

The Suppression of Korean Political Organizations and Publications in Postwar Japan

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Abstract

In 1949, with the aim of keeping Japan politically stable and securely allied with the US as a bulwark against communism, Occupation authorities instructed Japanese police to crack down on expatriate Koreans, who both perceived as a disruptive and threatening force. The result was a September raid disbanding and confiscating the assets of the “League of Koreans in Japan.” For the Koreans still living in Japan in the postwar period, the events of September 1949 comprised a return to the oppressive practices of Japanese colonialism and signaled the revival of the imperial Japanese menace. This paper analyzes the events surrounding the dissolution of the League and considers the rebuttal written by the organization’s advocates to the government memorandum produced to justify the action. With the aim of better understanding protest movements worldwide, and the tactics deployed to delegitimize them, this study explores the parallels between Korean activism in postwar Japan and recent protests in the United States.

Key words

Koreans in Japan, *Zainichi*, Occupied Japan, Postcolonialism, Decolonization

A Not So Different Time

During the summer of 2020 mass protests erupted across the United States in the midst of a pandemic. The grievances were familiar: mounting evidence of the extrajudicial killings of Black citizens and other people of color by police, institutional racism, and the recalcitrance of powerholders to even modest moves towards amelioration of these conditions. As of this writing, the response of authority to these protests has included several incidents of extreme force directed against protestors and even the abduction of protestors by federal troops in unmarked vehicles refusing to identify themselves.¹ Yet, even as pundits breathlessly remarked on the scale of these protests and their effect on the public consciousness as unprecedented, it remains to be seen if they will change anything.

Certainly, the protests of 2020 can be linked to a broader tradition of civil disobedience in the modern history of the US; however, it would be a gross misrepresentation to attribute the cyclical recurrence of these protests to uniquely American social and historical factors. This paper, originally intended as a presentation at the 50th anniversary celebration for the Ohio State University's Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, examines strikingly familiar paradigms in another context—that of postwar Japan, and the protests of Koreans newly liberated from Japanese colonial rule. These Koreans faced discrimination in myriad forms, including capricious violence from police forces against their lives and property. Then as now, dialogues about the legitimate grievances of protestors became dwarfed by questions of the protestors' politics and conduct, particularly in regard to violence and public safety.

Below, I explore Koreans' situation in postwar Japan and identify some of the parallels between the discourse surrounding their protests and activism and that of the present day in the US. While we may be tempted to view disconnected protests as the spontaneous reaction to conditions on the ground, i.e. the natural explosion of frustration when a particular population has been pressed beyond its ability to cope, one can also identify a nexus of shared motivations, tactics, and even rhetoric among disparate protest movements of the 20th and 21st centuries. The present study focuses on the voices of Koreans who were the direct victims of suppression at the hands of Japanese police and the Occupation government.

Decolonization and Crisis

While the present COVID19 crisis takes a substantially different form than other crises in living memory, the scale of its disruption and destruction is on track to match the greatest conflicts of the 20th century, having, as of this writing, claimed more than 245,000 American lives, easily exceeding the Korean War and Vietnam War combined. The 1945 surrender of the Japanese Empire might have signaled the end of crisis for some, but it also set in motion a number of other conflicts within Asia and throughout the world. Of particular interest here is the rapid transition from allies to rivals of the USA and USSR, as their division of the Korean peninsula was a major factor in the postwar unrest in Japan I describe below. At the same time, colonized people

¹ See for example Mike Baker, "Chaotic Scenes in Portland as Backlash to Federal Deployment Grows," *The New York Times*, 2020.7.21.

throughout the world demanded the right to self-governance and pressed the victorious Allied Powers for liberation.

In Japan the number of Korean residents, often called “*Zainichi*” (在日, “[foreigners] residing in Japan”) for short, had increased steadily over Korea’s time as a Japanese colony (1910-1945), with conscription and forced labor swelling the total number to over two million by the end of the war. The Allies were unsure of what to do with this group and left them with an ambiguous status that did not give them recognition as “victors” (citizens of countries who had opposed the Axis) but also did not afford them the protections of citizenship in Japan. Most Koreans were resistant to taking Japanese citizenship anyway, as they associated it with the forced assimilation policies of imperial Japan, and official diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea would not be established until 1965, leaving as stateless even those Koreans willing to associate themselves with the South.²

The first order of business for most liberated Koreans was repatriation. Despite the expressed desire of Japanese authorities to be rid of these former subjects, they did little to facilitate safe transport to Korea, leaving it largely in the hands of ad hoc groups which sprang up around the country and gradually coalesced into a more formalized social welfare organization to support Koreans returning home and those still in Japan. Those who did return to the peninsula found conditions significantly worse than even Japan itself, as the former colony was economically decimated, suffered from mass hunger and disease, and violent political factionalism that continued for years even before the Korean War. They were also prevented by Japanese authorities from taking any more than a minute quantity of money and property with them when leaving. Despite these hardships the majority did repatriate, leaving a *Zainichi* population of more than half a million who overwhelmingly indicated an intention to eventually return to what they assumed would be a unified Korea.

In other words, the Korean community itself as well as Japanese authorities and the Occupation all saw this populace as temporary. However, just four years later, as war in Korea began to seem inevitable, several large-scale strikes and protests throughout Japan as well as the affinity of most *Zainichi* Koreans for the communist North Korean regime over the US-allied South made them a fly in the ointment for US plans in the region. In September of 1949 Japanese police occupied the headquarters of the largest *Zainichi* organization: the League of Koreans in Japan (在日本朝鮮人連盟). Claiming that the League was in fact a terrorist organization that had actively promoted violent extremism to achieve its ends, the government disbanded the League and seized its assets.

Lost Voices

In the present day, the advent of the smartphone has lent credence to the long-standing complaint of black Americans that they are systematically targeted and abused by police; yet, the sheer volume of video depicting this treatment today implies a history of hundreds or thousands of

² See for example Weiner, *The Origins of the Korean Community in Japan* and Lee and DeVos, *Koreans in Japan* as standard English language sources describing Korean immigration and repatriation.

similar incidents in the past which have been dismissed without any redress. The public, the justice system, and mainstream discourse erased these Black lives simply by doubting that their accounts of extreme and constant persecution could possibly be true. With this in mind I shall take a radical approach and consider, though critically, the likely truthfulness of Korean accounts of their extreme and constant persecution.

Had every person in postwar Japan been equipped with a video camera, the public might have seen footage of police terrorizing Korean slums, where they destroyed the livelihoods of families barely scraping by, overturning their barrels of homemade pickles or rice wine. The public might also have known how often Koreans were beaten senseless or even to death for the same black-market activity that sustained many Japanese in the hard postwar years.³ We have no way to go back and see these scenes, but the Koreans who suffered from abuse both during the colonial period and after were determined to make these conditions known to the Japanese public in particular. It was in this spirit that Korean organizations in postwar Japan engaged in significant Japanese-language outreach and encouraged Koreans to write in Japanese.

Writing in Japanese carried an intrinsic association with efforts of the empire to force Korean assimilation and bend colonial literary production to imperial ends, and as such this would become a subject of intracommunity debate later. However, in the heady days of early liberation many felt a pent up desire to broadcast the very criticisms of Japanese rule and the nationalist Korean viewpoint that had been aggressively censored during the colonial era. The League of Koreans in Japan sponsored a Japanese-language magazine-cum-literary journal with just such an ideal: *Minshu Chōsen* (民主朝鮮, “Democratic Korea”). The following is its mission statement, published in the April 1946 inaugural issue:

In the process of a progressive democratic revolution, from what angle do Koreans grasp historical realities, and how can they fulfill their historical mission? In other words, what do Koreans think, what do they say, and what are they trying to do? In particular the objective state of affairs and subjective currents of opinion on the problems of trustee [Soviet/US] rule have become the focus of the world’s attention. Here we wish to show the world the proper direction forward, and at the same time correct the Japanese understanding of Korean history, culture and tradition, etc., the essence of which has been denied for the 36 long years of colonial rule. By so doing we hope to present the materials in this small volume as our thoughts on the foundation of a developing politics, economy, and society to all those who wish to understand Koreans.⁴

In the interest of continuing to observe meaningful parallels between postwar Japan and the mid-COVID United States, I wish to point out that that despite Koreans’ liberation from the direct control of Japanese colonial authorities, this mission statement points to an environment of epistemological tension. While the writers of *Minshu Chōsen* couched their goals in idealistic terms, it also suggests knowledge systems in conflict. As this coterie of writers saw it, the truth

³ Pak, “Kaihō chokugo no zainichi Chōsenjin undō (2)” *Zainichi Chōsenjin-shi kenkyū* 2, p. 80-85.

⁴ “Sōkan no ji” *Minshu Chōsen* 1, p. 3.

about Korea and its people had been unavailable to readers of Japanese and continued to be so despite the fall of the empire, necessitating a new approach that allowed Koreans themselves to define the terms of their message, even as they used the language forced on them during colonization.

In a sense this mirrors tensions in our own current information ecosystem. The Japanese censors present until 1945 were replaced by new gatekeepers for information, those of the American Occupation. These new gatekeepers had a radically different set of priorities in line with their own interests: writing critically about imperial Japan was now welcome, but criticism of Occupation policies was definitely out. Today the freedom of information promised by the dawn of internet technologies has been undercut by the presence of new gatekeepers and the effective dissemination of misinformation through their platforms. The algorithms that recommend YouTube videos, select stories for a Facebook feed, and determine which search results are returned by Google serve the priorities of their creators: namely, to encourage the users' continued engagement with each respective platform, and thereby the generation of revenue. These very practices enabled Russian interference in the US 2016 election and have stoked conspiracy theorists' skepticism of the scientific consensus around vaccines and mask-wearing to prevent the spread of COVID19.⁵

The journal *Minshu Chōsen* ran 33 issues (including the 26th issue which was pulled by censors), the first in April 1946 and the last in July 1950 when the American Occupation government suppressed it, on the very precipice of the Korean War. Framed by the end of Japanese colonialism at its inception, and at its close by the new paradigm of US and Soviet domination with its own tragic consequences, *Minshu Chōsen* is a unique artifact. It records the diversity of Koreans' attempts to write against empire and their understanding of the parallels between Japanese imperialism and that of the West. Most importantly it contains in their own words the protests of a minority that could not be silenced, who used the language of their former colonial masters to fight against the processes that divided their homeland and built the world order as we know it today. The content of the magazine included serialized novels, short stories, poetry, and drama in what was generally the second half of each issue, as well as non-fiction editorials and essays about current events and colonial history in the first half. In the present study my primary discussion focuses on the rebuttal in *Minshu Chōsen* to the suppression of the League of Koreans in Japan.

With the suppression of the League in September of 1949 *Minshu Chōsen* lost its primary financial support, however it would go on to produce two more issues during the summer of 1950. The May issue was almost entirely devoted to covering what had happened to the League and refuting the accusations used by the administration of Yoshida Shigeru to justify a major police action against this *Zainichi* support organization.

The main rebuttal to the Japanese government's assertion of Korean violence was written by one of the editors and founders of the magazine named Wŏn Yong-dŏk. Wŏn was a Christian and

⁵ Joseph E. Uscinski and Adam M. Enders, "The Coronavirus Conspiracy Boom," *The Atlantic*, 2020.4.30. <http://theatlantic.com>

a Marxist who spent much of the Pacific War imprisoned in Japan. Unfortunately, there is little further information available about this figure, and a lack of subsequent writings suggests that he may have repatriated to North Korea during or after the Korean War.

Wŏn's rebuttal consists of fourteen densely packed pages of text, divided into five chapters with further subdivisions within. In chapter one, Wŏn quotes at length from the public notice issued by authorities justifying the dissolution of the League. Chapter two is a recounting of the Japanese annexation of Korea and the hardships created by colonial rule, followed in chapter three by a description of the postwar founding of the *League of Koreans* in Japan as a direct response to those colonial policies. Chapter four takes up the specific charges leveled by the Ministry of Justice against the League, refuting them as blatant mischaracterizations of Koreans' actions or the result of provocation and oppression from the Japanese government. In this section Wŏn's rebuttal also connects the present suppression of Korean political activity in Japan with the US-backed autocratic regime of Syngman Rhee in South Korea. The final section summarizes Wŏn's argument and asserts that far from impeding the establishment of democracy and freedom in postwar Japan, in fact Koreans were, in advocating for themselves, also fighting for the very cause of democracy for all of Japan as well. Ultimately Wŏn's counterargument to the government is structured to shift the frame of reference that defines the perceptions of Koreans' postwar activity: rather than viewing these actions within the limited historical context of the immediate postwar era, the League and its members should be seen as acting in response to "colonial" circumstances that were in a general sense continuous, despite the defeat of the Japanese Empire.

To analogize this final point to the ongoing conflicts of summer 2020 in the United States we should consider the extent to which systemic racism and profound racial disadvantages are now coming to be understood as themselves extensions of slavery and as the subsequent cumulative effects of less visible levers of oppression. Wenei Philimon argues that the origin of the modern police system in the southern US has deep ties to the bands gathered to capture runaway slaves.⁶ Last year *The New York Times* launched its "1619 Project" which "aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative."⁷ Moreover, the psychological and physiological effects of discrimination, limited access to health care, frontline occupations, education/wealth/income gaps, and substandard housing are all factors identified by the CDC as increasing the COVID19 mortality rate among people of color.⁸ Each of these highlights a different way in which today's conflicts are deeply rooted in the past.

Wŏn's Rebuttal

In 1949 the administration of Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru produced a public memorandum in advance of taking action against the League of Koreans in Japan. It declared that:

⁶ Wenei Philimon, "Not just George Floyd: Police departments have 400-year history of racism" *USA Today*, 2020. 7.6, <https://usatoday.com>

⁷ "The 1619 Project," *New York Times Magazine*, <http://nytimes.com>

⁸ "Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020.7.24, <http://CDC.gov>

Members at every level of this organization, have incited violent crimes and repeated resistance to the Occupation government. As such they pose a grave threat to the safety of our citizens who are trying to create a peaceful democratic state in accordance with the terms of the Potsdam declaration. [...] Because they provoked a large number of members to take group action, the nature, and effects of these crimes, leaves us no choice but to designate this violent resistance against the Occupation government and other incidents, not as crimes committed by individuals, but actions in which the central and regional organizations were unified.⁹

The specific charges against the League were as follows:

- (1) From October through December of 1948, the illegal display of the flag of the People's Republic of Korea by League offices and members, as well as resistance from same when Occupation police attempted to arrest those responsible.¹⁰
- (2) In late April of the same year, when orders were issued to close Korean schools for violating Japanese education law, the League is accused of orchestrating an attack on the prefectural offices of Osaka and Hyōgo. Using violence and intimidation, including illegally taking hostage the prefectural governor and other officials, they demanded retraction of the law. In this incident too, they resisted the Occupation police.
- (3) On Nov. 11, 1946, the League led some two thousand Koreans in a demonstration at the Prime Minister's residence with the intention of presenting a petition for Korean rights. Protesters broke into the residence and injured approximately twenty police officers.
- (4) On approximately June 15, 1949, Kyoto League members attacked and injured police officers who were in the midst of enforcing the law against their illegal economic activities.¹¹
- (5) In the "Taira City Incident" on June 30, 1949, members of the League's Fukushima Prefecture Hamadōri regional branch, as well as members of other groups, attacked and occupied the Taira City Police Headquarters.
- (6) On approximately June 10, 1949, in the "National Railway Strike Incident," members of the Chiba Prefecture League branch occupied train conductors' compartments, and, while throwing around intemperate language, actively prevented the normal operations of the National Railway.
- (7) Repeating incidents of attacks directed by the League against its rival, the Mindan.¹²

⁹ Quoted by Wōn at the beginning of his rebuttal. Wōn Yong-dōk, "Yoshida seifu e no kōkaijō" *Minshu Chōsen* 32, p. 20. I have slightly paraphrased the charges for clarity.

¹⁰ Not to be confused with the ROK (South Korea) or the DPRK (North Korea).

¹¹ This is a euphemistic way of referring to raids on Korean neighborhoods.

¹² *Ibid.*, 20-21.

In reviewing this list of accusations, one significant contrast with the protest movements of mid-2020 in the USA is the existence and rivalry of two formalized organizations supporting Koreans in Japan. The League enjoyed broad support from the *Zainichi* community and had come to explicitly ally itself with North Korea, while a smaller group, the Mindan, splintered off for the comparatively small number of supporters of South Korea. However, in other ways the incidents listed above do call to mind several facets of recent protests.

The People's Republic of Korea (조선인민공화국, *Choson Inmin Konghwakuk*) was a short-lived provisional government organized as Japanese forces retreated from the peninsula. It was displaced when American troops arrived to occupy southern Korea and declared the PROK illegitimate (the Soviets co-opted it to their own ends). For Koreans involved in the League, this action immediately signified that the US Occupation refused to recognize the right to Korean self-governance. Along with the retention of collaborators in key bureaucratic positions, this led the writers of *Minshu Chōsen* to believe that the US occupation was simply a new set of imperial masters in the South, whereas they saw Stalin take a more hands-off approach in the North.

In this way the PROK flag became a contested symbol, while seventy years later the flag associated with another defunct polity, the Confederate States of America, continues to bedevil public discourse. For example, it was officially banned by the sport of NASCAR in June of 2020, leading to mixed reactions among fans.¹³ Of course generating far more controversy this year has been protestors' toppling of the statues of historical figures not limited to those who supported the confederacy, but extending to founding fathers who owned slaves, such as George Washington. In each of these cases the importance of symbols tied to national origins ignites fierce feelings of loyalty, pride, or hatred.

In the points numbered two, three, five, and six above, Koreans are variously charged with invading and occupying a number of public buildings. Excepting number three, the accusations of the Yoshida administration generally do not take note that these occupations occurred in the context of protests against government policies and practices that Koreans considered oppressive and direct threats to their lives. The occupation of these spaces will doubtless remind the reader of protestors' attempting to enter or damage Portland, Oregon's Hatfield Courthouse, or of Seattle's Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ), centered around the Seattle Police Departments East Precinct building. In the accusations against Koreans, as well as official statements about 2020 protests, we see protestors described as a danger to police.¹⁴

Of course, Wŏn sees no validity to the government's accusations and does not hesitate to forcefully label them as "trumped up" (*detchiagi* でっち上げ), "preposterous nonsense" (*kōtōmukei* 荒唐無稽), "slander" (*bukoku* 誣告), "fabrications" (*netsuzō* 捏造) and more. Much of Wŏn's direct response to the charges themselves is spent excerpting the portions of the Potsdam

¹³ Steve Almasy, "NASCAR Bans Confederate Flags at All Races, Events" 2020.6.10. <http://cnn.com>

¹⁴ Kate Conger and Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, "Fact Check: How Violent are the Portland Protests," *The New York Times*, 2020.7.28. <http://nytimes.com> We might note, for example, that this source lists numbers of federal and local police injured in the Portland protests, but while making note that protestors were injured, makes no attempt to provide a count or even rough estimate of how many.

declaration which the government claimed the League to have violated, followed by Wŏn's reframing of the incidents from a Korean perspective, thereby allowing him to assert that in fact it is the Yoshida government that has failed to act in good faith with the Occupation's dictates. Moreover, Wŏn draws connections between the suppression of the League and the past policies and discourse of Japanese colonial rule, generally arguing that the Yoshida government represents a continuation of the traditional power holders who oppressed Korea and led Japan to its destruction.

Wŏn protests against the central accusation that Koreans (supposedly at the League's behest) had engaged in constant and widespread opposition to the Occupation across the country. First pointing out that Koreans had a linguistic and cultural disadvantage when communicating with the Occupation government, making it more likely that their intentions would be misinterpreted. He adds that, "On these occasions we attempted to communicate the true will of the people to them through petitions and demonstrations. Therefore, the first reason given by the government of 'opposition to the Occupation' is a truly hateful way of describing our efforts to deepen our mutual understanding."¹⁵ In other words, Wŏn frames the occupation of government buildings, and the petitions presented by large crowds of supporters, as a wholly proper mode of communication and engagement with an Occupation government that did not fully understand the situation of Koreans in Japan. One might make a similar argument regarding the ignorance of elites about the situation of black Americans suffering police violence. The refusal to address these issues necessitated a form of communication that was both impossible to ignore and also caused disruption to routine social functions.

As for the Yoshida government's assertion that the League was guilty of "Attempting by premeditated violence to effect a change in policy, or generally supporting and/or permissively condoning violent methods," Wŏn describes the accusation as, "a spurious charge we would never have imagined in our worst nightmares."¹⁶ In addition to the sheer injustice of disrupting the peaceful efforts of the Korean people to rebuild their nation, this suggests to Wŏn that the current reactionary Japanese government was preparing to utilize the new power of the Organizational Control Law, under which they suppressed the League, to purge "democratic forces" (*minshu seiryoku* 民主勢力) and claim autocratic control of the country.

We should note here that, as in the title of *Minshu Chōsen* ("Democratic Korea"), the word "democracy" and "democratic forces" are themselves contested. From the perspective of many Koreans, August 1945 did nothing to alter the racist treatment they suffered at the hands of the Japanese, and therefore the postwar Japanese state had no claim to represent "democracy." The leftist political ideology shared by many activist Koreans, and their explicit allegiance to the emergent North Korean state would lead the US to define this population antagonistically as part and parcel of Soviet menace, and therefore label them as "anti-democratic." But democracy was the watchword of these Koreans, and they saw no contradiction in advocating for democracy and supporting the Japanese Communist Party; rather, the capitalist system that led Japan to Imperial

¹⁵ Wŏn, "Kōkaijō," p. 30.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

expansion was a truly anti-democratic force, as was the “trustee (US/Soviet) rule” that divided and controlled Korea instead of allowing Koreans to create their own postcolonial state.

On the particularly contentious issue of education, Wŏn writes that the various crimes of rioting and hostage taking to which the Koreans stood accused in the Osaka and Kobe incidents were in fact Koreans’ justifiable reactions to “unjust oppression and the unprecedented trampling of human rights” in the form of the closing of all League schools, and the illegal actions taken by Koreans were the results of “deliberate provocations devised by the offices of the local government.”¹⁷ To Wŏn, the tone of the memorandum declaring that Korean children in Japan would be educated in Japanese immediately recalled the high-handedness and top-down repressive approach of Japanese rulers to Korean subjects in the colonial period:

The government of the defeated Japan has stripped away the right of a liberated people to their own education, and this impinges on basic human rights. As such this action comprises the revival of the colonial policies aimed at limiting Koreans’ level of education, it is a complete violation of the Cairo and Potsdam Declarations, and we must name it for what it is: an announcement of the rebirth of Japanese imperialism.¹⁸

In his response to the remaining charges, including the “National Railway Strike Incident” and various skirmishes with the Mindan (the South Korean Organization), Wŏn writes: “Each of these incidents was a spontaneous local event; moreover, they are all the results of deliberate provocations by reactionary bureaucrats, spurious misreporting, or purposefully trumped up charges, and in no way does the entire organization of the League bear responsibility.”¹⁹

Wŏn shifts the focus in his last section to the claim that these incidents were centrally organized and premeditated:

Whichever of these incidents we look at, the goal was always and only to peacefully and democratically achieve a solution that would satisfy Koreans’ minimum needs as human beings and meet our demands as a people. These alone were most certainly the hopes of the various parties responsible for these incidents; yet, by utilizing provocation, baseless accusations, and slander to misconstrue these events, the offices of the Yoshida government have destroyed the good will of the people. We declare that it is they who bear the entire responsibility for these incidents.²⁰

As he concludes his editorial, Wŏn quotes from the Potsdam Declaration’s protections for speech, religion, and thought and asserts that while the government may hide behind the phrase “issued in accordance with the Potsdam Declaration,” the words were hollow. From a public relations perspective, the moment may have called for a final note of peaceful idealism to allay Japanese concerns about the potential for Korean violence; however, Wŏn Yong-dŏk’s final words do not fully succeed in ruling out the threat of violence. After warning that a day of judgement

¹⁷ Ibid., 31.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 32.

²⁰ Ibid.

would come for the traitorous Syngman Rhee, Wŏn ends the article this way: “We must always know that, even in the midst of bloody struggles, truth—especially truth that leads great historical developments in the correct direction—always points toward freedom, independence, and peace.”²¹

Conclusion

The analogy between the circumstances of postwar Koreans in Japan and those of minority groups in the United States is an imperfect one. The language barrier and significant cultural differences kept most first-generation Korean immigrants from being able to integrate smoothly into Japanese society; however, subsequent generations of this populace generally grew up to speak fluent Japanese and with native Japanese cultural knowledge, making it possible for them to develop a dual identity, or to “pass” as Japanese. While discrimination against *Zainichi* Koreans continues in some forms, generally they are not identifiable by any physical characteristic.

Some elements of the postwar *Zainichi* situation without obvious parallels in the US will readily be recognized in the struggles of oppressed people elsewhere in the world. For example, the right to educate the community’s children in the language and traditions of one’s own heritage in order that that cultural identity might be preserved was a major motivation for postwar *Zainichi* activism, and it is also a central issue in modern China’s attempts to control its Uighur minority and force them to assimilate.²²

However, the most significant points here are those direct commonalities between the postwar *Zainichi* experience and America’s 2020 protest movements. These intersections show that even as we perceive mass movements to be the product of unique contextual factors, in fact the same story plays out again and again with new characters and new settings. Wŏn Yong-dŏk’s statement that “the goal was always and only to peacefully and democratically achieve a solution that would satisfy Koreans’ minimum needs as human beings” was an assertion of the basic right of Koreans to life and might be thought of in the same spirit as Black Lives Matter. The two movements, separated by time and space, and most likely unaware of the particulars of each other’s struggle, nonetheless comprise part of the same grand tradition.

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²¹ Ibid., 34.

²² John Sudworth, “China Muslims: Xinjiang schools used to separate children from families,” *BBC News*, 2019.7.4, <http://bbc.com>

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