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Author(s)	Hirata, Yumi
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Transitional Identities and Heteroglossia in Zainichi Korean Literature¹⁾

HIRATA Yumi

Keywords: Zainichi Korean Literature / SAGISAWA Megumu / transitional identities / heteroglossia

1. A problematic position

As indicated by the title of the short story collection containing her debut work, *Kaerenu Hitobito* (“Those with Nowhere to Return”), author Sagisawa Megumu (1968 - 2004) began by writing about people deprived of a place to belong. In her sentimental hand, she continued to depict the pathos of those without a place to call their own, uprooted from the “family” they lived with, their comfortable “home,” their “work” which formed part of their identity, and their whole life and livelihood.

After turning 20 years of age, Sagisawa found out that her grandmother on her father’s side was in fact Korean, and began studying the Korean language. Around the same time, she wrote *Hazakura no Hi* (“The Day of the Green Leaf Cherry Blossom Trees,” *Shinchō*, August 1990), featuring a young man who grows up in a complicated and mysterious environment and continues to ask himself, “Who am I, really?” A work for which Sagisawa would be awarded her second Akutagawa Prize, which also saw her introduce “Zainichi” characters into her fiction. Though she continued to explore a new fictional world grown from this theme of questioning one’s identity, the “Zainichi” characteristics of the characters in her stories were for the most part kept at a distance under the idea of “place,” and they were by no means the main focus in her work.

The fact that Sagisawa was “Zainichi” didn’t come into the foreground until *Hontō no Natsu* (“Real Summer,” *Shinchō*, April 1992), in which a young Zainichi Korean man who lives under a false Japanese name and is unable to even read his real Korean name, awakens to his own ethnic identity. This work would eventually be published together into one edition with *Kimi wa Kono Kuni ga Sukika* (“Do You Love this Country?,” *Shinchō*, June 1997), the latter of which depicts a third generation Zainichi girl who follows her fascination with Hangul and goes to Korea to study, reflecting

in detail Sagisawa's own experiences as a student in Korea. In the publication's afterword, the author states that *Kimi wa Kono Kuni ga Sukika* is the homework assignment she submitted five years after *Hontō no Natsu* (Sagisawa, 1997 b: 234).

The work this article will focus on here, *Kenari mo Hana, Sakura mo Hana* ("Kenari is also a Flower, Sakura is also a Flower," 1994, *Shincho*), is situated right in between these two works, written during the "five years I struggled with this never-ending homework that stood before me" (same as above). Yu Miri added commentary in the paperback edition in 1997.

In the beginning of her commentary, Yu states "I am a Zainichi Korean and a 'gyopo,'" and assumes "that is the main reason I was asked to write the commentary for this book," adding, "I am the only Zainichi Korean author of the same sex and generation as Ms. Sagisawa." (Yu Miri's commentary, Sagisawa, 1997a: 177). In the following sections, I will quote from a few passages of this text.

As a commentator, to situate herself in that way is problematic when claiming, as Yu does, that this text is effective in presenting the book as "universal and open book" (same as above, 184). In fact, there is a danger that such a stance fences the text into the confines of the "unique position" of the "Zainichi Korean" world, leading to a mis-reading of this work. The "ethnic self expression" belief, that only the "Zainichi" can talk about the "Zainichi," effectively trivialize the issue down into a problem belonging to "the other," thereby hiding the very foundation of colonialism and racism in a profound way.

"*Kenari mo Hana, Sakura mo Hana*" is revealed to be full of the errors and pitfalls one finds as soon as one begins to ponder the meanings of ethnicity and nationality. The narrator substantiates "blood" and "ethnicity," finding in them the essence of "natural" and "primordial" identity, propelling one towards the instinct to identify "ethnically." However, this text also resists "Zainichi" categorization and its unique and collective group identity, rendering a place where a different "me" and "us" can exist. Reading for this potential while also being aware of the dangers behind it, and by answering the many questions brought up within, in what way should this text be read to make it an "open" work?

2. Non/determined identity, or identity in the making

Kenari mo Hana, Sakura mo Hana is based on the serialized essays Sagisawa

had published after entering Yonsei University Korean Language Institute in January, 1992 under the title *Uli Nala Nikki* (“*Uli Nala Diary*,” *Shosetsu Shincho*, March - November, 1992).²⁾ She added an essay she had published right before studying abroad (*Hon*, from *Shinchōsha*, January 1992) in the introduction, as well as a newly written epilogue, and published under a new title. This work was simultaneously written in the midst of the six months Sagisawa spent in Seoul as a student, as well as written out from there.

The first chapter opens with a series of striking staccato sentences ending in the present tense. “What powers played out in what way to allow me to be here now? This is what I’m thinking about right now,” says the narrator, emphasizing the “here” and “now,” expressing her feelings and thoughts at the speed at which she experiences them. The “I” viewpoint also moves from herself to the window, with descriptions of the view she sees through it (15).

At night, the Han River outside my window looks beautiful. The orange lights along the banks sway in the cold wind. [...] The landscape grows hazy with the sinking sun, and the city of Seoul begins to grow dark. This must be what “indescribable” means. It’s almost time for me to see my favorite view of the Han River at night.

As if reflecting the changes in the outer world described in this text written in the progressive form, the narrator’s identity is expressed as something temporary and in constant change. What is described here changes with every physical movement, the “I” is in a state of flux, fluidly moving with every interaction.

In the second chapter, *Kōri no Kabe - Namae no Hazama De* (“The Wall of Ice - At the Threshold of Your Name”), right after coming to Korea, the narrator doesn’t know how to answer a taxi driver when he says “Oh, so you’re a *gyopo*,” replying with, “I’m actually not sure,” “It’s a little hard to explain.” The reason for the difficulty is because the narrator herself believes that it’s not up to her to decide whether she is a *gyopo* or not, it’s something that should be decided by someone else, and so she places her identity in the hands of the other person. “So basically, you’re a *gyopo*.” “Yes, you’re right.” (42-45).

It’s hard for her to explain because, despite the fact that her answer appears to be the simple fact that “only my grandmother is Korean,” that very “fact” means, as

someone who is just “a quarter,” she is not fully qualified to identify herself as “*gyopo*.” Only a full person has the authority to decide who someone divided into “a quarter” and “three quarters” of a person is, as the ability to self-identify is denied to an ethnically impure person.

However, this very act of placing one’s self-identification in the hands of another is turned on its head two pages later.

I don’t think I’m a *gyopo* after all. Maybe I am to that taxi driver and all those other Koreans, but when I’m around other *gyopos*, I’m not a *gyopo*, I’m just that kind of person. When I’m around other Zainichi *gyopos*, it’s clear that I’m different from everyone else. No matter how much I blend in or adapt, I’m ultimately frozen out, separated by a thin wall of ice. I grew up in a typical Japanese household, *so I don’t think I can be a gyopo.* (46-47, italics in original text.)

The “*gyopo*” identity that the narrator says she cannot be a part of, is on the other side of a “wall of ice,” a monolithic collective that she can see, but as someone “different,” is not allowed to enter. Contrary to the declaration that she is “clearly different,” the reason she cannot clearly say what it is that is preventing her from identifying with that group is because the ethnic identity here is focused on a sense of belonging in a psychological and subjective way (Isajiw, 1979: 115-116), found in observable and objective attributes such as physical features, used language, and other criteria.³⁾

Whether being “different” is a disadvantage or, in fact, an advantage, “*gyopo*” is something formed through the psychological self-alienation of people labeled as different. One only feels that being “different” is a disadvantage if one is unable to prove what is inside oneself - something external that one is missing that one cannot attain - and so “*gyopo*” symbolizes the thing one can become by attaining that missing thing. But without knowing what is objectively on the list of qualifications required to become a member of that group, there is no way of knowing whether you have ever attained it or not. Therefore, “*gyopo*” becomes something unattainable, forever yearned for but always out of reach.

On the other hand, a “difference” is considered a disadvantage because one maintains something a “true *gyopo*” would never have. In this case, it is “growing up in a typical Japanese household” (40), and thereby going through a fundamentally

different process of socialization than a “*gyopo*.” However, as long as this difference contributed to the past experiences that formed the current incarnation of “myself,” dismissing or nullifying that experience doesn’t stop “me” from being “someone that is different.” One can create a new and different version of oneself, but only through attaching a new meaning to - redefining - one’s experiences, or even having new ones, not by erasing one’s past. Again, “*gyopo*” is something complete, an experience that cannot be added or subtracted from.

In this way, “*gyopo*” are seen as an ossified collective. Just as the experience of “growing up in a typical Japanese household” cannot be incorporated into the experience of a “*gyopo*,” the experience of growing up in an “atypical Zainichi household” would also be expelled from that collective. This ossification is because, much like “complete Japanese” (157) and “unalloyed Koreans” (183), “*gyopo*” are held up as a collective, unaccepting of impurities or diversity.

However, in later episodes, a category of “*gyopo*” created from irreversible “impurities,” self-denial, and self-alienation, is also denounced.

When Sagisawa was interviewed by a weekly magazine, the female reporter who was apparently friends with Lee Yangji said to her that Lee Yangji even studied dance here in Korea and asked whether she had any intention of doing the same thing. Lee has been here for almost ten years and speaks Korean with almost native fluency, in comparison with Sugisawa’s short stay and language incompetency. The interviewer asked, “why are you only here for three months?”. And furthermore she even asked, “Do you have any love for Korea?” Sagisawa felt that the interviewer was frustrated by her inability to pull the phrase, “love for my country” out of her, and resisted being categorized as a “*gyopo* who came here just to study Korean.” The narrator, apparently caught in the ossified image of a “*gyopo*,” completely refused to let that happen, answered “most people don’t fall easily into ‘stereotypes.’”

The violence of exclusion involved in this kind of categorization and assignment of the Zainichi will be revisited later. For now, how the denial of this categorization has been changed and transformed will be investigated first.

In chapter eight, after returning to Japan, a third generation Zainichi Korean woman says to Sagisawa, “But you’re really not the same after all, you’re just Japanese to me. [. . .] You’re Japanese, so you can’t understand, that’s why I don’t want you to tell these stories.” If this were “a few months ago,” Sagisawa would have “immediately fallen silent,” and “screamed out internally, ‘then you write it!’” Instead,

she answers simply, “Of course. I’m Japanese that way,” and then goes on to say the following (155-156).

The way I see it now, if you think I’m a *gyopo*, then I’m a *gyopo*, if you don’t, then I’m not, that’s all. There are so many other more pressing matters I have to think about beyond that, so that’s as far as my thinking goes on that topic.

Sagisawa does not counter the woman’s assertion that “you’re Japanese,” and “unlike you, I’m a pure *gyopo*.” But that wasn’t to build up the self-alienating, exclusive monolithic collective version of “*gyopo*.” Being “Japanese” is dictated by the contents prescribed by it, and like all words, it only applies to specific contexts, and the word “*gyopo*” is the same.

Here, there are just as many definitions of “*gyopo*” as there are people defining it, and it’s up to other people to decide whether you fall within their definition or not. Sagisawa accepts the woman’s definition based on her own experiences, that “you are not a *gyopo*” - and it’s clear that her logic leads her to exclude her by the fact that she “dropped her gaze, as if to drive me out of her field of vision” when she spoke. However, the authority of another to define one’s own identity cannot hold much importance. And not because the defining process is obviously arbitrary. Rather because if other people’s decisions all count, then none of them have any authority over “me.”

And the non-decisive state of one’s cherry-picked identity is accepted with reservation, going only as far as, “I guess that way of thinking is alright for me right now.” The decision only applies to the “me” that is here and now, and as soon as the “I” moves, “my” identity will also change. Even self-determination loses its absoluteness, becoming something constantly in flux.

The present nature of ethnic identity can be changed through an act of choice taken by individuals. This moment of action gives individuals the power to free themselves from the ahistorical and transcendental ethnicity that tears away individuality and drags individuals down into a reductive collective. The grammatically progressive form of the text, with its emphasis on the “now” - “You choose your now” (95) - reveals its freeing potential.

Guillermo Gómes-Peña, a Chicano performance artist who asserts that the identity of the United State’s southwestern and Mexican border region is “multi-

leveled,” supports the fluidity of identity, and states the following (Gómez-Peña: 153-154).

There is no such thing as a permanent, static, homogeneous sense of identity for Chicanos or for Mexican immigrants. In many ways, I can say that I am a Mexican in the process of Chicanization and that I am developing a multiple identity. I am Mexican, but I am also Chicano, and I am also Latin American. [. . .] There is a point at which you realize that to defend this monolithic concept of identity - *la Mexicanidad* - in a process of ongoing border crossings and reterritorialization and deterritorialization is absurd. What many people in the border say is that we assume a multiple repertoire of identities. We have transitional identities in the making.

As he says, it's the dominant cultural system of the United States, which assumes a unified Latino identity, with Cubans, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans all “exotic, passionate” or “Catholic, quarrelsome ‘bandidos,’” that hampers the changeable identity of the people called “trans-Chicano,” or “post-Mexican” (ibid. 159-162).

Just as Mexican Americans are created and categorized as the inverted mirror image of a unified and whole “Anglo America,” despite the diversity and differences in sex, class, time and background of “settlement,” and experiences, those known as “Zainichi” are also categorized and imagined as a homogeneous group, the other side of the same pure and homogeneous “ethnic Japanese” or “ethnic Korean” coin.

3. Ethnic blood

With Yu Miri even writing in the commentary that “I may have mentioned Korea and blood too much,” Yu saw Sagisawa’s actions as a concealment of her “genealogical bloodline,” and in it a kind of “original sin,” and inferred that Sagisawa “may have inherited her quarter Korean blood as an homage to her father” (180-181). And it’s true, Sagisawa states that “I do feel sad that, despite the fact our family has Korean blood, not one of us can read or write Korean,” “and that’s why I came to this country” (85), so for her, ethnic identity lies in the unification of the “ethnic blood” inside of her and its outward expression in the form of language. Therefore, going to

Korea to study the language was her attempt to recover this lost unification, and a way to restore her own lacking identity.

The concealment of the “genealogical bloodline” referred to by Yu is directly related to chapter six’s “Grandmother, Father, Myself.” In it, the “longstanding mystery” of her father’s “almost fatal trust in the good of mankind” makes “complete sense in the context of blood,” through the telling of the boundlessly trusting behavior of a Korean person - when a “Korean friend” finds out that Sagisawa, who had completed her studies and was returning to Japan the next day, had an expired credit card, the friend lends her his own card, worried in case anything were to happen to her. Sagisawa gets annoyed by this, “why is he so trusting?” And she can’t help but see in his actions her own father’s experiences of “trusting people too much” to his own detriment, and her long standing irritation at the mystery of this aspect of her father’s character is finally solved - “right, it’s because he’s Korean.”

The “fact that he is half Korean,” and in fact “quite densely Korean,” resolved how incomprehensible her father was to her, instigating a “discovery” of “a line connecting me to my father,” and even “to my grandmother.” This leads the narrator to the conviction that “blood is always there,” but this conviction is also tinged with the “mystical, something involuntary to me.” She repeats this feeling many times, even telling herself, “I want to allow myself to believe in at least this much mysticism” (117-124).

When this “genealogy of blood” goes beyond the blood relation of grandmother to father to me - that of the family group - and is applied to the even greater group of ethnic or nation, it loses its “mystical” overtones and becomes something absolute - “I have flowing within me ‘the blood of the fieriest of the oriental people’ (though I just assume that myself)” (85). “I have Japanese citizenship, and a certain percentage of Korean ethnicity in my blood” (157).

These “blood metaphors” are articulated through the “principle of direct participation”, described by Sakai as the archetype formation of national community. He states that the nation-state is created in a “fantasy area where the individual can directly attach to the whole,” beyond class, gender, region, occupation, status and other intermediary criteria, and calls this the “principle of direct participation” (Sakai, 1998: 45 - 46).

These metaphors such as “fiery blood” and “ethnic blood” in Sugisawa’s text are able to be articulated through a mechanism that this fantasized national identification

not only intrudes itself into the principle of “family” which is constructed by individual and tangible relationships and subsequently produces oneness as family, but also subordinates the principle of family under itself.

In the previous episode between the “friend” and “me” - without considering what experiences led to him being called a “friend” and what memories were tied to the image of him to create the feelings she had for him - the friend’s behavior is described as being determined by the fact that he is “Korean.” The narrator’s conviction that “blood is always there” is supported by the abstract relationship between “the whole” and “the individual,” and the tangible relationships between different “individuals” and “me” are disregarded.

The direct and individual relationship of “grandmother - father - me” is made up of shared memories of various experiences. When Sagisawa coughs after smoking too much and her mother sighs and says, “you have the same cough as your father” (Sagisawa 1995: 218), that came from those experiences and memory. “Ethnic blood” jumps from these kinds of relationships into identifying with and substantiating the “nation,” where ethnic history, experience, and memory is reflected onto and formed. The “mysticism” isn’t in the flow from “grandmother - father - me,” but rather in the principle that makes the unmediated leap into “ethnicity” possible through its appropriation.

The narrator is of the stance that, “I just can’t think of ethnicity as something imaginary,” and the mechanism at work behind her feelings when she contrasts “Japanese people who could never outwardly show their love for their country” to “Singing the Aegukga (South Korean national anthem) with a hand held to ones breast,” and her feeling that, “It’s not logical, but I just think it’s beautiful” (101-104) - how the creation of “Korean ethnicity” creates “Japanese ethnicity” as its reflection, or the yearning for the “Hinomaru (Japanese national flag) and Kimigayo (Japanese national anthem)” justifies the respect that is given to the flag and anthem of another nation - is made clear through the demolition of the mysticism or fantasy of the integral principle behind the nation state.

Sagisawa herself wrote about *Uli Nali Nikki* in dialogue with Sai Yōichi, stating, “before going to Korea, I wasn’t really able to position what I was. [. . .] I’d force myself too far into the Japanese side, and then too far into the South Korean or North Korean side, swinging dramatically from one side to another, even I didn’t know what I wanted to say” (Sagisawa 1994: 192). “What I am” is connected to a “nation,”

either “Japan,” “South Korea,” or “North Korea” (of course due to the fact that Sagisawa’s grandmother was from North Pyongan Province), in other words, it’s clearly based on the “principle of direct participation” between the individual and the national community.

However, Sagisawa continued on stating that, “once I actually went to Korea, I was a *gyopo*, nobody saw me as Korean,” and she returned to her “starting point,” realizing “after living in that situation, that things are hard for people no matter where they are.” *Kenari mo Hana, Sakura mo Hana*” is full of these words, emitted while gazing at the beggars and stalls filling the streets of Seoul (33).

People selling things, and people begging for things on the street. These streets were bursting with so many impassioned people that the buildings and homes couldn’t contain them, and this could have been one of the reasons I was brought here.

To dismantle the goal of recovering the “unification of ethnic blood and language” as something mystical, she had to come to these bursting streets, a “place of real life,” and live here herself. This very tangible and distinct view of “human life” is what limits this text into the dangerous discourse of the abstract “ethnic spirit” or “national culture” transcending individual life and experience.⁴⁾

“Then try living here” - those are the words that Homi, a Zainichi student who was so moved by a traditional Korean dance performance she saw when she was in high school that she goes to Korea to study, wishes she could say to “those people living in Japan who can’t stop complaining about Japan, despite not even understanding what’s going on in their ‘motherland’” (86-87), and this is also the view of those who actually go and “live” there. When the text states, “before tackling such big, abstract concepts as ‘ethnicity’ and ‘motherland,’ you have to get through every day” (53), the narrator is not speaking from a “place of fantasy,” but from a “place of real life,” shared by these Zainichi.

A fellow exchange student who listened thoughtfully to the details of the weekly magazine interview and the tragedy of the “wall of ice,” says, “Oh, I get it. Your story sounds kind of familiar. It’s like how when we’re in Japan, we’re not Japanese, and when we’re in Korea, we’re not Korean” (57). This statement is from a different friend than the one who said, “we’re different from Japanese people. And we’re

different from Koreans. That's why we're *gyopo*" (131).

The Zainichi category is created as a defensive barrier preventing the crossing of the border between the two closed domains of "Korea" and "Japan." Those living comfortably on either side of the border exclude the impossible, multi-genus existence of the Zainichi, and thereby maintain their own impenetrable domain.⁵⁾ To deny the unavoidable "hybridity" that exists among all "races" and "ethnicities," the principle of unification based on the "purity" of nation state "race" and "ethnicity" creates the vague category of "belonging," and inverts it into "impurity." Those forced into "the threshold of their name" are able to feel the categories those "names" create, and the violence at work within them.

The violent exclusion at play during categorization is not simply the action of the powerful against Zainichi, or women, or any number of minority groups. Just as the feminist primatologist Donna Haraway states that the categorization of "women" makes possible the negation of all "non-white women," and the categorization of "blacks" makes possible the negation of all non-black and black females (Haraway 2001: 298-303), not only does categorization involve a power play between the categorizer and categorized, but it also involves the complicated violence of rejection and oppression within the categories.

Haraway imagines the positioning of the critical search of identity politics possible in the following way (Haraway: 193, italics in original text).

The split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history. [. . .] The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see without claiming to be another.

Though she is discussing gender identity politics here, the position of the partial and never finished "self" that is able to construct conversations is, of course, valid to ethnic identity as well.

Different from racial or ethnic identity created through the power struggle of exclusion and connotation, control and dependence - a separate relationship than the "pure" oppressing the "impure" or the "originals" controlling the "descendants" or the

“whole” retrieving the “parts” - it is necessary to create the self and the other. To open a Zainichi text is to defy such hegemonic struggles and to use the “threshold” as a fissure in which to expose a non-hierarchic domain.

4. Heteroglossia for heterogeneous identity.

There are various aspects of *Kenari mo Hana, Sakura mo Hana* that expose linguistic power struggle.

The third chapter, “*Kaikabutteyaru*” (“Overestimate”), introduces Zainichi characters from many different places. When a girl named Heja rushes to the kitchen during a gathering after someone says they want to eat some “spinach *ohitashi*,” (Japanese dish of boiled, seasoned spinach), and ends up making “what can only be described as *namul*” (similar but different Korean dish), she simply says, “I just call all those kinds of things *namul*.” Heja tells this story as a joke aimed at making Japanese laugh, but she fails to get a laugh. On the contrary, she is defended by a Japanese girl seriously. Sagisawa tries to explain Heja’s perplex by comparing to the story of a “half German person” who mistook “*tsukemono*” (Japanese pickles) for “sauerkraut,” but can’t really explain it adequately (64-66).

Heja’s mistake lies in the use of her own, individual code of thinking of the two things as part of the same category and using “*namul*” as an over-reaching term that includes “*ohitashi*,” instead of the social code of using two separate indicators for what is considered two separate things. Just like when one uses baby words that have become common household terminology outside of the home, or when one uses private friendly jargon out in public, these code mistakes are regularly made by almost everyone.

This is a “silly, laughable story” because it involves a simple code mistake in which personal language customs were given precedence in a place of group communication. However, this occurred against the backdrop of multiple layers of coding and symbols, and the circumstance of the Zainichi who can’t help but be aware of the level disparity they involve. What is being asked of them is not the simple distinction between personal and private. Zainichi exist within two languages or cultures which should each have their own personal and private domains, but are required socially to keep one of those codes completely private, forced into a complicated code-switching. Perhaps this is clear when considering the existence of

the double code system of the *tsūmei* (fake socially acceptable Japanese name) and real name.

Just as Sagisawa tries to explain the Japanese girl's strange reaction by replacing "*namul*" with "sauerkraut," the reason the girl can't laugh at Heja's mistake is that she perceives this code power construct between "Japan and Korea," which doesn't exist between "Japan and Germany." Her words - "It's not your fault, Heja. It can't be helped" - reveal that she viewed this situation not as just a code mistake that anyone could make, but rather a difference in precedence, and she feels that because of Heja's "origins," she's not surprised that she would prioritize the code of "Korean cuisine." As Sagisawa says, she may have said that to "save her feelings." But what at first glance appears to be a "defense" of her, was actually a negation, indicating that in actuality the code-switching forced on the Zainichi is unnecessary, or even impossible, and thereby completely disavowing that of the two languages or cultures, one is suppressing the other.

Compared to this kind of denial of suppressive power over communication, the power that "Arrogant Old Man" who appears in the front desk episode of the first chapter is trying to use is so obvious as to be too easy to criticize. However, that criticism must go beyond just the coding power struggle between Japan and Korea. That is because this power construct is not relegated to just the dynamics of the two languages and cultures.

When a "middle aged Japanese man" asks a staff member of a top Seoul hotel what floor the restaurants are on, and is answered with what is obviously within the context a mispronunciation of "the fifth floor," the Japanese man "lets out an off-handed laugh" and says, "you mean the fifth floor." In this instance, Sagisawa sighs sarcastically to herself and whispers, "(if you know, then don't ask, old man.)" directing her snide comment at this middle-aged man who throws around his linguistic dominance, completely unaware of his social and economic predominance and the cultural suppression behind it. At the same time, the sharp end of her criticism is aimed at "Americans" who "fail to understand that your own language doesn't work in other countries," and the "Japan" that tries to be a "miniature America," within the "Asian world" by imitating this self-centered belief in their own language - "what's the point of imitating a fool?" (17-23).

Linguistic imperialism in the age of globalization goes beyond the simple suppression by a controlling language of other languages, and into the fact that

suppression or control is brought into other languages, creating layers of power relationships and further advancing the world linguistic map. Therefore, it can be said that Sagisawa's stereotypical criticism of "The illusion of how powerful 'America' appeared after the war," and the "arrogance" of linguistic imperialism that came with it makes the power relationship between the Korean and Japanese languages actually part of a much bigger chain of oppression. However, it has to be pointed out that it is problematic that Sagisawa criticized the middle-aged man by saying, "if you're going to laugh or frown at how someone talks," then you "need to be able to speak perfectly" first, admonishing him in her head by saying, "so you think your Japanese is perfect, do you?" focusing on linguistic awareness and the power placement of languages it creates.

By holding him to the concept of "speaking Japanese perfectly," this man's authority as a user of the dominant language and status within the hierarchy of "Japanese speakers" may be relatively low. However, this loss of authority has no affect on the linguistic power construct at play between the languages. In fact, discrediting him as an imperfect speaker actually consolidates the power of "the perfect language and the perfect language speaker."

It's understood that the concept of "perfect language" creates a "legitimate" and "pure" standard and hierarchy within language, oppressing "illegitimate" and "impure" language and their speakers, and bringing up the "perfectness" of the language someone speaks in order to criticize their linguistic power is a subversive argument. The issue is not only within one language. The legitimization given to the idealized language controls the relationships between various languages, aggravating the status struggle and hegemonic dispute between various languages with accusations that "that language is illogical" or "this language is the clearest in the world," creating layers of divisions and barriers between languages and their speakers.⁶⁾

If the unification of the "Platonic idea of language" and nationality only exists as an "ideological construct" (Hobsbawm 1990: 57), then unlike language based on that idea, all languages actually in use have a wide range of differences from sex, age, social status, region, and more, with further transformation = metamorphosis occurring over racial and border communication. These mutations, which look like nothing more than examples of deviation to linguistic nationalists who sanctify canonized grammar and dictionaries, are not just the changes that occur internally

over time, but actually hold a rich history of the processes of linguistic interaction between diverse speakers.

To expose this linguistic history and reality that has been covered up by nationalistic ideology makes possible not a diglossiac situation in which the colonizer's dominant language coexists hierarchically with pidgin and creole languages, but the construction of a place of heteroglossia where various languages can coexist and mix non-hierarchically. This potential world is what must be understood from reading *Kenari mo Hana*, *Sakura mo Hana*.

5. The potential of jumbled language

Despite being written over the course of a year, the "I" in *Kenari mo Hana*, *Sakura mo Hana* shifts and changes and is never conclusively determined. As the story unfolds, the narrator's own rigid self-definition of herself as a "gypop" gradually collapses, and she increasingly discovers the multiplicity of identity by moving through spaces where she meets people with a diverse array of identities, and through these interactions, the space she occupies further expands upon its fluid and non-determined nature.

It's clear, even from the few passages quoted here, that Zainichi people are extremely relevant in these interactions. It's also clear that this space is made up of more than just them. Yonsei University Korean Language Institute's level two class was filled with not only "Zainichi," but also "U.S. resident" and "Canadian resident" *gyopo* from various different countries, as well as a "Japanese" woman who came to Korea when her Korean husband was transferred here, an "American priest," an "American woman" in the military stationed in Korea, a "girl from New Zealand," a "woman from Myanmar," and more, making for a truly diverse group of people (Sagisawa 1998c: 78-79). When Sagisawa says "*itadakimasu*" (Japanese phrase said before eating), the girl who comes up to her and longingly asks her, "are you Japanese?" is a Zainichi *gyopo* from Osaka who studied at an American university before coming to Korea, and when the teacher sighs in exasperation when a student doesn't know what an "*ondol*" is, that student is a *gyopo* from America (29-35).

The only thing they all have in common is that they are all studying Korean, but Korean is by no means the communal language that dominates and holds power over their communication. It's a "given" that the Zainichi who have come to Korea to

study “mix together” Japanese and Korean (Sagisawa 1994: 198), and with Sagisawa most comfortable speaking “Konglish,” a “mysterious German who speaks seven languages” tells her the results of the Grade skipping exam by saying, “*Aigu, silpaehaess-eul* (I messed up). I did terribly” (Sagisawa 1997c: 100, 174). The language spoken at a “girl’s talk evening” with a group of girls, “some who speak Korean, some who speak English and just a little bit of Korean, some who speak Japanese and Korean, and more,” is of course “a complete, overall jumble” (78).

That all these languages lose their fixed outlines and transform into “jumbled” language is a reflection of the mixed medley of identities the speakers of those languages have. Regarding the potential and necessity of this jumbled language, Sugihara Toru started by detecting the faint though transformed hint of a Jejudo accent in the Japanese phonological structure of Osaka rakugo’s *Daishoya*, and historicized the experiences up to the present day of “border crossing people,” opening it up into a non-power relational transnational linguistic or cultural interaction, revealing that it is a difficult though defining and important practice (Sugihara 1998). Gómes-Peña, who states that for language to cross borders, people must decenter their own voice, speaks of the jumble of multiple languages by saying that in order to rationalize the different aspects of our own identity, we develop a self that speaks differently (Gómes-Peña:156).

Of course, we cannot simply praise the jumbling and hybridization of languages, because we are all too aware that historically, geopolitical inequality between societies or cultures have often led to the “predominant” language absorbing and extinguishing the “subordinate” language. Therefore, criticizing a tendency towards Hangul writing of the Korean language as “nationalistic withdrawal,” and to say “they scorned a great culture of their own accord” (105), and expand that into an argument for the integrated identity of the “Chinese character using sphere” is far too naïve.⁷⁾

We are living at a historical spearhead, in which various disparities are ranked according to a chain of power on a global scale. In this world, what is needed to resist the power relations incorporated into communication is not to act as speakers of “perfect language,” or to reject those who speak “imperfect language” as communication noise, but rather an effort to understand such language, and thereby raise the tolerance and strength of language.

Such effort would change the passive weakness of linguistic and social minorities or other vulnerable groups into a source of power that we can use to build

relations upon. This will surely test the potential of the impure, incomplete and jumbled language that rationalizes our ever changing, never fixed identities.

Translated by Laura F. Keehn

[Notes]

- 1) This essay is an English version of a paper written in Japanese entitled “Hi-kettei no Aidentiti: Sagisawa Megumu no Kenari mo hana, Sakura mo Hana no Kaisetsu wo Kakinaosu” (非-決定のアイデンティティ：鷺沢萌『ケナリも花、サクラも花』の解説を書き直す, Non/Determined Identity: Unpacking a postcolonial hybridity through a reading of Megumu Sagisawa’s “Kenari mo Hana”) which appeared in Datsu Aidentiti (脱アイデンティティ) edited by Ueno Chizuko and published by Keisōshobō in 2006. I would like to extend my gratitude to Laura F. Keehn for finalizing this version.
- 2) “Uli nala” is Korean for “our country,” “motherland.” My essay follows Sagisawa’s text and uses the term “Kankokugo” (South Korean language) rather than “Chōsen-go” (Korean language). “Zainichi” is used here as a general term unrelated to nationality, referring to those of Korean descent living in Japanese society.
- 3) Isajiw distinguishes two separate methodological approaches - “subjective” and “objective” - when defining ethnic identity. The latter “by which ethnic groups are assumed to be existing as it were ‘out there’ as real phenomena,” the former is focused on “psychological identity” which “makes it much easier for the definition to embrace the second or third ethnic generation than would a definition emphasizing the observed sharing of culture or other attributes” (Isajiw 1979: 115-116). Therefore, this psychological approach places Sagisawa as a “third generation Zainichi,” a fact which can only be applied when that ethnic identity is an issue. To make this text “open” according to the actions of the reader and not the writer, a different approach will be required. For example, in the seventh chapter from which the title of the essay collection comes from, “Kenari mo Hana, Sakura mo Hana,” an interaction Sagisawa has with a female editor in a park in Seoul in which they discuss the confusion over the words “kenari” (forsythia) and “nageune” (wayfarer), can be seen as what Zygmunt Bauman terms the identity of the “tourist,” making it possible to analyze the non-determinacy and temporariness from a different angle. By conceptualizing “the tourist is on the move” who “is everywhere he goes in, but nowhere of the place he is in,” he describes the “postmodern life strategy” of “not identity building, but avoidance of fixation” (Bauman 1996: 24, 29).
- 4) The positioning of oneself among these confused streets and the view from there can be seen in terms of the “life value” that Nagao Nishikawa found in Ango Sakaguchi’s

Nihon Bunka Shiron ("Personal Views on Japanese Culture"). Through comparative analysis of Bruno Taut's Personal Views on Japanese Culture and Ango's Shiron, Nishikawa sees Ango in complete opposition to Taut's cultural concept that "beauty and culture are advanced national spiritual expressions, highly valuing cultural traditions and cultural heritage," rather believing that Ango's view that he is "placed within and living in actual society and culture" is "the position that we are actually living in" (Nishikawa 2001: 325, italics in original text).

- 5) Under apartheid, South African citizens were divided into nine racial categories under the Population Registration Act, with the government accepting applications for change of status once a year. According to Time, the results of applications in 1986 led 1,600 citizens to change their status from white to colored, colored to white, black to Indian, Indian to Malay, white to Malay, etc. ("A Crazy Game of Musical Chairs," Time, Mar. 09, 1987). The Mauritius born scholar of comparative literature, Francois Lionnet stated the following on this Time article. "These 1,600 individuals are in an 'undefined position,' in a gray area in which their ethnic/racial identity is fluid. The Home Secretary added sarcastically that 'no whites have become black, nor have any blacks become white.' In other words, the two categories at both ends of the spectrum were safely preserved, and the system of apartheid dominant over the majority. Classification of those in the middle are there as a defensive barrier - a kind of cordon - to prevent the crossing of the border between the 'white' and the 'black' domains. (Lionnet 1991: 20).
- 6) It isn't at all outrageous to suggest here that the theory of evolution that typified language as evolving from isolated to inflective dominated 19th century racist delusions. For more on Darwinism as applied to linguistics, see Alter (1999). Hagège (2002=2004) also relates the view of "language as species" to evolutionary theory and anthropology (2004: 37-48). For ideology on the history of linguistic studies, see Frederick J. Newmeyer (1994).
- 7) Hirata Shoji (1994) makes the historic observation that "a kanji and words (or written language) focused principle" is formed out of "a continuation to a pluralistic and non-Sino Japanese" spoken language, making the "non-homogeneous Chinese cultural sphere" invisible. Similarly, for more on the Chinese nationalism issue related to the creation of "culture China," which makes "the tradition of Chinese culture" a super-ethnic concept at the nucleus of a global cultural alliance beyond nation states, see Murata Yujiro (1994).

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(Professor, Graduate School of Letters)

SUMMARY

Transitional Identities and Heteroglossia in Zainichi Korean Literature

HIRATA Yumi

As her first collection of short stories entitled *Kaerenu Hitobito* ("Those with Nowhere to Return," 1987) shows, Sagisawa Megumu (1968-2004) began her career writing about those who had lost a place to belong. From the early 1990s, she began to write stories in which Resident Koreans in Japan (Zainichi) played main characters - a shift that was triggered by the revelation that her paternal grandmother was from the Korean peninsula. Since then, having experienced a half-year stay in Seoul, Sagisawa became tenaciously focused on themes of ethnicity and nationality.

Kenari mo Hana, Sakura mo Hana ("Kenari is also a Flower, Sakura is also a Flower," 1994), which I focus on here, is an essay written during the time she spent learning the Korean language in Seoul. On the one hand the narrator substantiates "blood" and "ethnicity" and essentializes "natural" and "primordial" identity, but at the same time she resists being categorized into a homogeneous Zainichi group by cutting into the diversity that exists within it.

The text reflects the author's vacillated thought on identity and depicts how the ethnic identity expressed as psychological and subjective sense of belonging, in which Sagisawa was entrenched at the beginning of her stay in Seoul, comes to lose its absoluteness and transforms into "transitional identities in the making."

Sagisawa's ideas of ethnic identity developed in a place where all language loses their fixed outlines and transforms into a "jumbled" language. This follows the path from the colonial and hierarchical diglossic condition to a more egalitarian heteroglossic situation in which various languages and their speakers can coexist and mix in a non-hierarchical way.