



“Poems of Flesh”: Rethinking Zainichi Women’s Literary History Through the Works of Sō Shūgetsu

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Abstract

Zainichi Korean literary histories of the late 1990s and early 2000s positioned the emergence of female author Yi Yangji in the 1980s as the beginning of Zainichi women’s writing, emphasizing her naturalized identity and thus positioning her at a remove from works by male authors that were interpreted as more overtly political. This development, whereby Zainichi women were circumscribed as bearers of cultural authenticity yet excluded from the realm of the political, can be traced back to the hollowed-out interiority of female characters in canonical works of Zainichi literature from the postwar period. This paper considers how the author Sō Shūgetsu (1944-2011) positioned herself outside of this system of Zainichi knowledge production, exploring the ways in which Sō’s idea of the *jōsetsu* (情説, as opposed to *shōsetsu* 小説, novel), an experimental literary form “written on/of flesh,” subverts the literary conventions established by her male predecessors and sets forth an alternative mode of writing that foregrounds the embodied, affective subjectivity of working women in the resident Korean neighborhood of Ikaino, Osaka. Sō’s critiques of the limited representations of women in the works of critically acclaimed Zainichi authors and the structures of oppression that worked to silence women within Zainichi society hint at the possibility of a radical rethinking of the criteria through which women’s writing was first incorporated into the Zainichi literary canon.

Introduction

The Osaka-based Zainichi Korean poet, novelist and essayist Sō Shūgetsu (宗秋月, 1944-2011) published her first poetry collection, *Sō Shūgetsu shishū* (Collected poems of Sō Shūgetsu), in 1971, at a time when the Tokyo literary establishment was showing a renewed interest in institutionalizing discourses of both women’s and minority literature.¹

¹ Previous scholarship on Sō in English has typically referred to her by the Korean reading of her pen name, Chong Ch’uwŏl. Here, I use the Japanese pronunciation in keeping with her stated preference in a 2009 interview, and her former editor’s assertion that she never heard Sō use the Korean pronunciation during her

Later that same year, Ri Kaisei (Lee Hoesung) would become the first Zainichi author to receive the Akutagawa Prize for his novel *Kinuta o utsu onna*, leading the way for a new canon of male, second-generation Zainichi Korean authors in Japan. Female authors were relatively late to gain visibility and acknowledgement within the Zainichi literary scene, a fact often attributed to the low literacy rate and lack of access to education for first-generation Zainichi women, but by the late 1980s and early 1990s, female authors such as Yi Yang-ji and Yū Miri had come to dominate the critical discourse on Zainichi literature. In fact, Yi and Yū became the second and third Zainichi Korean authors ever to win the Akutagawa Prize, in 1988 and 1997 respectively, officially marking the acceptance of Zainichi women writers into the Tokyo literary establishment.

Meanwhile, scholarly interest in Zainichi Korean cultural production was taking off in Japan, with the influential works “*Zainichi*” *to iu konkyo* (The Basis of “Zainichi,” 1995) by Takeda Seiji,² *Umaretara soko ga furusato* (Home is Where You’re Born, 1999) by Kawamura Minato,³ and “*Zainichi*” *bungaku ron* (On “Zainichi” Literature, 2004) by Isogai Jirō⁴ laying the groundwork for a growing body of research on Zainichi authors in both Japan and the U.S. by the 2000s. Within the generational paradigms laid out by these early literary histories, women’s writing was linked with the “third generation” of Zainichi literature, with Kawamura Minato in particular asserting that the spread of naturalization within Zainichi society was correlated with the emergence of serious writing by female Zainichi authors. This critical narrative glosses over the intellectual contributions of earlier writers such as Sō. These writers struggled against the system of representation established by the canonical works of male Zainichi authors from the postwar period onwards, which denied Zainichi Korean women characters full interiority and positioned them as cultural objects of representation rather than as subjects with the potential to write or speak their own narratives.

Further groundbreaking scholarship by Song Hyewōn⁵ and others in recent decades has sought to create a fuller picture of postwar literary and intellectual activity by Zainichi Korean women and explore the complex and varied ways in which their writings navigate the politics of identity. However, I would argue that the categories established by the earliest volumes of scholarship on Zainichi literature - which were in turn shaped by which Zainichi authors were already recognized within the Tokyo literary establishment - led to a lingering preconception that Zainichi women’s writing lacked the explicit engagement with Zainichi domestic activism and other political issues that were praised in the works of

lifetime. Sō Shūgetsu, *Sō Shūgetsu zenshū* (Tokyo: Doyō Bijutsusha Shuppan, 2016), 563 and 588 (hereafter cited as SSZ).

² Takeda Seiji, “*Zainichi*” *to iu konkyo* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1995).

³ Kawamura Minato, *Umaretara soko ga furusato: Zainichi chōsenjin bungakuron* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1999),

⁴ Isogai Jirō, “*Zainichi*” *bungakuron* (Tokyo: Shinkansha, 2004).

⁵ For example, see Song Hyewon, “*Zainichi chōsenjin bungakushi*” *no tame ni: koe naki koe no porifoni* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2014).

canonical male authors, influencing which texts receive the most critical attention as well as how they are taught and interpreted within the discipline of Japan Studies.

Melissa Wender has discussed how the first- and second- generation male Zainichi writers that received critical acclaim in Japan wrote “fiction of a decidedly political tenor,” while “authors who did not write work that focused explicitly on the political dimension of Resident Korean identity... did not receive such critical accolades.”⁶ The reverse dynamic seems to be at play in the initial reception that female Zainichi authors were greeted with in the 80s and 90s – those who were embraced by the literary establishment were often viewed by their contemporaries as having moved away from the overt politics of their male predecessors. Wender describes how early critical commentary on Yi Yangji’s work “revolved around the perceived apoliticality of her fiction,” arguing instead that Yi drew together the bodily, the linguistic, the existential and the historical in complex ways that were simply not legible within “a single model of identity that was intensely political.”⁷ Some of the critical reception of Yū Miri has also focused on the perceived “deemphasis of ethnicity” in her writing, with Tracey Gannon arguing that the “deferral of serious literary appraisal relates, at least in part, to Yū’s identity as a *zainichi* Korean.”⁸

The normative criteria initially imposed on Zainichi women’s narratives by the Tokyo literary establishment continue to shape which authors reach a general audience today, both in Japan and globally. Yū Miri has gained mainstream popularity internationally since her novel *Tokyo Ueno Station* won the National Book Award for Translated Literature in the U.S. in 2020, and publication of the English translation of another of her novels, *The End of August*, is currently slated for 2023.⁹ Yi Yangji remains a similarly dominant figure in the domain of scholarship and criticism of Zainichi literary production, with two separate volumes of her works issued in 2022 to mark the thirtieth anniversary of her death. The first, *Kotoba no tsue: Yi Yangji essei shū* (The Cane of Words: Yi Yangji Essay Collection) presents a variety of Yi’s prose pieces organized under the subcategories of “travel,” “Korean dance,” “literature and culture,” and “living in the interstice” (*hazama o ikiru*); the second, *Yi Yangji serekushon* (Yi Yangji Selection), is a collection of four novels and three essays edited and with an afterword by the contemporary Zainichi Taiwanese

⁶ Melissa Wender, “Fleshly Inscriptions of History: Yi Yang-ji’s *Koku*,” *Korean and Korean American Studies Bulletin* 11 (2000): J28.

⁷ *Ibid.*, J27-28.

⁸ Gannon goes on to discuss the critical fascination with Yū’s perceived “deemphasis” of Koreanness in her work, as well as Yū’s own complicated and shifting relationship with the category of “Zainichi.” Yū has at times insisted that she does not identify as a “Zainichi author” and famously refused to be included in the 18-volume “Zainichi” *bungaku zenshū* (Collected Works of “Zainichi” Literature, ed. Isogai Jirō and Kuroko Kazuo, 2006). See Tracey Gannon, “Controversy as Context: Yū Miri and the Critics,” *U.S.-Japan Women’s Journal*, No. 34 (2008): 90-93, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/42771977.pdf>.

⁹ Yū Miri, *Tokyo Ueno Station*, trans. Morgan Giles (New York: Riverhead Books, 2020).

author On Yūjū (also romanized as Wen Yourou).¹⁰ These new publications seeking to reappraise Yi's previously published work indicate the intellectual and capital value still attached to her name within the literary establishment in Japan. Meanwhile, more "minor" Zainichi authors, such as Sō - who spent her entire life in ethnically segregated Korean neighborhoods in Saga and Osaka, participated in the domestic anti-fingerprinting movement, and incorporated explicit critiques of the Japanese, South Korean, and American governments into her works - have been largely excluded from the mainstream literary canon. To date, none of Sō's novels have been translated into English, and her name is rarely recognized outside of those specializing in research related to Zainichi Koreans in either U.S. or Japanese academia.

In this article, I read the works of Sō Shūgetsu as the source of a potent critique of the system of Zainichi knowledge production that enforced normative criteria about how Zainichi women were represented in literature and determined which voices were seen as legitimate writers by the Tokyo literary establishment - a system that shaped the makeup of the canon of Zainichi authors that are most widely read and taught in Japan Studies today. I argue that Sō's literary experiments sought to subvert the Zainichi literary canon in terms of narrative structure, literary aesthetics, and the medium of written language itself. Although Sō was not the first female Zainichi writer to produce literary works with an overtly political bent, her critique of the aesthetic and ontological underpinnings of the "Zainichi literature" genre suggests an alternative framework for understanding the purpose and potential of a literary history of Zainichi women writers.¹¹ In particular, I am interested in Sō's idea of the *jōsetsu* (情説, as opposed to *shōsetsu* 小説, novel) as an experimental literary form "written on/of flesh" that blurs the boundaries of poetry and prose and sets forth an alternative mode of writing that positions *jō/chōng* 情 (affect/emotion) as a concept weaving together the embodied and intellectual lives of working women in the resident Korean neighborhood of Ikaino, Osaka. Focusing on the short story "Ikaino nonki megane" (Ikaino Rose-Colored Glasses, 1987), the essay "Waga ai suru chōsen no onnatachi" (Korean Women I Love, 1974), and the poem "Tanomoshikō" (Mutual Financing Association, from *Sō shūgetsu shishū*, 1971), I will examine Sō's depictions of Ikaino as both a landscape imbued with intersecting structures of oppression and a site of possibility for fleeting moments of resistance. By reading Sō's works as critiques of the objectifying representation of women in the works of canonical Zainichi authors, the oppressive forces that worked to silence women within Zainichi society, and

¹⁰ Yi Yangji, *Kotoba no tsue: Yi Yangji essei shū* (Tokyo: Shinsensha, 2022) and On Yūjū, ed., *Yi Yangji serekushon* (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 2022). The "walking stick" or "cane" (*tsue*) of the title refers to a metaphor Yi uses for the disorienting experience of living between two languages.

¹¹ Sō's 1971 poetry collection is sometimes credited as the first published volume of literature by a female Zainichi Korean author. See, for example, Kim Huna, *Zainichi chōsenjin josei bungakuron* (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2004), 29. However, resources such as the 1950s Zainichi poetry journal *Jindare* demonstrate that Zainichi women were certainly writing about political engagement earlier, and I find that the necessarily amateur nature of women's writing and publishing during the Japanese empire and immediate post-war period makes the attribution of "firsts" somewhat arbitrary.

the limitations of emergent feminist conceptions of women's empowerment for Zainichi women, I consider Sō's conception of Ikaino as a space constituted through women's labor as a literary motif that continues to reappear in later works of Zainichi literature and offers a new perspective on the ongoing reevaluation of canonical Zainichi women writers of the past.

Sō Shūgetsu and the project of writing *jōsetsu*

Sō Shūgetsu (birth name Son Chunja; Japanese name Matsumoto Akiko) was born in Ogi, Saga in 1944. She was a second-generation Zainichi Korean, born to parents who met in Osaka in 1934 after each had immigrated from Cheju Island. After graduating from middle school in Saga prefecture in 1960, Sō moved to the Ikaino area of Osaka, home to the largest Zainichi Korean community in Japan, to look for employment. The landscape of Ikaino would come to shape the entirety of her future literary career, and before long she was secretly writing poetry on paper scraps in the bathroom of the sandal factory where she worked. This was the first of many jobs she held in Ikaino, which included factory work, door-to-door sales of makeup and contraceptive devices, and eventually operating her own snack bars and food stands, all experiences that show up repeatedly in her writing.

In 1966 she began studying at the Osaka School of Literature (*Osaka bungaku gakkō*), where she became involved in the local poetry scene through close relationships with fellow Zainichi writers such as Kim Shijong as well as other Osaka poets such as Ono Tōzaburō. Her first poem was published in the journal *Shinbungaku* in 1967, with English translations of her poetry appearing in print as early as 1973 in *Lotus*, the journal of the Afro-Asian Writers Association. She was primarily known as a poet, with the 1971 *Sō Shūgetsu shishū* followed by the collection *Ikaino/onna/ai/uta* (Ikaino/woman/love/poem) in 1984. However, she was also a prolific prose author, publishing frequently in both local newspapers and journals and eventually putting out the essay collections *Ikaino Taryong* in 1986 and *Sarang he/Ai shitemasu* in 1987. She also completed six novels over the course of her career.

Probably because her works were written both at a physical remove from and in direct opposition to the Tokyo literary establishment, Sō did not gain mainstream critical recognition in the way that authors such as Yū Miri or Yi Yangji have done. She is mentioned only briefly in the Zainichi literary histories by Kawamura Minato and Isogai Jirō mentioned above, and remained relatively obscure during her lifetime, outside the sphere of Zainichi Korean literature and activism in Osaka. However, scholarly interest in her work has grown in recent decades, especially after the publication of the *Sō Shūgetsu zenshū* (Collected Works of Sō Shūgetsu) in 2016. Recent scholarship in Japanese by Kim

Huna¹² and in English by Norma Field,¹³ Melissa Wender,¹⁴ and Jackie J. Kim-Wachutka,¹⁵ has provided insightful analyses of Sō's representations of motherhood, her resistance against narratives of cultural assimilation, and her relationship to first-generation Korean women in her writing. Here, expanding on these earlier examinations of Sō's depictions of Zainichi domestic life, I will focus on the way she writes women into the economic and social space of Ikaino, outside of the household.

While Sō's writing spanned prose, fiction, and poetry, often ambiguously blending all three within a single piece of writing, a central concept that ties her range of work into a single writing project can be found in a 2009 interview, where she stated bluntly, "Shōsetsu [小説, novels] can eat shit, I always say that mine are jōsetsu [情説]."¹⁶ This neologism had already shown up in the afterword of her essay collection *Sarang he/Ai shitemasu* in 1987, where Sō wrote, "In poetry and in novels, I want to write our real existence as contained within the Zainichi jōsetsu [情説], our jōkyō [情況, conditions], even eros - Ah, I want to write it quickly."¹⁷ Her editor Shimizu Noriko elaborates on this concept of the jōsetsu in her essay "From Poetry to Prose: What Sō Shūgetsu Wanted to Write," included in Sō's posthumous volume of collected works. Shimizu explains the meaning of jōsetsu, and the particular valence of Sō's use of the character 情 (emotion/affect/sentiment) as follows: "Once, the South Korean poet Kim Chiha called his own long-form works not shōsetsu [小説, novels] but 'daisetsu' [大説], and Sō Shūgetsu emulated that in terming her own prose 'jōsetsu' [情説]. She painstakingly gathered up the memories of women - the experiences that needed to be forgotten in order to survive daily life deep in the alleyways of Ikaino - and expressed that han [恨, resentment] that could not be put into words in her 'jōsetsu.'"¹⁸ Whereas Kim Chiha's worldplay emphasizes the need for a "grand" narrative, replacing the character for "small" (小) in the word for *novel* with the character for "large" (大), Sō's similar rhetorical gesture of inserting the character for "emotion" (情) emphasizes the centrality of affect in her work, which sought to unearth and give voice to the "unspeakable" emotions and repressed experiences of Ikaino women.

This idea of creating a new language, assembled from women's affective and embodied experiences of daily life and capable of expressing that which "cannot be put into words," reoccurs throughout Sō's body of work, although the concept of the jōsetsu is yet to be

¹² Kim, *Zainichi chōsenjin josei bungakuron*.

¹³ Norma Field, "Beyond Envy, Boredom, and Suffering: Toward an Emancipatory Politics for Resident Koreans and Other Japanese," *positions* 1-3 (1993): 640-670.

¹⁴ Melissa L. Wender, *Lamentation as History: Narratives by Koreans in Japan, 1965-2000* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 91-125.

¹⁵ Jackie J. Kim-Wachutka, *Zainichi Korean Women in Japan: Voices* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 202-211.

¹⁶ "Shōsetsu nante kuso kurae, watashi no wa jōsetsu da to itteimasu ga." Sō, SSZ, 567. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁷ Sō Shūgetsu, *Sarang he / Ai shitemasu* (Tokyo: Kage Shobō, 1987), 249.

¹⁸ Shimizu Noriko, "Shi kara sanbun e: Sō Shūgetsu ga kakitakatta koto," in SSZ, 588.

explored within previous scholarship on her writing. Sō's insistence on the potential of language that transcends the limiting logic of "words" is most clearly expressed in her 1985 essay "Mun Konbun omoni no ningo" (Mother Mun Konbun's Apple), a meditation on the power of writing and the hybridity of Zainichi language as mediated through Sō's encounter with a first-generation Zainichi woman learning to write for the first time. In it, she declares, "I decided to live composing poetry only of flesh. / How painful are poems written on the body... After I parted ways with words, my encounter with true words began."¹⁹ Melissa Wender has read this passage as a narrative describing Sō's abandoning and then "coming back to" writing during the decade between the publication of her first poetry collection and that of her second, using the translations "I decided to live my poetry with my flesh" and "After having parted [once] with language." However, I argue that we should interpret these lines instead as positing a definitive and final break with received forms of literary language, as differentiated by the "true words" (*shin no kotoba*) that come from the embodied act of "writing on/of flesh" – Sō is not describing a return to a previously abandoned writing practice, but the generation of an entirely new literary form that she would later come to term *jōsetsu*, a form unencumbered by oppressive systems of rationalization, representation, and objectification. The distinction Sō draws between the "true words" (or "poems on flesh") she writes and the oppressive world of mere "words" is emphasized by her repeated questioning: "For the Korean women, Zainichi women who kill their own selves just to get by for one more day, how much meaning could letters – words – have?... Supporting a 'home' on this archipelago where you're sane because you're stupid, you'd go mad if you got sharp, bracing your legs, hands, and neck, what strength can words provide? What meaning can words have?"²⁰ As we will see in the next section, Sō carries out this process of deconstructing the established system of "words" – which we might understand as the same system of representation that framed women as aesthetic objects rather than writing subjects – by subverting the conventions of the Zainichi literary canon and re-centering the affective and visceral experiences of working women in Ikaino. The quality of Sō's poetic language, which Isogai Jirō characterized as "flesh-words" (肉体コトバ), or "words overflowing within the flesh, filtered by the flesh, spoken through the flesh,"²¹ might be understood as an aesthetic technique that Sō deploys as part of a larger campaign against the objectifying logic of a literary establishment that failed to recognize women like her as legitimate writing subjects.

It is not difficult to prove that Sō was highly attuned to the overtly political issues of her day—one need only consider the fact that the content of her works touches on topics ranging from the Gwangju Uprising to the Gulf War, or that she herself actively participated in the movement to resist the mandatory fingerprinting of Zainichi Koreans until the law was finally abolished in 1993. Although she did not explicitly affiliate with either Chongryon or Mindan, the two primary political organizations for Koreans living in

¹⁹ Sō, SSZ, 258.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Isogai Jirō, "Zainichi" *bungaku ron*, 42.

Japan, she spoke out consistently against both dictatorship in South Korea and America's global interventionism. More importantly, however, her constant centering of the interior monologues of the women of *Ikaino* challenged the existing framework through which Zainichi Korean women had been represented, insisting on the political stakes inherent in lived experience, personal memory, and quotidian working life. In novels such as *Ikaino nonki megane* (*Ikaino Rose-Colored Glasses*, 1987), Sō's emphasis on both the rich interiority of her female working class Zainichi characters as well as their power within the local economy acts as a sharp critique of the utter lack of prior literary representations that depict resident Korean women as characters with fully formed subjectivity and agency.

Overcoming the Zainichi canon

As mentioned in the introduction, the prominent literary scholar Kawamura Minato's groundbreaking Zainichi literary history *Umaretara soko ga furusato* (*Home is Where You're Born*, 1999) links the emergence of women's writing with the increasing rate of naturalization among members of the Zainichi community by the 1980s and 1990s, framing it as one of the conditions that enabled Zainichi women to begin writing critically successful literature about their life experiences. Kawamura says, "Coupled with the fact that there were hardly any female Zainichi Korean writers up until that point, hardly any 'naturalized women' had appeared within the world of Zainichi literature... Yi Yangji and Fukasawa Kai each appeared within the world of 'Zainichi Korean literature' as just that kind of 'naturalized' second-generation Zainichi Korean female author."²² He continues:

I think we can say that the activity of the 'third generation' of Zainichi Koreans first started when 'naturalized' Zainichi Korean women writers, bearing the dual disadvantage of being 'Zainichi Koreans' among the overwhelming majority of 'Japanese,' and moreover being 'naturalized citizens' who were called fourth-rate 'Koreans,' and even further being (what was looked down upon as) the inferior gender of 'women,' acquired their own 'words' and began to speak.²³

Aside from being factually incorrect, the assertion that there were "hardly any" Zainichi women writers until Yi's debut in the 1980s is problematic in that it both reifies the literary establishment's disinterest in earlier narratives by working-class women writers who did not come from families with naturalized citizenship and primes readers to understand these literary narratives of the "third generation" as expressing an already circumscribed form of engagement with the multiple facets of Zainichi identity. In the introduction to her literary history of Zainichi women's literature, Kim Huna continues this line of thought in

²² Kawamura, *Umaretara soko ga furusato*, 278.

²³ Kawamura, *Umaretara soko ga furusato*, 280. It's worth noting that both Yi and Fukasawa were technically second-generation Zainichi Koreans; Kawamura's "generational" of Zainichi literature is only loosely associated with the generation of the authors in question.

describing the works of Zainichi female authors in general as categorically different from their male predecessors, stating, “To some extent, we can say that [these female authors] are positioned at a distance from the racial ideology and politics that can be seen in the works of many male authors. This was partly due to their exclusion from male society, but these works, which were written to maintain that distance, expand the breadth of Zainichi literature (and its criticism and research), which has tended toward the conceptual and the ideological.”²⁴ Melissa Wender has similarly contextualized Yi’s generation of authors in terms of “two general trends: first, that within Japanese mainstream literature toward a focus on interiority; second, that within the Resident Korean community toward a self-definition based on culture rather than politics,” although, as I stated in the introduction, she has also sought to question any simplistic notion of “politics” in regards to Yi’s works.²⁵

Kawamura’s statement that naturalized women authors of the 80s and 90s “acquired their own ‘words’ and began to speak” echoes a system of gendered representation that can be found within the work of critically acclaimed first- and second-generation male Zainichi authors, who first made Zainichi women the silent subjects of literature at a time when they were largely precluded from writing themselves due to low literacy rates and lack of access to education.²⁶ Kō Youngran details the ways in which women were excluded from political and intellectual discourse in first-generation Zainichi Korean author Kim Talsu’s novel *Pakdal no saiban*, written in 1958, where only the female character Tanson, among a group of political dissidents, is excluded from the tactic of ideological “conversion” (転向) that allows the men to strategically move in and out of the South Korean prison system:

In this text, which places such a high value on the repetition of ‘conversion,’ her ‘non-conversion’ is structured not so much as an issue of ideology as it is the protection of the ‘integrity’ of the Korean man Pak, which is to say, the strength of a woman who has no ideology... If we consider the historicization of ‘conversion’ as based exclusively on a Japanese male experience, the high value placed on Pakdal’s conversion is complicit in preserving the framework of the discourse of ‘conversion’ within the Japanese language sphere, a framework which regards the bodies of women like Tanson as things which can be traded between Japanese, American, and Korean men, and excludes

²⁴ Kim, *Zainichi chōsenjin josei bungakuron*, 20.

²⁵ Wender, *Lamentation as History*, 19.

²⁶ In a 1980s survey, over 40 percent of Zainichi Koreans older than 60 had not attended school, compared to less than one percent among Japanese people in that age group. See John Lie, *Zainichi (Koreans in Japan): Diasporic Nationalism and Postcolonial Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 77-78. The opportunities for education for Zainichi women in the imperial and postwar periods were even more meager: a 1934 survey of Osaka schools found that as many as 95.32% of Zainichi women had never been to school. See Song Hyewon, “*Zainichi chōsenjin bungakushi*” *no tame ni: koe naki koe no porifonii* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2014), 52.

them from the conversation surrounding ‘conversion.’²⁷

The second generation of Zainichi Korean authors followed the precedent set by Kim Talsu in writing women into their literature. Kim Huna notes that our access to the life experiences of first-generation Zainichi women is essentially limited to their depiction as mother figures in the works of second-generation Zainichi men such as Ri Kaisei (Lee Hoesung) and Kin Kakuei (Kim Hakyōng), who portrayed them as “ideal women who ‘support,’ and submissive women who ‘endure,’”²⁸ inscribed within the household and the family. Like Kim’s Tanson, these female characters lack individual opinions or means of expression, and are defined solely in relation to male members of their respective families. They are often rendered literally voiceless, as when the children in Ri Kaisei’s *Kinuta o utsu onna* find their mother after she has been beaten by their father:

She had a huge bandage covering her pale face, and all we could see were her deep, piercing eyes glittering strangely... We stood in the doorway facing our mother, still crouched there with a vacant look in her eyes... We stayed there absolutely still, growing more and more timid as Mother came to seem like a stranger to us. We wanted to cry, it was so awful. I don’t know how much time passed. Mother remained crouched there for a terribly long time. Her head was bowed. Then she covered her face with her hands and started to cry. After a while she got up as if nothing had happened, and put the suitcase away in the back room.”²⁹

Here, the children find their mother’s reaction totally impenetrable: she is “like a stranger,” and the language used to describe her is almost animalistic. Throughout the text, the mother is denied a direct voice – her (real and imagined) life experiences are retold through the voice of her son (the narrator) and his grandmother (who incorporates memories of her daughter into her performance of the traditional storytelling form *shinse taryōng*), even in scenes that neither of them was there to witness. Her son rarely remembers her actual words, instead creating speculative dialogue for her in lines like, “Then she said something to me. I wonder if she told me about the girl who had crossed this river barefoot ten years before...”³⁰ However, he does clearly remember his mother using a *kinuta* (fulling stone) to rhythmically beat the family’s laundry, a symbol for him of traditional culture that overlaps with his memory of a childhood trip to Korea: “I think I can also remember seeing women in white clothes here and there along the river’s edge beating their laundry on the smooth stones there.”³¹ The emphasis here on an aesthetic of foreignness combined with the

²⁷ Kō Youngran, “Kakumei to tenkō: Yoshimoto Takaaki ‘Tenkōron’ to Kim Talsu ‘Pakdal no saiban’ no aida kara,” in *Sengo shisō no hikari to kage*, ed. Miura Nobutaka (Tokyo: Fūkōsha, 2016), 225.

²⁸ Kim, *Zainichi chōsenjin josei bungakuron*, 23.

²⁹ Lee Hoesong, “The Woman Who Fulling Clothes,” in *Flowers of Fire: Twentieth-Century Korean Stories*, trans. Beverly Nelson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1974), 371.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 359

³¹ *Ibid.*

refusal to have any engagement with the character's actual interiority resembles what Karatani Kojin has described as the structure of orientalism, in which the viewer or reader's pleasure is derived from the bracketing of the intellectual in favor of the aesthetic.³²

While the female characters in works such as these are portrayed as powerless and lacking any clearly decipherable or rational interiority, Sō turns this trope of the “enduring” Korean woman on its head in works such as *Ikaino nonki megane*, where she places her female protagonist Junko/Sunja³³ in a similarly abusive relationship but centers the narrative on the character's complex interiority – for example, the entire first chapter of the novel consists of Sunja's interior monologue as she rides her bike to work at the bar she operates, reflecting on the state of her family, the uncertain future of her son and daughters, and her neighborhood's collective worries about the fate of the local economy in an age of globalization. As a contemporary of Ri Kaisei, publishing her debut poetry collection the same year he finished his Akutagawa Prize-winning story *Kinuta o utsu onna*, Sō was necessarily writing against this trope by continuing to give voice to female characters who exceed the boundaries of the domestic space allotted to them as mothers and wives. In general, female characters occupy a unique position within the politico-economic landscape of Sō's works: although both men and women are forced to work in order to survive, women are not merely the secondary breadwinners of their respective families. The women who appear in Sō's works are oppressed by the surrounding conditions of violence and poverty in a way that men are not, but they also serve a key role in the socio-economic structure of both family and society at large. Sō deliberately exaggerates this aspect of her community, creating a sort of fantasy space in which the traditional family structure represented in other Zainichi Korean literature is inverted: although, in reality, there was obviously a large male workforce fueling the manufacturing industries of Ikaino, that demographic recedes into the distance in her novels and poems, with the only adult male characters appearing as alcoholic or abusive husbands and brothers, similarly dehumanized and wordless, who have become unemployable and are thereby restricted to the traditionally “female” spaces of the home and the markets while their wives commute to the factories and restaurants where they work.

Sō similarly subverts the tropes of domestic violence and sexual abuse that are virtually inescapable in the works of male Zainichi authors that were praised by the literary establishment. Arguing that we should read Sō's portrayal of acts of violence at home not as “romanticization” of Zainichi women's suffering but as satire based on the hard truths of lived experience, Jackie Kim-Wachutka describes how Sō “views the years of physical abuse by her husband as part of her fate as a woman – a fate that is ironically also her ‘muse,’ the

³² See Karatani Kojin, “Uses of Aesthetics: After Orientalism,” *boundary 2* 25, no. 2 (1998): 145-60.

³³ None of the three published versions of this novel (in *Kikan mintō* in 1987, in the anthology “Zainichi” *bungaku zenshū* in 2006, or in *Sō Shūgetsu zenshū* in 2016) gloss the pronunciation of characters' names, and the Korean and Japanese readings are both equally plausible. I have (somewhat arbitrarily) decided to use Sunja moving forward, for the sake of readability.

source of her artistic inspiration.”³⁴ While Sō was unable to change the fact of her husband’s abuse in real life, which often interfered with her ability to publish or attend literary events, she frames *Ikaino* as a space with the potential for that power dynamic to be flipped, even if only temporarily. Sō describes Sunja’s husband’s abuse, but refuses his nameless character any interiority, describing him using animalistic language that echoes the “piercing eyes glittering strangely” of Ri Kaisei’s description of the abused mother quoted above: “Sometimes when he had drunk himself into a stupor, Sunja’s husband would creep up beside her with his eyes glittering like a beast, showering her with abusive language, already off the rails... her only way to protect herself was to curl up her body like a shrimp.”³⁵ In the next chapter, their roles are quite literally reversed as Sunja climbs on top of her drunk husband during sex and begins to strangle him, then finds herself aroused by her own implicit power as he drifts off to sleep with her hands still around his throat: “Love me. Love me. The throat that unleashed these howling torrents of abuse was swaying peacefully in Sunja’s hands. The peace of mind of a selfish man was of Sunja’s own volition, easily defeated in the palm of her hand.”³⁶

Sō Shūgetsu’s recentering of narratives of female labor and the affective experience of daily life, as well as her insistence on the possibilities of pleasure even within a landscape of abject poverty, can be read as a direct critique of the image of *Zainichi* women as silent and empty symbols of female suffering in the works of male authors such as Ri Kaisei and Kim Talsu. She rebels against the systems of representation, rhetoric, genre, and form that govern the conventional literary canon through her conception of the “*jōsetsu*” – a deliberate tactic for subverting the expectations the literary establishment held toward a so-called “doubly minor” female and Korean author. This is carried out not just through the narrative structure of her work, which insists on dwelling within the emotional and erotic life of women who challenge the constraints imposed on them by *Zainichi* society, but also at the level of the text itself. On the *obi*³⁷ for her 1984 poetry collection *Ikaino/onna/ai/uta*, prominent intellectual Tsurumi Shunsuke acknowledged the defiant nature of Sō’s relationship with language, describing her poems as “written with words that aren’t wearing the uniform of the *bundan*.”³⁸ Echoing her insertion of the character 情 (*jō* or *chōng*; emotion/feeling) into the conventional term for novel, her prose writing similarly plays with the instability of language to create a new literary form that renders visible the deep affective experiences hidden with the mundane aspects of everyday labor. For example, when describing Sunja’s family’s screw manufacturing business in *Ikaino nonki megane*, the narration riffs off the visual similarity between the character for screw (振) and the character for tears (涙): “Sunja, as the youngest daughter of six siblings, often wondered if

³⁴ Kim-Wachutka, *Zainichi Korean Women in Japan*, 208.

³⁵ Sō, SSZ, 177-178.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁷ An *obi* is a slip of paper wrapped around the dustcover of a book, usually containing blurbs and other promotional material selected by the publisher.

³⁸ Sō Shūgetsu, *Ikaino/onna/ai/uta* (Osaka: Burēn Sentā, 1984).

the characters for *screw* (振子) in the screw shop that was her family's business were not a misprint of *child of tears* (涙子).³⁹ In her first poetry collection, the title of her poem “Tanomoshikō,” which I discuss in detail in the next section, replaces the character 講 (*kō*, group/association) in the term for a female-run mutual aid group with the homonym 考 (*kō*, thought/to think), further linking women's labor to the production of knowledge.⁴⁰ This kind of wordplay seems related to Sō's formulation of the *ningo* as a mispronounced term that exists somewhere between the Japanese *ringo* (apple) and the Korean *nŭnggŭm* (wild apple), representing the accented speech of first-generation Zainichi women in Sō's poem “Ningo” (1971) and essay “Mun Konbun omoni no ningo” (1985). Both Wender and Kim-Wachutka have drawn attention to the way the *ningo* is linked to the weathered bodies of Zainichi women through imagery of the “drip of blood” after biting into an apple and the flavor “filtered through flesh.”⁴¹ In each of these cases, the deliberate use of “incorrect” or “mistaken” language works against the representing logic of institutionalized literature, destabilizing the received meaning of “words” and positing an alternate form of writing that seeks to make new connections between the intellectual, the emotional, and the visceral within the working lives of Ikaino women.

Sō Shūgetsu's Ikaino: Language, body, landscape

Sō's attempts to destabilize language as a function of larger structures of power through her *jōsetsu* rely heavily on the technique of situating the embodied experiences of her Korean women characters within the broader landscape of Ikaino, the ethnic Korean enclave in Osaka where she lived and wrote. *Ikaino nonki megane* demonstrates how the landscape of Ikaino as constructed by Sō ties the politics of language to the bodily experience of female labor. Much of the narrative follows Sunja's daily commute to and from work by bicycle along an Ikaino side street she nicknames the “Galaxy Road,” against the backdrop of a plotline about a series of mysterious arson incidents in the neighborhood. The eponymous “Galaxy Road” road connects all of the important locations within the novel, the very name of the road implicating that space in the entangled politics, economy, and culture of Ikaino: “galaxy” refers to the tiny bits of scrap metal that have over time become a part of the road itself, drifting from the metalworking shops that display “the Japanese names borne by Koreans ever since *sōshi-kaimēi*, such as Kanaumi Ironworks and Takayama Metalworks, hidden away under the train tracks much like the chipped-off paint itself, and yet clinging

³⁹ Sō, SSZ, 173.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 22. The title was changed back to standard spelling when the poem was re-printed in her second poetry collection, but given the other instances of her manipulating *kanji* orthography, the choice of 考 in the first version seems deliberate.

⁴¹ See Kim-Wachutka, *Zainichi Korean Women in Japan*, 203-204 and Wender, *Lamentation as History*, 104-105.

to the shutters with a stubborn presence,”⁴² but it also hints at the otherworldly spiritual presences Junko projects onto the road as she commutes each night, a “belief her mother brought with her from Jeju Island to Japan.”⁴³ While the road is where Junko perpetually navigates the transition between home and workplace, it also traces a path straight through the center of Ikaino as it “meanders along from Fuse to Imazato and from Imazato to Tsuruhashi,” offering her glimpses into the red-light district of the so-called “world of the Japanese,” the restaurants and pachinko parlors of what she calls the “Korean street,”⁴⁴ as well as the many people in constant circulation between the two.

The focus on the economy of Ikaino allows Sō to shift scope effortlessly from the minutely personal to the broadly sociopolitical, as when she moves from the day-to-day financial struggles of Ikaino women to the demographics of how Ikaino residents identify their permanent residences on their alien registration cards within a single paragraph.⁴⁵ In the same way, Junko’s careful inventory of the prices at the stall on the bridge that sells expired food products and her memories of all the times she has attempted to serve her children spoiled food⁴⁶ are infinitesimal parts of the same economic system that gives rise to Zainichi-owned companies that resort to “subcontractors, sub-subcontractors, and even sub-sub-subcontractors” but are still so strapped for cash that they must rely on “mothers scraping together funds from the mutual financing association”⁴⁷ to survive. *Ikaino nonki megane* sheds light on some of the larger structures of exploitation that continued to oppress working class communities even in the midst of the bubble economy of late-1980s Japan, portraying globalization as a force that is both inescapable and unforgiving in its unequal distribution of wealth and power. For example, Junko sees her own family as victims of the global competition for cheap labor, since their poverty is at least partially a result of her husband’s inability to find work: “Junko thought that the slump in even those marginal positions being steadily stolen away by cheap labor in Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines was spurring on the depression in this city.”⁴⁸ However, she also sees herself and her family as complicit in political violence on a global level, thinking that “her family’s screw manufacturing factory, as a subsidiary of a large Japanese company, supported the arms industry.”⁴⁹ In short, Sō makes it clear that participation in the local economy, necessary for both men and women in Ikaino in order to survive, inevitably equates to participation in global politics.

⁴² Sō, *Sō Shūgetsu zenshū*, 172. *Sōshi-kaimei* refers to an assimilation policy implemented by the Japanese imperial government in 1939 in which Korean colonial subjects were required to take on Japanese-sounding family names and encouraged to choose Japanese-sounding given names.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁴⁵ Sō, *Sō Shūgetsu zenshū*, 176.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

As much as the space of Ikaino is symbolically infused with the traces of empire in this novel, Sō's writing is equally attuned to the significance of the local history of this particular Korean slum. When Sunja goes to visit her family home in *Ikaino nonki megane*, the space of her childhood home is linked with the two defining events in Ikaino's history: the labor of Korean colonial subjects in the 1920s that allegedly led to the settlement of Koreans in Ikaino, and the official, bureaucratically decreed end of "Ikaino" in 1973, when the township was divided by the government of Osaka into several other districts and abruptly erased from city maps. As Sunja approaches her family home along the Hirano Canal, which also doubles as a small-scale factory for screw manufacturing, the newly installed flood protection barricades along the canal recall the area's history as a place literally created out of nothing:

Because countless rivers within the city had been filled in, when it rained hard the Hirano Canal would swell so much that they had to extend concrete embankments a full meter above the ground. The Hirano Canal was made by rebuilding the Hirano River in the Taishō era for the sake of flood control in Osaka, the City of Water. Now a Class A protected river, the canal was made with the labor of Jeju Islanders, and the city at the river's edge where the imported laborers settled was called Ikaino.⁵⁰

Sō's emphasis on the tenuous nature of this constructed land, still threatened with a return to watery marshland whenever it rains, conveys the sense of precarity experienced by the community materially bound to this landscape that was built through its own suffering. However, the narration continues, "Sunja's family lived at the foot of the Ikaino Bridge. Around the time Sunja got married, the name of the town of Ikaino was officially changed, but the bridge name remained the same, and the word Ikaino was engraved into the guardrail beside Sunja's childhood home."⁵¹ In the space of a single page, Sō not only weaves the entirety of the history of Ikaino as a material place into the domestic space of this fictional family, but also posits the importance of the place name as a continuing symbol of the limits of the state power's ability to control human life within this landscape: the concreteness of the name carved into the guardrail of the Ikaino Bridge is a reminder of the name's persistence, both in the daily life of the characters in the text and in the characters that spell out the name of the novel itself, despite the government's postwar policy of erasing such markers of difference.

***Tanomoshikā* Female structures of power and exploitation**

Although the image of the Ikaino woman working to support her multiple children and unemployable husband is perhaps the primary motif of Sō's *jōsetsu*, we can also find economic systems that are built and run by women on a broader scale. One such economic

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

power structure is the *tanomoshikō* (頼母子講), or mutual financing association, an informal, locally organized financial institution wherein participating members would contribute small sums of money at regular intervals, thereby providing the group funds to loan out that they would then collect interest on (usually at exorbitantly high rates). *Tanomoshikō* were a necessary fixture of public life in Ikaino, where many residents were excluded from more traditional financial institutions, and they appear throughout Sō's works as exclusively female spaces - for example, Sunja's brother in *Ikaino nonki megane* must ask his mother to go to the *tanomoshikō* to raise funds, rather than participating directly himself.⁵² Sō's essay *Waga ai suru chōsen no onnatachi* describes the functioning of the Ikaino *tanomoshikō* as a women's institution as follows:

The *tanomoshikō*, the sole financial institution available to the Korean women of Ikuno Ward⁵³, does not require collateral, or a guarantor, or a personal seal, or complicated language, or troublesome administrative procedures.

Women who don't have the literacy required for administrative forms or the Japanese fluency to speak in jargon, to say nothing of collateral, lend and borrow on the female spirit that has enabled them to live and work here.

Ok-hee folds up the scrap of paper on which she had her son write the interest amount "9,999.999 yen" until it's small, then holds it out among the gathered women.

The scrap of paper Ok-hee presented and all the other bits of paper that have already been collected are placed in front of the woman who is leader of the *tanomoshi*. The children of the *tanomoshikō* watch with bated breath as the girl who has been summoned to read for them, in perhaps her fifth year of elementary school, unfolds a scrap of paper and calls out.

The goddess of fortune smiles upon Ok-hee, and thus she has ended up with a rounded-down interest of 9,900 yen on each loan of 10,000 yen.

There were 30 people at the *tanomoshikō*, so Ok-hee puts the 290,000 yen that remain after the leader is paid into her pocket and makes her triumphant leave. Starting next month, she will have to repay 19,900 yen every month for 29 months.

⁵² Sō, SSZ, 173.

⁵³ Ikuno Ward is the modern name for Ikaino. Although the Osaka government officially redistricted the area once known as Ikaino into the Ikuno and Higashinari wards in 1973, the name Ikaino continues to have strong symbolic and political resonance for the Korean community there, and Sō uses both names in her work.

“If the jobs start coming in, everything will go fine...”⁵⁴

The *tanomoshikō* as portrayed by Sō is a complex social ritual involving strategic bidding tactics on the part of potential borrowers. She emphasizes the way in which the financial institution enfold all generations of women in Ikaino society, from the elderly woman acting as leader (literally 親, “parent,” in the original Japanese) and the adult “children of the *tanomoshikō*” vying for funds, to the schoolgirls who read for members of the illiterate older generation. The emphasis here is on the *tanomoshikō* as a structure in which local women wield power, with references to “the female spirit” and “the goddess of fortune” framing it as a mechanism through which women of Ikaino who are excluded from conventional financial institutions due to illiteracy or lack of personal identification are able to access the resources that enable them to survive within the local economy. The extremely high interest rates that accompany these resources are openly acknowledged, but not directly commented upon.

Much like Sō’s framing of Ikaino as a space constituted solely through women’s labor and her fantasy of women reversing the power dynamics of sexual violence in novels such as *Ikaino nonki megane*, the portrayal of the *tanomoshikō* here is not entirely realistic. Sō hints at the possible risks Ok-hee is shouldering in accepting these funds to give to her son with the final line, “If the jobs start coming in, everything will go fine...” The consequences if things don’t go her way are left unstated. Other Ikaino authors have written more bluntly about the *tanomoshikō* as an exploitative and even violent force within local Zainichi communities. For example, the author Won Sooil’s short story “Kikyō” (Going Home, 1987) centers around a first-generation Zainichi woman who has used over 300,000 yen in *tanomoshi* funds to buy up black market goods she plans to resell at a profit in South Korea during a government-sanctioned visit to her ancestral grave.⁵⁵ The driving dramatic tension of the story is the looming threat of the *tanomoshi* as her plans fall apart – the trip is ultimately cancelled because of the assassination of the South Korean president, leaving the main character in a state of frantic despair about ever being able to repay the loan.

An even blunter portrayal of the *tanomoshi* as an oppressive force within the local community can be found in Gen Getsu’s novel *Kage no sumika* (Dwelling in the Shadows), which won the Akutagawa Prize in 2000. The novel plainly states the stakes of the *tanomoshi* for its participants: “If you ran away with the money of the *oya* [boss] of the *tanomoshi*, you couldn’t complain even if you were killed for it, but if you returned the money and begged for your life with your head on the ground, you might just be allowed to leave the village still able to walk.”⁵⁶ The narrative, which is set in a Korean enclave that

⁵⁴ Sō, SSZ, 223.

⁵⁵ Won Sooil, *Ikaino monogatari* (Tokyo: Sōfukan, 1987), 96-110.

⁵⁶ Gen Getsu, *Kage no sumika* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2000), 69. Thank you to Sonia Ryang for pointing me toward this text. Ryang analyzes *Kage no sumika* in detail in Sonia Ryang, “Dead-End in a Korean Ghetto: Reading a Complex Identity in Gen Getsu’s Akutagawa-Winning Novel Where the Shadows Reside,” *Japanese Studies* vol. 22, no. 1 (2002): 5-18.

seems to be a fictionalized version of Ikaino, is haunted by the lingering figure of Sukja, a woman who was once group-tortured as punishment for stealing money from the local *tanomoshi*, forced to kneel on ice and beaten by the villagers until she was left permanently disabled. The narration specifies that virtually everyone in the enclave participated in the torture, including both men and women, belying Sō's vision of the *tanomoshi* as an exclusively female space and laying bare the almost ritualistic brutality of the group's extra-legal methods of enforcement. (It is worth noting that *Kage no sumika* is similarly frank in its portrayal of the working lives of women in the Korean neighborhood - the main character's wife has died from blood loss after getting her arm caught in a machine at the shoe factory where she works, and the factory owner has a reputation for sexually harassing and assaulting his female employees.)

While Sō does not portray the *tanomoshikō* with the level of brutality captured in Gen's novel, she does acknowledge that while females hold power within the structure of the *tanomoshikō*, they cannot truly be empowered by it - the *tanomoshikō* does not provide a solution to the multiple layers of oppression faced by women in Ikaino, but rather contributes to the suffering of the less fortunate participants while further enriching the *oya*, who already occupy a position of power. In her poem *Tanomoshikō*, Sō's portrayal of the local financial institution is far more ambivalent than in the essay quoted above, emphasizing that women placed into positions of power inevitably end up perpetuating the same cycles of poverty and debt that they are attempting to overcome.⁵⁷ In lines like "from ancient times / here / women / went to / war," the poem ambiguously suggests that the *tanomoshikō* might be a site of either female resistance or institutionalized violence. She is openly dismissive of the naiveté of drawing a connection between this institution and feminist movements of the time: "obscene transaction / women's lib / etc / idiotic / drum-bellied women." As the list in the opening lines of the poem indicates, the "obscenity" of the *tanomoshikō* lies in the fact that they exploit the community's women through extremely high interest rates even as they provide financial opportunities to women who otherwise would not be able to participate in the economy at all. As a result, the woman chosen as recipient of *tanomoshikō* funds is part victor, part victim, and immediately complicit in the cycle of violence: "the woman, shot through by / white-feathered arrow / strange, look of / luck and / pain / first of all / today / she kills someone and / survives / alone."⁵⁸

Sō's disdainful references to "women's lib" show that she sees the contemporaneous feminist movement as limited in its applicability to her community, hinting at one of the reasons her work may have been pushed aside at a time when both minority literature and women's literature were being established as genres within the Japanese literary establishment. She had a complex relationship with feminist discourse, expressing her

⁵⁷ Sō, SSZ, 21.

⁵⁸ The words "白羽の矢" literally mean "a white-feathered arrow" but simultaneously evoke the saying "白羽の矢が立つ," meaning "to be chosen."

excitement at witnessing the rise of feminist movements in Japan and Korea in the 1970s while also maintaining skepticism about the limitations of any concept of women's empowerment within the intersecting structures of oppression that constituted daily life in Ikaino. These frictions come to a head in the final pages of *Ikaino nonki megane*, when Sunja's scorn towards the men committing violence in the community turns into a confrontation with the self as she questions what it would mean for a dehumanized Zainichi woman to finally become fully human. The repeated question, "Are you human?", first intended as an insult in response to a stranger's bad behavior, is first redirected towards herself, then finally made into a statement:

"Are you human?"

"Are you human?"

"Are you human?" she had asked that day - and when faced with the same circumstances she would surely again ask again, "Are you human?" Sunja wondered why she herself was somehow unable to be "human."

"I want to become human," Sunja thought. She wondered how many wrongs one would have to commit to become a human, deeply sinful.⁵⁹

Sō's portrayal of Ikaino as an economic space reliant on and controlled by working women was a new one that redefined the way women could be represented and given voice within Zainichi literature, but in insisting on the impossibility of disentangling issues of gender from those of ethnicity and class, she defines a landscape in which cycles of poverty and violence can be participated in but not overcome, where the category of the "human" will always be fraught with one's own inevitable complicity in the oppression of others.

Sō's legacy: a new perspective on Zainichi women's literature

Sō's work and her vision of an Ikaino in which women are fully incorporated into the political and economic fabric of society had a clear influence on the Zainichi women who wrote after her. Her most obvious legacy can be found in the work of other Ikaino writers such as Kim Ch'angsaeng, who joined Sō in the project of writing Ikaino through the lens of female experience in works such as *Watashi no Ikaino* (1982),⁶⁰ and Kim Kaeja (a.k.a. Kim Yuchōng), a contemporary author living and running an *izakaya* in Ikaino, who has sought to both respond to and at times critique Sō's work in interrogating persistent structures of sexism within Zainichi society.⁶¹ However, it is also possible to trace the concept of Ikaino as a space of female political and economic engagement through works that have gained greater recognition from the Tokyo *bundan*, indicating that this alternative reading of

⁵⁹ Sō, SSZ, 202.

⁶⁰ Kim Ch'angsaeng, *Watashi no Ikaino: Zainichi ni totte no sokoku to ikoku* (Nagoya: Fūbaisha, 1982).

⁶¹ See, for example, Kim Kaeja, "Murasame," *Buraku kaihō*, no. 505 (July 2002): 38-65.

women's role in Zainichi literature and society extends beyond the physical boundaries of Ikaino itself.

Fukasawa Kai's 1992 novel *Yoru no kodomo* provides one such example of Sō's Ikaino as a space in which female networks of power appear in an unexpected place, albeit in a somewhat modified form. On the surface, Fukasawa's novel seems to conform to the narrative of naturalization as the originating event of Zainichi women's writing: the protagonist, Akiko Hayama, is a naturalized, second-generation Zainichi Korean woman who begins to work for a Tokyo lifestyle magazine aimed at a Zainichi Korean readership. She is initially drawn to the job by the magazine's staunch commitment to publishing content related to lifestyle and culture rather than political articles and desperately avoids engaging in political debate with her non-naturalized male colleagues, citing her own naturalized status as her reason for distancing herself from politics: "Within Akiko lay the alienated feeling that it had nothing directly to do with her own existence in Japan. She could only feel that she was viewing the series of incidents at a distant remove from the linked concepts of 'homeland,' 'ethnicity,' and 'Zainichi.'"⁶² However, as she grows closer to her colleagues and begins to discover that she is not truly as apolitical as she once thought, she begins to view her status as a naturalized citizen as something that further entangles her in the politics of identity rather than exempts her from it.

Crucial to Akiko's transformation is her relationship with Sunja, a friend of Akiko's colleagues who is also a naturalized citizen but who has reclaimed her Korean name. Sunja struggles with alcoholism, and the two end up in long phone conversations about their respective insecurities surrounding identity despite not knowing each other well. Towards the end of the novel, Akiko receives a letter from Sunja saying that after failing her college entrance exams, she has finally acted on her long-held fantasy of moving to Ikaino and has found work in a sandal factory:

Now I'm studying the mother tongue three times a week through the Ikaino Korean Language Course. And once a week, I'm the Japanese language teacher for the *Omoni* School. The *Omoni* School is a course that teaches Japanese to *omoni* [mothers] and *halmoni* [grandmothers] in their 50s and 60s who can't read or write even though they can speak Japanese. These *omoni* are people who can't even write in *hangul*, much less in Japanese. Right now I'm working with four of them, but they all say they've never held a pencil before until now. When I see these *omoni* licking their pencils, concentrating with all their might on writing characters with their shaking, bony, sun-baked hands, I'm truly moved, and sometimes I feel like I'm going to cry. My own studying for the entrance exams... it makes me wonder what the hell that was for. I'm really immature, and it's shameful to have someone

⁶² Fukasawa Kai, *Yoru no kodomo* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1992), 12.

like me teaching people like them, but I'm really happy to be able to help compatriots [*dōhō*].

I'm so incredibly happy to be of use to someone for the first time in my life... You always told me to go study at university, but even without going to college, I think I'm managing to study by being here. I've also come to understand some things about myself, little by little.⁶³

Ikaino here serves the same essential purpose that it does in Sō's work: while Sunja is rejected by the traditional education system, Ikaino emerges as a refuge where she can not only find work as a young woman, but also educate herself while effecting real change in the community. There are echoes of Sō's female structures of power in Sunja's remark that she has begun to feel a sense of purpose for the first time in her life as she uses her language education to in turn help the elderly Zainichi women of the community gain their own sense of power through literacy. Her letter ultimately serves the purpose of inspiring Akiko to achieve her own explicitly political transformation, finally allowing herself to engage with her male colleagues as equals and give expression to her own personal politics of identity.

It is also possible to find echoes of Sō's unique female image in the writing of Yi Yangji (and it is worth noting that Yi was familiar with Sō's work, since the two apparently met before Yi's debut as an author).⁶⁴ In Yi's essay "Sanjo no ritsudō no naka e" (Into the Rhythm of *Sanjo*), published for the first time in the journal *Sanzenri* in 1979, she describes both visiting relatives in the seemingly foreign environment of Ikaino as a child and working in a sandal factory (in what Sō herself described as the "prototypical job"⁶⁵ of the women of Ikaino, portrayed in detail in works such as *Hariko aishi*⁶⁶) alongside other Zainichi Koreans in Tokyo as important events in her process of maturing as a *kayagŭm*⁶⁷ player, as a writer, and as an adult aware of her own Zainichi Korean identity. Her experience working in the factory is linked in her memory to her growing involvement in the movement to free Yi Tŭkhyŏn, a Zainichi Korean man falsely convicted of murder in a case known as the Marushō Incident. She says in the essay that her current dedication to and level of accomplishment on the *kayagŭm* is because:

I was made aware of my own position in places outside of the *kayagŭm*, through my involvement in the Marushō Incident and my encounter with Yi Tŭkhyŏn... The me washing dishes in a Kyoto ryokan overlaps with the figure of me working in a sandal factory, and the me riding on the limited

⁶³ Fukasawa, *Yoru no kodomo*, 150-151.

⁶⁴ See Sō, SSZ, 608.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶⁷ A *kayagŭm* is a traditional Korean instrument analogous to the Japanese *koto*.

express train to Sendai [to visit Yi Tŭkhyŏn] overlaps with the figure of me biting my lip in hatred before my father. All of this is connected to the way that I am right now.⁶⁸

I read these lines as a direct rebuttal of the way Yi's writing was initially received – as Wender notes, she was initially criticized by other Zainichi intellectuals as “devoid of the political consciousness seen in earlier Zainichi fiction” and as “a ‘woman writer’ more strongly than ... a ‘Resident Korean’ writer.”⁶⁹ Here, however, she clearly states that her immersion into the world of Korean music and dance would not have been possible without her experience as a laborer or her participation in domestic political activism, and that the three experiences are inextricably linked to each other. This complex model of the politics of daily life, to borrow Wender's words, aspires to encapsulate “aspects of existence at once much narrower (that is to say, about unique personal experiences of particular historical conjunctures) and much broader (about universal aspects of human interaction) than ethnicity,” while remaining engaged with the relationship between the personal and the historical, as in the narrator of *Kazukime's* obsession with the massacre of Koreans during the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923.

The echoes between Sō's portrayal of Ikaino and the engagement with women's labor and activism in the works of Fukuzawa and Yi indicate that even these authors do not fit within the critical narrative discussed at the beginning of this article, in which Kawamura Minato framed them as pioneers of Zainichi women's literature in their ability to speak about Korea from their subject positions as women from naturalized families. If even the prototypical authors of this version of literary history do not fully conform to it, then this concept within the critical discourse has not described the actual reality of how Zainichi Korean women came to produce literature, instead acting as a standard by which the literary establishment determines which works of literature should be circulated and considered representative of the whole. By returning to the works of overlooked authors like Sō and performing close readings of the ways in which they diverge from the gendered expectations of the conventional literary histories that first shaped the canon of Zainichi literature, we can come to a better understanding of the true influence of intersecting issues of gender, age, class, and ethnicity on the formation of a critical discourse of Zainichi Korean literature over time, questioning the normative criteria through which texts like Sō's came to be excluded from that canon in the first place.

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⁶⁸ Yi Yangji, *Yi Yangji zenshū* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1993), 600.

⁶⁹ Wender, *Lamentation as History*, 126-128.