on Zainichi literature and on its colonial-period antecedents.

Of course, the term Zainichi itself is bound up with issues of legitimacy founded on (ethno)nationalist temporalities. As John Lie points out, “even the very term Zainichi was not used before the end of the war.” Indeed, Zainichi would have been redundant before the collapse of the empire, when movement between the peninsula and the archipelago was commonplace and when ethnic Koreans on either side of the straits were not only “in Japan” but also citizens of Japan. Zainichi makes sense as a designation only insofar as it implies displacement: the term Zainichi Japanese would be redundant on the basis of the implicit assumption that the Japanese belong “in Japan.” Zainichi Japanese would simply be called Japanese—it is only non-Japanese who can be Zainichi. Thus, a community or body of literary texts called Zainichi cannot but testify to its own prepositional distance from legitimacy. If its presence in Japan is worth naming in the first place, it can only be because that presence is a sign of something amiss, disturbing the monolingual, monoethnic orders emerging in the Japanese and Korean states in a Cold War-inflected postwar.

Along these lines, I argue that Zainichi refers not so much to a spatial displacement as to a particular temporality: not “in Japan” full stop, but “in Japan” for now. In fact, the Zainichi epithet, in the absence of a specified ethnonational identifier (Kankokujin for South Korean, Chŏsenjin for otherwise), takes on the pejorative tone of an ethnic slur. This is due to its implication of not merely ethnic nonbelonging but also eventual departure from Japan. It is no coincidence that one of the most common refrains of anti-Korean hate speech in Japan is kaire—“go home!” Ironically, these bigots share with many Zainichi nationalists involved in organized politics of liberation a belief in the eventual return of Koreans in Japan to the peninsula, albeit with different conceptions of the agency driving such a return. At the same time, throughout the entire history of “Zainichi” Koreans as such, the envisioned return has been impossible. On the Korean side, the division of the peninsula and the issues of citizenship and statelessness brought about in its aftermath have complicated the politics of return. At the same time, the assimilation of Zainichi Koreans into Japanese society, particularly the attrition of Korean-language ability in the community, now precludes their return even to a hypothetically reunited Korean state. Unsurprisingly, over the years, as Zainichi politics has become less concerned with the peninsula—the
once and future homeland—and more concerned with achieving equity in Japan as a permanent place of residence, the term Zainichi has fallen out of favor somewhat, making way for alternative terminology such as Korean-Japanese. It is possible, then, to interpret Zainichi as occupying a postcolonial temporality of the simultaneously not yet and never to be: perpetually awaiting a “return” to a homeland to which they can never return.

However, this Japan-centric analysis of Zainichi temporality does not tell the whole story. In fact, the beginnings of Zainichi literary history are tied more closely to the narrative of the birth of modern Korean literature rather than to its counterpart in Japan. Both contemporary scholars of Zainichi literature and writers like Kim Saryang and Chang Hyŏkchu, publishing in Japanese in the colonial period, list as their literary ancestors writers like Yi Kwangsu, Yŏm Sangsŏp, Yi Kiyŏng, and other canonical figures of modern Korean literature—many of whom wrote in Japanese as well as in Korean and some of whose Korean-language literary texts were published in Japanese translation before “liberation” in 1945. The disavowal of this kind of multilingual literary exchange and the construction of ostensibly monolingual, monoethnic nation-states in the postwar period has served to rupture Zainichi literature from Korean literature on the peninsula. Moreover, an area studies model of siloed national (language) literatures has ensured, until recently, that Zainichi literature would be studied in the context of Japanese(-language) literature, if it was studied at all. This can create a mistaken impression of Korean and Japanese language literatures as mutually independent when in fact they were deeply entangled in the Japanese Empire, an “intimate” relationship, in Nayoung Aimee Kwon’s words, that reverberates well into the postwar period. If Zainichi literature seems distinct from what we might call mainstream or legitimate Korean literature today, this was certainly not the case under the conditions of colonialism from which modern Korean literature emerged. Moreover, if Zainichi literature as a genre of writing or a field of inquiry betrays a self-conscious ambivalence regarding its own colonial origins, then the same can be said of modern Korean literature as a whole.

However, I focus here not on the common roots of Zainichi and mainstream Korean literature but rather on the distinct futures that they represent. That is, Zainichi literature might be productively thought of as an alternative future to that of mainstream South Korean literature in the postwar period. In the timeline of Zainichi literature, many of the fears of colonial-period Korean writers (in both languages) have come true: the Korean language is largely abandoned as a literary medium, a sovereign Korean state no longer exists (at least not in unified form), and whatever space is carved out for a distinctive Korean literature or culture is necessarily located in that of Greater Japan. What Janet Poole refers to as the “disappearing future” of Korea under the fascist mobilization regime of late Imperial Japan looks eerily similar to not-yet/never-to-be temporality of the Zainichi. This framework sheds light on the vexing position of the Zainichi community, reliving a history of forced assimilation through a process of generational assimilation that, although often socially beneficial, fulfills an imperial fantasy long after the collapse of the empire. At the same time, seeing Zainichi literature as an alternative future of colonial Korean literature can check the temptation to see the status quo as inevitable. Despite the risk of recapitulating an ethnocentric logic of Korean literature, considering Zainichi literature as Korean literature—deemed “legitimate” rather than marginal in its literary-historical narrative—can act as an antidote to the disavowals characterizing postwar South Korean literary historiography. The Zainichi temporality of the not yet/never to be—one way of articulating the paradoxical temporality of the postcolonial—offers us a clearer picture of mainstream Korean literary history: its origins under the conditions of colonial modernity, its potential futures, and its possibilities.

By way of beginning to sketch such a picture, I now turn to works of criticism by Kim Saryang, Chang Hyŏkchu, and Kim Talsu, whose diverging paths in the postwar represent a range of
Zainichi writers and postcoloniality

possible trajectories for colonial Korean writers after 1945. Kim Saryang returned to the Korean Peninsula, eventually “going north” (wŏlbuk) and writing once more in the Korean language in his capacity as journalist embedded in the North Korean military. Conversely, Chang Hyŏkchu and Kim Talsu remained in Japan, the former eventually naturalizing as a Japanese citizen (taking the name Noguchi Minoru) and the latter concerning himself with the politics of Korean liberation and reunification in Japanese-language discourse. Each of these writers has been excluded from mainstream South Korean literature throughout the bulk of its history, but what is clear from their essays in the years shortly before and after 1945 is a consciousness of their own “illegitimacy” with respect to mainstream Korean (not to mention Japanese) literature, even as they were also conscious of the illegitimacy of mainstream Korean literature itself in a (post)colonial temporality that rendered it not-yet legitimate and never to be. In this way, we can see these early or proto-Zainichi writers as central, rather than marginal, to Korean literature as a whole, their postcolonial futures providing a stark reminder of the birth of modern Korean literature amid the impossibilities engendered by colonial modernity.

Chang Hyŏkchu: literary Korean as not yet, never to be

Chang Hyŏkchu burst onto the Japanese-language literary scene in 1932 with the publication of “Gakidō” (The Hell of Hungry Ghosts), a story about the struggles of Korean peasants under Japanese imperialism. The story had been awarded second prize by the Japanese leftist magazine Kaizō (Reconstruction) in its short story contest. As Chang remained popular with the Japanese literary elite in the 1930s, he penned a number of essays that attempt to communicate conditions on the peninsula to Japanese readers. Among these essays is a three-part series published in Bungaku annai (Literature Guide) in 1935–6 that outlines the past, present, and future of the literary establishment in Korea: “Chŏsen bundan no genjō hōkoku” (Report on the Current State of the Korean Literary Establishment), “Chŏsen bundan no shōrai” (The Future of the Korean Literary Establishment), and “Chŏsen bundan no sakka to sakuhin” (Writers and Works of the Korean Literary Establishment). The authors, movements, and texts that he mentions in these accounts do not wander far from those one might see in a contemporary history of canonical Korean literature of the colonial period. It is clear that Chang, like many Koreans writing in Japanese who would follow him, saw himself or was seen as a part of this group and its history. Despite his linguistic and geographic removal from the Korean literary establishment (Chŏsen bundan), he nevertheless finds himself in a position of speaking for them, citing a desire to inform a larger audience about the plight of colonized Koreans, not to mention responding to an appetite on the part of his Japanese leftist network for more information about the state of things on the peninsula. Whether out of a desire or a duty to represent Korea, he published prolifically on the subject in the 1930s.

In the Bungaku annai series, Chang presents Korean literary history in cosmopolitan, if teleological, Marxist terms. He submits that the literary history of any nation follows the same basic pattern, which he traces from “ism” to “ism” up to its culmination in proletarian literature. Chang suggests that it is a point of pride for the Korean bundan that it was able to reach this pinnacle more or less simultaneously with Japan despite their process of literary modernization beginning decades later and under the yoke of imperialism. Even as he praises Korean writers working in Korean, Chang couches that praise in terms of future potential rather than past achievement. He credits Yi Kwangsu and Yi Kiyŏng in particular as two writers whose works represented huge strides toward bringing Korean literature up to speed with the rest of the world (already accepting a temporal order that renders Korean literature abjectly behind). Of Yi Kwangsu, he writes that even his recent work has immature qualities, and that his best work is
Cindi Textor

probably still ahead of him.\(^{22}\) He calls Yi Kiyŏng, who had already published Kohyang (Hometown, 1934), a masterpiece of colonial Korean literature, “the writer of the future, of whom we expect great things.”\(^ {23}\) No matter the stature of Korean writers at this time, they are relegated to a state of greatness still to come.

At the same time, and in contradictory fashion, Chang Hyŏkchu offers a bleak view of the future of literature in Korean. Citing (rather dismissively) an uneducated population unwilling or unable to read, as well as the limited number and resources of publishing outlets and their subjection to a harsh censorship regime, he concludes that it is hard to see how Korean literature will ever break out of its current rut.\(^ {24}\) Thus, Chang sees little hope for the future of Korean literature even as he defers its best days to that same dismal future.

The overall pessimism on display in these essays would eventually lead to Chang’s abandoning Korean-language literature altogether and attempting to carve out a future for Korean writers in Japanese. Chang would later argue, in a 1939 piece titled “Chŏsen no chishikijin ni uttau” (An Appeal to Korean Intellectuals), that Japanese was the best medium for writing about Korean issues, as its readership was larger and its potential for translation into world languages offered a path to even larger audiences.\(^ {25}\) He reiterated this message at a roundtable sponsored by Bungakukai (Literature Circle) in 1939 on the topic of Chŏsen bunka no shōrai (The Future of Korean Culture).\(^ {26}\) While this choice (rightfully) garnered criticism, especially after the fact in the postwar period, it is nonetheless a rational choice in the context of the temporal conundrum that Chang describes—that is, a modern Korean literature that is not yet and never to be.

Kim Saryang: waiting for Goethe

Kim Saryang, alongside Chang Hyŏkchu, was the most prominent ethnically Korean writer in the Tokyo literary establishment during the empire. At the same time, whereas most colonial Korean writers were multilingual at least to some degree, having completed at least part of their studies in Japan, Kim Saryang is known for his particularly high level of proficiency in both Korean and Japanese. Perhaps more than any other Korean writer at this time, Kim became a conduit between the peninsula and the metropole, tasked with representing Korean culture to a Japanese audience. Thus, in the 1930s and 1940s, when Japanese-language readers became enamored of Korean literature and culture, and special issues and other publications dedicated to Korean culture appeared, Kim published translations of contemporary Korean literature (including Yi Kwangsu’s Mu’myŏng [Unenlightened, 1939]) and was asked to write essays introducing Korean authors and their texts to Japanese-language readers.\(^ {27}\) I am drawing from three such essays, published in 1939 and 1940: “Chŏsen bungaku ūgetsuroku” (Record of Second-hand Knowledge of Korean Literature, 1939), “Chŏsen no sakka o kataru” (Narrating Korean Writers, 1939), and “Chŏsen bunka tsūshin” (Communicating Korean Culture, 1940).\(^ {28}\) Each of these titles reveals something about how Kim saw his own position, tasked with preserving, explaining, translating, communicating, and perhaps speaking for Korean literature at large.

One consistent theme in the message that Kim is trying to send through these essays is a sense of crisis in Korean literature on the eve of what would later be referred to as “the dark period” (anbûkki), the final years of Japanese imperial rule when the war effort ramped up sharply and nearly all publication in the Korean language was outlawed. Rather than predicting this kind of acute suppression of Korean-language literature, Kim’s concern for the future of Korean literature is grounded in a crisis of readership. As he explains in “Chŏsen bungaku ūgetsuroku,” literature in Korean has not been able to come into its own in part because of lagging literacy rates in Korea (he quotes a figure of approximately 80 percent illiteracy). Whereas Chang Hyŏkchu uses this limited Korean-language readership to justify his choice to write in
Japanese—thereby creating a much larger audience for his appeals for justice for Korea—Kim Saryang conversely insists that the onus is on writers to create literature in Korean that is capable of building a larger readership. He argues that because primary education and secondary education in Korea are now being conducted in Japanese, the window to build a mass print culture in Korean is closing, and to abandon the small readership that exists would be to foreclose this possibility.

Kim’s thinking about these questions of language and readership reflects a specific temporal mindset, in which he is anxious about the future of Korean literature even as he is ambivalent about the question whether a properly modern Korean literature has actually begun. Perhaps as a result of this quandary, Kim’s essays are characterized by an impetus to write (narrate, record, communicate) a history of modern Korean literature. A student of German literature, Kim understood this history in a global context that went beyond a simplistic binary relationship with Japanese literary history, in which Korea is seen as the little brother tagging along behind Japan. He often uses analogies to European authors and literary movements by way of explaining the key figures and movements in Korean literary history, and he even argues that compared with Japanese literature, modern Korean literature has been more directly influenced by European traditions and over a shorter time span.29 His understanding of the crisis in Korean literature through the lens of modern German literature is particularly suggestive:

In terms of literary history, writers like Yi Kwangsu and Yŏm Sangsŏp, who created anew a literature in hangŭl at the genesis of Korean literature are the Klopstock and Lessing of Korea. But now we need the Goethe to come forth. A Korean Goethe who possesses the artistry of language necessary to provide a legitimate (seitōteki) basis for literature in Korean. Language is one thing, but it is the need for this kind of writer that is the greatest crisis facing Korean literature.30

Aside from reflecting an internalized teleological view of (literary) modernity that places the West ahead and “the rest” waiting to catch up—waiting for their Goethe—this passage also reveals Kim’s understanding of Korean literature, at least in its current state, as not yet “legitimate.” Nam Pujin articulates this idea, which Kim Saryang never quite makes explicit, that the Korean language had not sufficiently evolved as a literary medium capable of capturing the artistry that writers like Chang Hyŏkchu and Kim Saryang were able to produce in Japanese during this period.31 Even as the future of the Korean language was in question, Kim is unconsciously questioning whether the language is sufficiently modern or sophisticated to merit preservation in the first place. On the other hand, while Kim seems to some extent to embrace the notion of Japanese as better equipped than Korean to mediate his artistic vision (and certainly better equipped to inform the world about the state of Korea, as Chang argues), he also relies on essentialist logic to maintain that Korean is the only language capable of mediating the emotional lives of Korean subjects.32 In this way, Kim Saryang, like his contemporaries writing as Koreans in the Japanese Empire, faced an impasse wherein neither language available to him could be comfortably deemed “legitimate.” Under the conditions of colonial modernity, modern Korean literature as a whole—not merely the segment being produced in the metropole in the language of the colonizer—found itself caught in a crisis of legitimacy: not yet fully “modern,” its becoming so perpetually deferred.

Nevertheless, Kim Saryang maintained a sense of optimism, drawing from examples in European literary history to insist that it is precisely these conditions of crisis that give rise to breakthroughs in the development of language and literature. Just when Korea needs its messianic Goethe to appear, he will. While this hopeful prediction did not pan out, and the Korean

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language was “rescued” not by a literary genius emerging from inside but by outside powers defeating and dismantling the Japanese Empire, Kim’s greater optimism toward the future of the Korean language, as compared to Chang’s, can be seen as one cause of their divergent paths. If we think of Chang as having given up on Korean, his advocacy for Japanese-language writing and eventual naturalization appear rational, even if not wholly justifiable. By the same token, Kim’s hopeful waiting for the emergence of a “legitimate” Korean literary language in the future led him back to the peninsula and ultimately to a comparatively sympathetic reception in the postwar period—as opposed to Chang, who has been dismissed as a collaborator.

But what Kim’s return and Chang’s naturalization have in common is that they reinforce the notion that one cannot be legitimately Korean in the Japanese language. Their trajectories represent futures in which a logic of national linguistic homogeneity is preserved and heterogeneity disavowed. Thus, I turn finally to Kim Talsu, whose alternate path would, according to the standard narrative of Zainichi history, give rise to the formation of Zainichi literature.

Kim Talsu’s perpetual illegitimacy

Kim Talsu, often described as the “father” of Zainichi literature (reflecting the patriarchal undertones of most accounts of Zainichi literary history), was extremely active in the early postwar period, especially the 1950s, in establishing spaces for Korean writers in Japanese-language discourse. At the same time, he wrote prolifically, penning many essays that revisit themes familiar from the work of Chang Hyŏkchu and Kim Saryang, including the call to represent Korean lives and make appeals for justice for Koreans to a Japanese audience. He writes, “I wanted—needed to tell these stories to the Japanese.”33 As part of this mission, Kim Talsu, like Kim Saryang and Chang Hyŏkchu before him, renarrates the history of Korean literature, paying special attention to the origins of its modernity.34

However, I focus on one essay in particular, written a bit later in Kim Talsu’s career. “Shokuminchi no naka kara no sakka” (Writers from inside Colonies), published in Asia-Africa Bulletin in 1962, begins with a call to celebrate Algeria’s recently won independence. The essay continues with Kim reflecting on what he has read about the position of Algerian writers in the wake of independence and drawing comparisons to Koreans after the liberation of 1945. He lingers on the provocative stance taken by the French-language Algerian writer Malek Haddad, whom he quotes as follows:

The tragedy for us is that we are orphaned. Algerian writers who write in French are a product of colonialism. There is one thing I can say with no trace of regret: that with the disappearance of colonialism, with the independence of Algeria, it is also our destiny to disappear.35

Haddad would ultimately become famous for keeping his promise, giving up writing in French after independence.36

Kim sees many parallels between post-independence Algerian writers and Zainichi Koreans, even repeating part of Haddad’s statement, mutatis mutandis: “Zainichi Korean writers who write in Japanese are a product of colonialism.”37 The sticking point for him, however, is Haddad’s call for disappearance. In defense of his continued existence, Kim falls back on his predecessors in the colonial period, Kim Saryang and Chang Hyŏkchu, arguing at length that their work in Japanese was not a betrayal but rather a means for advancing Korean ends. In his own case, and for other Zainichi writers in the postwar period, that mission continues. Kim thus argues that such writers should use whatever language is most expedient, since their position
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with respect to categories like Korean literature versus Japanese literature is less important than the content of their work.

What is interesting about this discussion, however, is that Kim Talsu begins to refer to Korean literature in Korean as “legitimate Korean literature” (seitō no Chosen bungaku). His consciousness of his own illegitimacy is itself a product of colonialism—but now it is not the empire creating this sense of marginalization but rather the need to disavow its multilingual, multiethnic nature. What makes Kim Talsu “illegitimate” with respect to his own national literary tradition and yet unable to be at peace with disappearance is a problem of temporality: the postcoloniality of (Zainichi) Korean literature. Whatever legitimacy Korean literature enjoys is constructed through the exclusion of writers like Kim Talsu as part of a process of excising the colonial past and its painful entanglements with Japan—its reminders that not only Zainichi writers working in Japanese but the “legitimate” Korean authors themselves are “a product of colonialism.” If we can find a way to see Zainichi literature as fully belonging within the rubric of Korean literature, it may aid in acknowledging the alternative futures and painful memories that have been disavowed in Korean literary history. This mindset can also illuminate the ways that all Korean literature—even the mainstream—has been rendered illegitimate under the conditions of (post) colonial modernity.

The future of transnational Korean literary studies

I emphasize, in lieu of a conclusion, that the mainstreaming of Zainichi literature under the rubric of modern Korean literary studies does little to clarify the question raised at the outset of this chapter: what is modern Korean literature? As stated earlier, the consideration of heretofore marginalized writers, texts, and genres—such as those from the Zainichi diaspora—renders the question all the more difficult to answer satisfactorily. On the other hand, the inclusion of such writers and texts may do nothing more than expand the boundaries of modern Korean literature while making them no less rigid and exclusionary. A shift of gaze from one nation to another is not, in and of itself, transnational. Nor is it clear that a transnational lens is the cure for all that ails the field. At its best, Zainichi studies can open new avenues of inquiry in Korean literary studies, rather than providing a corrective. If texts from the diaspora trouble ethnocentric or nationalist frameworks for understanding modern Korean literature, then they may prove equally troubling to the transnational models replacing them. Perhaps this comes in the form of disrupting our temporal understanding of Korean literature’s place in the world, demanding a greater emphasis on gender or other intersecting categories of difference inside and outside the Korean ethnonation, or further probing the advantages and pitfalls of the categories themselves. What sort of framework comes next is a question left for future scholars of modern Korean literature.

Notes

1 See Pak, “Chaeil Chosŏn’in”; Ha, “Kwangbok 70 nyŏn, chaeil Chosŏn’in”; Kwak, “Kim Talsu mun-hak”; Ch’oe, “Chaeil Chosŏn’in si.”
2 In Japanese, major studies include Takeda, ‘Zainichi’ to iu konkyo and Kawamura, Umaretara soko ga furuso. In English, see Ryang, Koreans in Japan; Wender, Lamentation as History; and Lie, Zainichi (Koreans in Japan).
3 In fact, the term Zainichi includes no reference to Korea. The more precise terms are Zainichi Kankoku-jin and Zainichi Chosenjin. Kankoku-jin refers to those with South Korean citizenship, whereas Chosenjin, though typically associated with North Korea, refers to the defunct undivided Korea before division.
4 For more on the 4.3 Incident, see Merrill, “The Cheju-Do Rebellion”; Johnson, Blowback.
The Alien Registration Law of 1947, passed under US occupation, had already established that Koreans should be treated as foreigners and required to register as such, but they technically maintained Japanese citizenship until 1952, when the San Francisco Treaty went into effect. See Kashiwazaki, “Politics of Legal Status,” 20–3.

Kim Sŏkpŏn, “Ima, ‘Zainichi’ ni totte ‘kokuseki’ to wa.”


McClintock, “Angel of Progress”, 293, emphasis original.

See Isogai and Kuroko, ‘Zainichi’ bungaku zenshū, particularly vol. 11; Wender, Into the Light.

Lie, Zainichi (Koreans in Japan), 11.

Kawamura, Umaretara soko ga funsato, 16.

Song, ‘Zainichi Chōsenjin bungaku shi’ no tame ni, 3.

Lie, Zainichi (Koreans in Japan), 12.


For recent interventions uncovering these disavowals, see Hughes, Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea; Kwon, Intimate Empire; Suh, Treacherous Translation; and Glade, “Occupied Liberation.”

North Korean literature represents yet another alternate trajectory that is outside the scope of this chapter. See Immanuel Kim’s essay in this volume.

Poole, When the Future Disappears.

I must emphasize that this sense of illegitimacy developed in response to the impossible standards imposed on colonial literature under the conditions of imperialism. What is important here is not whether Korea ultimately produced a “legitimate” modern literature but rather that the authors of such literature internalized an arbitrary standard of legitimacy on the basis of imperial, Eurocentric temporalities.

All reprinted in Shirakawa and Nam, Chang Hyŏkju Nihongo sakuhinsen.

See Perry, Recasting Red Culture, chapter 4.

Chang, “Chōsen bunbun no sakka to sukhin,” 312.

Chang, “Chōsen bunbun no genjō hōkoku,” 304.

Ibid., 305.

Chang, “Chōsen bunbun no shōrai,” 308–11.


Akita et al., “Chōsen bunka no shōrai (zadankai).”

On the Korea boom of the 1930s, see Atkins, Primitive Selves; Ko, ‘Sengo’ to iu ideorogi.

All reprinted in Kim Saryang zenshū, vol. 4.


Kim Talsu, “Ichi Chōsenjin watashi no bungaku jikaku,” 11.


Benrabah, Language Conflict in Algeria, 138.


Works cited


