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**Becoming Korean: Decolonization, Repatriation, and Everyday
lives of Ethnic Koreans in Postcolonial Taiwan, 1945-1970**

Yoshihisa Amai
Chang Jung Christian University

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國立陽明交通大學文化研究國際中心

International Center for Cultural Studies

National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University

Rm.103 HA Building 2, 1001 University Road

Hsinchu, Taiwan

Tel: +886-3-5712121 Ext.58274, 58272

Fax: +886-3-5734450

Website: https://iccs.nctu.edu.tw/en/wps_list.php

Email: iccs.wps@gmail.com

Becoming Korean: Decolonization, Repatriation, and Everyday lives of Ethnic Koreans in Postcolonial Taiwan, 1945-1970

Yoshihisa Amae

Chang Jung Christian University

amaeyoshi@gmail.com

Abstract

This article attempts to construct a narrative of ethnic Koreans in postwar Taiwan through careful reading of governmental archives as well as oral history collected through personal interviews. Its scope is from 1945 to 1970, a period which underwent political transition from a Japanese regime to a Chinese one, requiring local residents challenging adjustments to the new political environment.

Voices of Korean diaspora in Taiwan remain relatively unheard despite the celebration of ethnic diversity and multiculturalism in the recent decades orchestrated by the liberal-minded Democratic Progressive Party. This may be due to the small number: There remained about only four hundred Koreans in Taiwan after the end of WWII. Most Korean men found employment with the Taiwanese Fishery Company in Keelung, filling a vacuum left by Japanese employees who were forced to repatriate after the war. Seasoned Korean fishermen took on well-paid positions such as captain and chief engineer with the company, but soon faced economic hardship after gradually being replaced by local Taiwanese. A number of women who stayed were previously involved in the sex industry during the prewar and wartime eras.

One of the highlights of this article depicts a power struggle between Yim Du-uk 任斗旭 and Lee Sang-man 李象萬 over the leadership of the Korean Association. In the end, Yim, who had a record of collaborating with Japanese military during wartime, ousts Lee, a long-time Korean independence activist sent by the Korean provisional government in China. Through the narratives of ethnic Koreans in Taiwan, this article also attempts to rethink decolonization, i.e. “de-Japanization,” and national imagination by focusing on how the Korean residents on the island became “Korean,” through everyday negotiations with cultures, including a Korean one that is presupposed as their own. This article pays special attention to the ethno-spaces of the Korean School and the Church in Keelung as case studies.

Keywords: Korean diaspora, decolonization, repatriation, Japanese imperialism, comfort women, postcolonial

Introduction

On March 28, 1950, a prostitute was found dead in her apartment in Central Taiwan. According to local news reports, a blood-stained ice pick found at the scene was used to stab her to death.¹ The victim was a twenty-three-year-old Korean woman named Seok Hwak-sil. Neighbors described her as an “unclean woman” who had been married to a Taiwanese man but was living together with two Korean men. On the night she was murdered, neighbors reported hearing a wailing cry before someone banged on the door and rushed down stairs. The police detained Kim Il-je and Jang Seung-do, who admitted being with the victim that evening. Jang told the police that he had left the site earlier that evening, and thus had no clue as to what had happened. Kim, on the other hand, stated that Seok had killed herself while he was in the bathroom. He told the police that Seok was in love with him and demanded he return to Korea with her. According to Kim, when he refused, Seok lost all semblance of self-control.² The case was later dropped and Kim was not indicted.

It was less than three months after Seok’s death, on June 25, that the war broke out on the Korean Peninsula. Had Seok and Kim decided to return to their birthplace, they could have been caught in the battle in which nearly two million people lost their lives.

This article is about ethnic Koreans like Seok and Kim, who remained in Taiwan after World War Two (hereafter WWII). There were about 400 people. Unlike the well-surveyed Korean diaspora in postwar Japan (the *Zainichi*) and Northeast China (*chaoxianzu*), very little is known about the ethnic Koreans in Taiwan, known as *hanqiao*, most likely due to their smaller numbers. There have been no studies conducted in English on this subject to date, and there are scant resources in other languages as well.³ The focus of this article is on the early postwar period in Taiwan (1945-1970). This period marked turbulent times in which the island nation experienced political transition from Japanese rule that lasted half a century (1895-1945) to Chinese Nationalist (KMT) rule. While expectations for local self-government and higher

¹ “彰化艷屍案以韓僑少婦刺殺原因不詳正調查中 [Murder of Korean Woman in Zhonghua under Investigation],” *Taiwan People’s Voice Daily*, March 31, 1950: 5.

² “韓女郎命案問題仍在迷離中 [Murder Incident of Korean Lady Still Unsolved],” *Taiwan People’s Voice Daily*, April 7, 1950: 4.

³ There are three Master’s theses on this topic in Taiwan. Wang (1984) investigates overseas Koreans and their state of assimilation with the local culture. Tominaga (2010), in his study on Keelung’s Fishery industry, describes the interactions between Koreans, Ryukyuan, and local Taiwanese. An (2011) surveys the history of ethnic Koreans in Taiwan with a focus on Keelung Korean Church. Kim (2009) investigates on the Korean people who migrated to Taiwan. Huang (2005) documents the postwar repatriation of Koreans in Taiwan. Yang (2010), in his study on decolonization of Taiwan by the KMT government, has a section on repatriation of Koreans. Yet, none of these research provides the narrative which this article presents using both archive materials and in-depth interviews.

political participation were high among local Taiwanese after the Japanese surrendered, they were soon quashed by the corruption and incompetence of their new KMT rulers. Under early KMT rule, many Taiwanese lost their jobs, savings, and even their lives. Frustrations came to a head on February 28, 1947, as protesters seeking justice for the beating of a street vendor selling illicit cigarettes were gunned down by security guards at the Taiwan Provincial Administrative Executive Office headquarters. This later became known as the “February 28 Incident” as island-wide anti-government protests and riots resulted in brutal crackdowns by the military, costing thousands of lives that included a score of political and social elite (Li and Chen 2015).⁴ The tragedy was followed by the entire KMT government’s withdrawal to Taiwan after losing the Chinese Mainland to the Communists in 1949 and the subsequent political terror against “communist insurgents” and other political opposition under the martial law.⁵ Meanwhile, the Korean Peninsula, though liberated from Japanese rule, was politically divided between the USSR-backed North and the US-controlled South. On Jeju Island, left-leaning political groups took arms to resist the US-backed government on April 3, 1948 in opposition to a unilateral election. Their attempt was crushed by government forces and right-wing militia groups, resulting in the massacre of 25,000 to 30,000 islanders (Jeju Peace Foundation 2014: 455). In July of 1948, Rhee Syngman was elected as president; then in June of 1949, Kim Gu, a staunch opponent of the division of Korea and Rhee’s political rival, was assassinated. Eventually, the bloody war between the North and the South between June 1950 and July 1953, involving the US and the PRC, made the division more or less permanent. In both Taiwan and South Korea, authoritarian leaders ruled the people with an iron fist in the decades to follow. The United States allied with the two regimes under the banner of anti-communism, in effect condoning political oppression and terror.

It is against the backdrop of the Cold War in which the story of ethnic Koreans in Taiwan takes place. The narrative introduced in this article is constructed using declassified documents from the Academia Historica, the Taiwan Provincial Administrative Executive Office Archive, the National Archive Center, the KMT Archive Center as well as intensive interviews conducted to the senior members of the Korean community over the years. Taiwanese and Korean newspapers are consulted as well. The “Register of Ethnic Koreans in Taiwan in 1947 (臺灣韓僑登記名冊, hereafter ‘1947 Register’),” which is found in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Academia Historica, proved particularly useful, as it contains information on each ethnic Korean, including ages, genders, marital statuses, birthplaces, addresses in Taiwan, occupations, and date of arrivals in Taiwan. This twenty-page-long-typed document is believed to have been compiled by the government authorities based on registrations made by

⁴ The number of death in the Incident is still highly contested. A recent research on 228 suggests the number to be between 1,300 and 1,500 in contrast to the widely accepted “18,000 to 28,000 death (Tang 2017).” For discussion on the 228 death, see Stefan Fleischauer (2011).

⁵ The martial law lasted until July 15, 1987.

ethnic Koreans through the Liaison Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Taiwan. Once registrations were completed, the government requested all Koreans to appear at the local police stations for verification and to receive residential permits by December 31, 1946.⁶ However, not all who registered were projected to stay in Taiwan as some had stamps on remark columns that read: “willing to return to their country 自願回國;” and “should be deported 應行遣送.” There were two other stamps: “married to a ROC national 已與中華民國人結婚;” and “traveling 旅行中.” While the 1947 Register is neither complete nor flawless, it does provide valuable information for understanding the demography of ethnic Koreans on the island. For instance, according to the document, Seok Hwak-sil, the victim of the aforementioned alleged murder incident in 1950, was from South Pyeongan Province (located in today’s North Korea), lived in Taichung City, and arrived to Taiwan (or China)⁷ in 1942. The column on occupation is left blank. The 1947 Register also shows that there were three other Koreans in Taichung, all women in their early twenties. Three of the four, including Seok, were marked “should be repatriated,” and one “married to a ROC national.” This shows that Seok was not yet married when this survey was taken. Seok may have chosen to marry a local man in order to legally stay on the island. We can also discern from the Register that Seok, Kim, and Jang, are all from Pyeongan Province. Few Koreans in Taiwan were from the Northern region of the Korean Peninsula, with most hailing from the Southern provinces.⁸ It is not hard to imagine that coming from the same region was the glue that held the three together in Taiwan.

⁶ “外僑居留證辦理手續限期領取通告 [Notification to pick-up alien residential card application within the deadline],” November 25, 1946, 外僑管理及簽證事項, Archives of the Taiwan Provincial Administrative Executive Office, Taiwan Historica (hereafter ATH), 00306510031018.

⁷ In Chinese, that is “來華年月.” The word “華” refers to the Republic of China, which at the time governed both Taiwan and Mainland China.

⁸ Eighty-two percent of them were from Jeolla Province and Gyeongsang Province. Geographic vicinity must have prompted them to move to Taiwan.

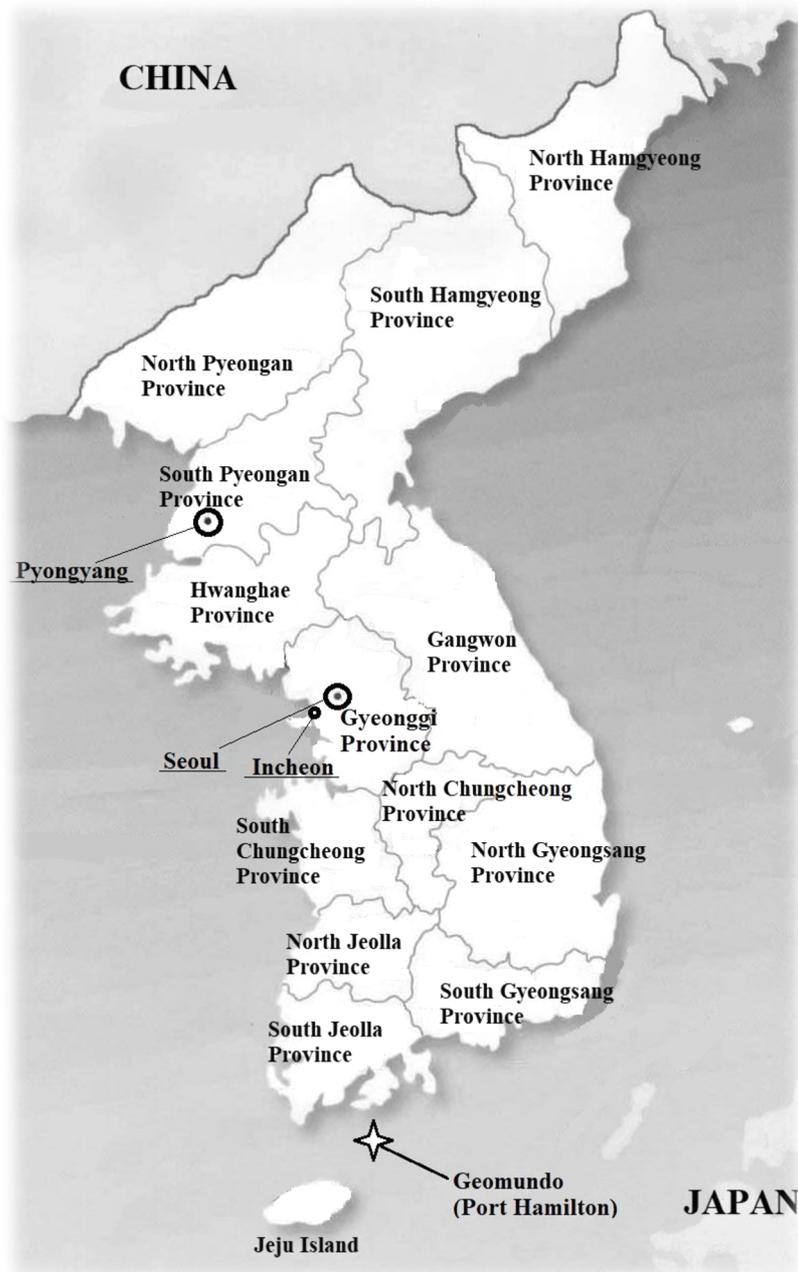


Figure 1: Map of the Korean Peninsula and Provinces



Figure 2: Map of Taiwan (ROC)

Who Stayed and Why?: The 1947 Register under a microscope

There were 1,305 Korean soldiers (and military employees) and 2,199 civilians (759 men and 1,440 women) in Taiwan when the war ended in 1945.⁹ Koreans in the Japanese military were the first to be repatriated. After receiving three months of compulsory training in Taipei, they left for Korea in March of 1946.¹⁰ During their stay in Taiwan, they were forced to daily attend lectures on “Three Principles of the People,” “Words and Deeds of Chairman Chiang Kai-shek,” “The Truth of the Second World War,” and “Sino-Korean Relations,” along with two-hours-long Chinese language courses held from Monday to Saturday.¹¹ Korean civilians, which numbered 1,974, left Taiwan a month later, on April 24, 1946 (Xie 2008: 684).

⁹ “韓僑暫緩集中請示案 [On situation of concentrating Koreans],” January 31, 1946, 韓國人處理情形, ATH, 00306510041003.

¹⁰ The first batch of 850 Korean officers and soldiers left Taiwan on March 20, and all the rest on March 23. “在臺韓籍官兵祖國へ 本省軍官民に感謝の言葉 [Korean Officers and Soldiers Return to Fatherland, Words of Appreciation to Taiwanese Officers and Civilians],” *Taiwan Xinsheng Daily News*, March 23, 1946: 4.

¹¹ The training, as it is obvious from the curriculum, was designed to decolonize (or de-Japanize) them by saturating their minds with KMT propaganda. “韓籍官兵集訓總隊訓練教官派任案 [On dispatching instructors to concentration camp for Korean officers and soldiers],” December 2, 1945, 韓國臨時政府及光復軍資料, ATH, 00308920003001.

Not all Koreans returned to Korea, however. Some stayed in Taiwan by choice, while others by chance. The 1947 Register lists 358 names. Keelung City had the largest number of Koreans with 197, followed by Taipei City (43), Taipei County (28), and Kaohsiung City (24). The actual number of Koreans is believed, however, to have been higher, as some people were hiding to evade deportation and others were smuggling into the island from Japan, Korea, and Mainland China.¹² Government records also suggest some Koreans were using fake Chinese names to avoid deportation.¹³ More Koreans came to Taiwan from Mainland China in 1948 and 1949 as the Civil War intensified, but the actual numbers are not known. There are several people I know personally who are not listed on either the 1947 Register or a similar register compiled in 1948, which is another reason to suspect that the actual number of Koreans in Taiwan was larger than that recorded.

Those who remained in Taiwan can be divided into three groups. The first group was men employed by the Taiwan Fishery Corporation (the former Japan Fishery Corporation 日本水産株式会社 or “Nissui 日水”) and their families. Of the total number of 358 Koreans, 181 were family members of men who worked in the fishing industry, with the vast majority of them employed by the Fishery Corporation. Most of them were concentrated in Keelung, with 173 of the 197 Korean residents there involved in the Fishery Corporation. Stable jobs and free housing provided by the Fishery Corporation kept many Koreans in the region, but the added allure of replacing outgoing Japanese as captains and chief engineers solidified their desire to stay (Wang 1983: 85).

During Japanese colonial rule, the fishing industry was dominated by the Japanese (including Okinawans) and Koreans, with very few Taiwanese in the business.¹⁴ This reality rendered Taiwan’s postwar fishery industry dependent on foreigners. The dependence on Koreans became stronger, as most Japanese, who were retained by the KMT government after the war, left the island after the 1947 February 28 Incident.¹⁵ Taiwan Fishery Corporation records show

¹² There remains in the archive registration forms of fifty-three people whose names were not included in the 1947 Register. “韓僑請領居留證（或身分證）申請書 [Alien Residential (or Identification) Card Application Form for Overseas Koreans],” “韓僑登記名冊,” 韓僑調查與登記 [Investigation and Records of Overseas Koreans], Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Academia Historica (hereafter MAH), 020-110400-0010. The number of unregistered Koreans must have been larger, as all fifty-three are residents in Keelung City, Taipei City, and Taipei County.

¹³ For example, see “韓國僑民遣送,” January 28, 1946, ATH, 003-4733; “電希查明該市遷出之韓僑曹相玕等姓名因何與原報外附僑名冊所列者不符報憑核辦由,” October 28, 1947, National Archives Administration (hereafter NAA), 0036/133/53/2/1/014.

¹⁴ “臺灣漁業總社設立緣議 [Establishment of Taiwan Fishery Company Headquarter],” August 5, 1947, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等 [Overseas Koreans in Taiwan Request Assistance, etc.], MAH, 020-110400-0006.

¹⁵ This is due to the fact that the KMT government suspected Japanese involvement in the uprising. “將留用日人全部遣回去 [All Retained Japanese To be Repatriated],” *China Daily News*, March 27, 1947. For more details, see Chen (1995): 423-427.

that there were 197 Taiwanese, 33 Okinawans, and 71 Koreans working for the company branch in Keelung in 1947. Among the Koreans, nine were captains (including one intern), three were vice-captains, and seven chief engineers. In contrast, there were only two Taiwanese captains, one vice-captain, and four chief engineers. Moreover, Taiwanese workers were all in their twenties while their Korean counterparts were all in their forties.¹⁶

The second group of people who remained was young women who were most likely involved in the sex industry during the prewar and wartime eras (explained in detail later). The information provided in the Register informs us that they were merely teenaged girls at the time of their arrival in Taiwan (or Mainland China) between 1937 and 1944.¹⁷ Many stayed in Taiwan after WWII perhaps because they had no home to return to or they were financially constrained. The Tainan city police record from August of 1946 gives us some clues. A twenty-two-year-old woman surnamed Lee, states that she was “deceived into coming to Taiwan 被人欺騙來台” in 1941. The record shows that she worked as a prostitute, was illiterate and does not want to return to Korea because “she had no job there and was not confident she could make a living there 回國無職業不自信生活安定.”¹⁸ It also stated she owed the owner of the brothel two thousand yuan.¹⁹ While it is uncertain what eventually became of Miss Lee, her name appears in the “whereabouts unknown” section on the last page of the 1947 Register.

The third group who remained were those who wanted to return yet were not able to secure a seat on an outgoing ship. Several elderly members in the Korean community told me that their families decided to return to Korea, so the parents sold or gave away all their possessions and headed to Keelung to board a ship. Kim Yong-ja recalls: “There were too many people at the pier, so we gave up. No other ship ever came back.”²⁰ Kim Myo-yeon’s family also missed the ship. Living in Kaohsiung, the family had to travel 350 km to Keelung. On the train ride, the children came down with food poisoning and had to be hospitalized for several days. By the time they arrived in Keelung, the ship had left. At the pier, her mother collapsed on the ground and wept.²¹

There were other Koreans who ended up in Taiwan for different reasons. Lee Yong-jeong, who

¹⁶ “台湾水產有限公司基隆分公司現有船員移交名冊 [Register of Crews in Taiwan Fishery Corporation Keelung Chapter],” 農林水產分司基隆辦事處陳鄧兩人交代清冊, NAA, 0037/84/0. No dates are given on this document. However, from the age of the employees provided in the document, it is assumed that it was compiled in 1947 (after March).

¹⁷ It is possible that these women were sent to other places outside of Taiwan during the wartime. But, such information is not given in the 1947 Register.

¹⁸ “韓僑調查表,” August 14, 1946, 電發台南市韓僑調查表 [Tainan City Investigation Form of Overseas Korean], NAA, 0035/B065.1/1.

¹⁹ For example, the monthly salary of a crew on the fishing vessel was 110 yuan.

²⁰ Interview with Kim Yong-ja, December 21, 2013, Kaohsiung City.

²¹ Interview with Kim Myo-yeon, April 15, 2012, Keelung City.

later married Kim Yong-ja in November 1950, came to Taiwan from Japan after the war, though it is not clear exactly when as his name is not found either in the 1947 or 1948 Register. Lee was employed in the Japanese Navy and after the war ended he came to Taiwan with some other men.²² Kim Il-je came to Taiwan with two other Korean men from Hainan Island where he worked as a railway conductor of a mine during the war.²³ There are also those who came to Taiwan from Mainland China, fleeing the Chinese Communists' takeover in 1949.

Not all Koreans were permitted to stay, however. There were sixteen Koreans marked "should be deported" on the 1947 Register, equaling the number of whom were stamped "willing to be repatriated." While those willing to return to Korea were all men and their family members except one (which could have been a mistake), those assigned for deportation were all single women in their twenties. Of the 358 Koreans, there were 49 single women, 41 of whom were under twenty-seven years old, and 27 of whom arrived in Taiwan between 1936 and 1944, with 15 arriving at an unknown date. Only one listed a job in agriculture with the others leaving that space on the form blank. It can be assumed that most of these women were involved in the sex industry and some may have been "comfort women" during the war since it is unnatural for single teenaged women to travel to Taiwan alone without their parents. The data seem to support this assumption. According to the 1930 population census, all but one of the 298 Korean women in Taiwan were employed in "hospitality industry;" with 129 listed as prostitutes (Taiwan Governor-General Office 1932: 278). Jin Jungwon's study shows that the ratio of Korean women working as prostitutes in Taiwan rose from 38:1 in 1921 to 4:1 in the 1940s. In 1941, there were ten times more Korean prostitutes working in Taiwan than native Taiwanese (Jin 2010: 124). As a result, Korean brothels became an exotic yet familiar scene of all major cities on the Southern island colony (Jin 2010: 133).²⁴ A study reveals that some of these women were forced to move to China and Southeast Asia during the war. In 1939, 570 Korean women (an increase from 110 the previous year) moved from other parts of the Japanese empire to Taiwan, while 656 women (compared to 165 in the year before) were transferred from Taiwan to places outside the Japanese empire. (Komagome 2000: 137). Another data shows that among the 2,300 women who received travel permits from the Governor-General Office in Taiwan to go to China between 1939 and 1941, 681 were Koreans (Huang 2004: 24, quoted in An 2011: 74). It appears that Taiwan was a transit point for Korean women who moved between the Japanese empire and the outer territories.

²² Interview with Kim Yong-ja, December 21, 2013, Kaohsiung City.

²³ Interview with Kim Il-je, March 12, 2016, Kaohsiung City.

²⁴ The law stipulated women to be over seventeen to be prostitutes in Korea, whereas in Taiwan it was sixteen. While this was a factor behind an influx of Korean women to Taiwan, Jin argues that the overrepresentation of Korean women in the island's sex industry is explained by the fact that the social movement to abolish prostitution in Japan in the 1930s made it difficult for Japanese sex workers to move to Taiwan, providing business opportunities for Korean brothel owners (Jin 2010: 136, 139).

Coinciding to this fact, a Japanese Imperial Army declassified document reveals that the military requested fifty “comfort women” be sent to Borneo from Taiwan in March 1942. Three names of local brothel managers were listed in the same document as points of contact, of which one was a Korean in Keelung, named “Toyokawa Kōkichi 豊川晃吉.”²⁵ According to Zhu De-lan, a Taiwanese expert on comfort women, Toyokawa had six men and forty-two women registered under his household: among the forty-two women, twenty-one were between the age of 11-20 (eleven from Korea; eight from Okinawa, and two from Japan); and eleven between 21-25 (four Koreans; five Okinawans, and two Japanese); and six between 26-35 (five Koreans and one Okinawan). Among them, seventeen stayed in Taiwan for less than one year and twenty-five for more than one year. (Zhu 2009: 334). Zhu speculates that these women were brought in from Korea and Okinawa and then later shipped off to Borneo to serve as “comfort women (Zhu 2009: 335).”

The easiest and surest way for single Korean women without a “proper job” to legally stay in Taiwan was to marry an ROC citizen. Among forty-nine women listed as heads of households in the 1947 Register, eighteen were married to ROC citizens. Government officials were aware that many of the single Korean women were sex workers. It is why guidelines concerning Koreans in China stipulate those permitted to stay in the territories of the Republic of China (including Taiwan) have a “proper job 正當職業.”²⁶ In the early postwar period, these women seem to have moved from one city to another to avoid deportation. A former Korean comfort woman named “Li Yu-fen” testifies that as soon as the war ended, the owner of the comfort station fled and the women continued to work in brothels run by local Taiwanese. They had to move frequently however, as they feared staying in one place for too long increased the risk of being discovered by authorities (Li 2001: 102). This may explain why Seok Hwak-sil, who was initially registered as living in Taichung City in 1947, was found dead in Changhua City in 1950. Moreover, a police record dated December 22, 1948 shows that she moved from Tainan County to Kaohsiung County on December 20 with her Taiwanese husband. Another document reveals that she suffered from mental illness and was transferred from Tainan to the state-run Xikou Sanatorium in Taipei on November 19, 1947 to receive treatment.²⁷ She was released on December 24 and returned to Tainan through the help of the Korean Association.²⁸

²⁵ 陸軍密大日記 [Army Classified Documents] No.22, 2/3 (1942), Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, National Archive of Japan, Ref.C01000379100. The two others are Japanese, a male and a female. The man was an owner of a brothel in Keelung and was formerly a corporal in the Military Police Corps (Zhu 2009: 330).

²⁶ “韓僑處理辦法大綱,” June 20, 1946, 韓僑處理事項, ATH, 00306500001009.

²⁷ “外僑戶籍異動登記案,” NAA, 0037/133.53/1. There is another woman, named Kim, 23 years old, who was staying at the Xikou Sanatorium. Her name appears on the list as one of the twenty-eight Koreans to be repatriated (Xie 2008: 693).

²⁸ “外僑戶籍異動登記案,” NAA, 0037/133.53/1.

Yim Du-uk and the Korean Association

The first name that appears on the 1947 Register is Yim Du-uk who served as president of the “Korean Association in Taiwan.” Yim was born in 1908 on Jeju Island and came to Taiwan in 1933. His household includes his wife (age 33), daughter (20, from his former wife), and his wife’s siblings (elder sister 39, younger sister 20, and younger brother 14). Yim’s wife was Japanese.²⁹ Her siblings were registered as part of Yim’s household, as all Japanese were subject to repatriation after the war.

The Korean Association was established in December 1946.³⁰ The Association’s role was to help fellow Koreans organize themselves and settle in Taiwan under the new Chinese rule. The Association also helped to be the guarantor for Koreans who were detained by the local police,³¹ and served as a liaison with local government authorities, as the Korean mission in China was located in Shanghai.³² One noteworthy fact is that Yim Du-uk is stamped as “traveling” on the 1947 Register remarks column. Five other Koreans were given the same stamp. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ROC) archive reveals that Yim traveled to Korea for five months between December 3, 1946 and May 3, 1947.³³ A Korean newspaper reports a visit of a delegation from Taiwan to Jeju Island on January 25, 1947. According to the article, Wi Juk-heon 韋竹軒, the group leader and thirteen others are representing “six hundred Korean compatriots in Taiwan” there and will be visiting Seoul on February 2 and 3.³⁴ All the names that appear in the article, including “Wi Juk-heon,” are nowhere to be found on the 1947 Register or any other records, which makes me suspect that they all used pseudonyms; “Wi Juk-heon” was most likely Yim Du-uk and the five others were among the thirteen others in the delegation.

The Korean article does not mention about the purpose of their trip. Yet, documents from the

²⁹ Interview with Miyashiro Kiku, August 31, 2012, Keelung City.

³⁰ The Korean Association was not recognized by local authorities as legal because it was not registered with the government. “函為關於韓僑協會之組織情形如何希賜予見告由,” September 12, 1947, 臺灣韓僑協會成立, MAH, 020-1104000-0003.

³¹ A document suggests the Association issued temporary identification cards for short-term visitors. The police arrested two Korean men who entered the port in Hsinchu. They had temporary identification cards issued by the Korean Association but were detained nonetheless. “為新竹警察局被囚韓僑保釋,” August 25, 1947, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006. The Korean Association issued a letter as guarantor for the six Korean men who were detained by the police for illegal entry. “韓僑金漢雄等 6 名保釋案,” April 30, 1947, 韓僑處理事項, ATH, 00306500001018.

³² The Republic of Korea (ROK) was not established until August 15, 1948. The ROC recognized the ROK officially on January 1, 1949. The Embassy moved to Taiwan in December 1949 after the KMT lost the Mainland to the Communists.

³³ “為救濟本省韓僑物資被扣件謹呈瀝情並懇轉介晉謁財政部總稅務司由,” May 21, 1947, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006.

³⁴ “解放된祖国에 [Toward a liberated fatherland],” *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, January 25, 1947: 2.

Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs make plain that Yim and his associates were involved in smuggling. When Yim returned to the island on May 3, 1947, the authorities seized his two fishing vessels, which were loaded with 600 kilograms of shark fin.³⁵ In an attempt to recover the vessels, Yim explained that the merchandise was purchased in Korea using money he had raised for victims of the 228 Incident, and he was planning to sell it and use the cash to help fellow Koreans who suffered from the Incident.³⁶ Local authorities knew however that Yim had smuggled out 520 bags of sugar from Taiwan and had used that money to purchase two fishing vessels and the shark fin.³⁷ On the journey back to Keelung, Yim seems to have also brought extra men from Korea. According to the “1948 Register 會員名簿,” there were fourteen more men registered under his household than from the survey taken a year prior, with nine having the surname “Yim.” These men are most likely Du-uk’s relatives and may have been fleeing Jeju Island due to the rising political tension caused by confrontations between the political left and right.³⁸

Yim’s Colonial Past

It was common for colonial subjects, Koreans and Taiwanese alike, to change their names into Japanese under the colonial rule. Yim Du-uk’s Japanese name was “Toyokawa Kōkichi.” As mentioned earlier, Toyokawa was one of the three contacts in Taiwan designated by the Military Police Corps for providing women for the Japanese military deployed in Borneo. It was Zhu De-lan who first revealed Toyokawa’s original Korean name after getting a hand on the Japanese-era household registration document (Zhu 2009: 332).³⁹ Aside from his own family members, there were thirty-eight women and five men listed as part of the household as “co-habitants” or “employees.” The woman who is listed as Yim’s wife in the 1947 Register is found among them. She was from Miyazaki, Japan, and moved into Yim’s household in 1936.

³⁵ Yim was reported to the police by his “business partner” after their relationship soured. “呈為無辜受累請求洞察下情將船釋放由,” November 30, 1947, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006.

³⁶ “為救濟本省韓僑物資被扣件謹呈瀝情並懇轉介晉謁財政部總稅務司由,” May 21, 1947, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006. Yim wrote another letter to the Liaison Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Taiwan seeking permission to access money in the bank left by Korean expatriates who repatriated to Korea in April 1946. According to Yim, they were all concerned about the 228 Incident and had agreed to use part of the money as relief fund for the victims. The letter includes an attachment showing a total of 754,400 yuan held by twenty-three people as well as their signatures. Yim, in the name of the president of the Korean Association, also asked for rights of Choi Seung-han’s 崔承翰 property in Taichung. “為代理領回韓僑在台存款並懇發還代管家屋陳情敬懇函商有關當局賜助由,” May 28, 1947, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006. The address of Choi’s property coincides with that of Chosenrō 朝鮮樓. He was an owner of two Korean brothels in Tainan City and Kaohsiung City, also named Chosenrō (Jin 2010: 133, see Table 3).

³⁷ “為復任斗旭任漢根等戴運魚翅走私來台情形請查照由,” December 30, 1947, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006.

³⁸ In March 1947, the police opened fire, killing six protesters. The political tension between the Left and the Right escalated since this incident, eventually leading to an armed uprising on April 3, 1948. With US backing, the Korean government brutally suppressed the anti-government forces, leading to an island-wide massacre which lasted several years (Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation, 2014).

³⁹ Yet, Zhu was unaware of Yim’s postcolonial life in Taiwan.

At the time, she was 21 years old. The Japanese household registration notes Toyokawa's occupation as "boatswain of a motor vessel 機動船水夫長."⁴⁰

陸軍省 陸軍部 第二九二九號
 秘 電報譯 三月十七日午前十一時三十分發
 發信地 臺灣
 大 臣宛 發信者 台灣軍司令官
 台電 第六〇二號
 陸軍電第六三號「閣下ホルネオ」行キ慰安土人ノ
 名爲シ得ル限リ派遣方南才總軍ヨリ要求セルヲ以テ陸軍
 電第六三號ニ基キ憲兵調査選定セル左記經營者
 三名渡航認可アリ度申請ス
 左記
 愛媛縣越智郡波方村一三六台北州基隆市日
 新町二六村瀬近市四十二歳 朝鮮全羅南道濟
 州島翰林面挾才里十台北州基隆市義重町四一五
 豊川晃吉三十五歳 高知縣長岡郡今良村三七〇高
 雄州潮州郡潮州街二六七 茂田ウノ五十一歳
 終

Figure 3: Comfort Women Sent From Taiwan to Borneo. The dotted line (added by this author) reads: “Chosen, South Jeolla Province, Jeju Island...Taihoku Province, Keelung City, Gijōchō 4-15, Toyokawa Kōkichi, 35 years old.” Source: *Rikuamitsu Dainikki* 陸軍密大日記 No.22, 2/3 (1942), Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, National Archive of Japan, Ref.C01000379100.

It is uncertain as to how Yim trafficked these men and women; one source told me that he ran an inn in Gijūchō, Keelung's downtown area.⁴¹ Pre-war Japanese household records suggest that Yim lived in Gijūchō between October 1936 and February 1943. This address, which is several blocks away from the Military Police Corps Bureau, was most likely the location of the inn. His name also appears in the *Taiwan Nichi Nichi Simpo*, a daily newspaper in colonial Taiwan. On May 15, 1943, Toyokawa—referred to as “the president (of the Korean Association in Keelung 半島人協和會)” —led hundred fifty members to the Keelung Shinto Shrine in response to the announcement that Navy Special Volunteers System began to recruit ethnic Koreans. Afterwards, he visited the Navy Office as well as the Military Police Corps in Keelung, making donations to each agency.⁴² Such acts of patriotism were not unique. In another

⁴⁰ Japanese-era Taiwanese household records, acquired on February 1, 2019 at the Household Registration Office Zhongzheng District, Keelung City.

⁴¹ This inn was burned down from US air raid in WWII. Interview with Miyashiro Kiku, August 31, 2012, Keelung City.

⁴² “基隆在住 半島人神社参拝 海軍志願制度に感激 [Koreans in Keelung Pay Visit to Shinto Shrine, Thrilled About Navy Volunteer System],” *Taiwan Nichi Nichi Simpo* (TNNS), May 16, 1943: 2.

example when Korean residents held a ceremony in Keelung celebrating three Korean volunteers to the Imperial Army in January 1938, one of the organizers delivered a speech that included this excerpt: “This policy (to recruit Korean volunteers) shows that our country Japan now regards Koreans to be equal to the Japanese and for this reason I am grateful to the Emperor’s mercy from the bottom of my heart... We the Koreans in Keelung must further strive hard as to live up to the honor of being Japanese.” The attendants then unanimously decided to send telegrams to the Korean Governor-General, the Military Commander in Korea, the Minister of Colonial Affairs, and Diet member Park Chun-gum to thank them for the occasion, as well as to declare the fifth of February a “National Defense Donation Day.” The ceremony concluded with participants shouting in unison “Long time the Emperor” three times.⁴³ In the same year, two thousand plus Koreans in Taiwan responded to a campaign by the United Korean Association in Taiwan 台灣朝鮮人聯合會 to donate two light machine guns as “national defense weapon” to the military in celebration of the fall of Nanking, collecting 2,105 yen.⁴⁴ A similar gathering was held by Korean expatriates in Kaohsiung in which thirty representatives elected leaders and also raised five hundred yen as a donation to the military.⁴⁵ Kim Chan-ho, who was elected as president, was an owner of Chōkarō 朝花樓, a Korean brothel in Kaohsiung City (Jin 2010: 133).⁴⁶ No other information can be found about Yim, other than one of my sources telling me that she once saw a photo of Yim sitting on a chair with a military cap and a Japanese sword between his legs with two other men standing behind him.⁴⁷ It is assumed that he had close ties with the Military Police Corps.

⁴³ “基隆の半島人が南決督に感謝電 志願兵制實施祝賀會を開き [Koreans in Keelung Thank Governor-General Minami at Celebration Party for Accepting Koreans as Army Volunteers],” *TNNS*, January 22, 1938: 2.

⁴⁴ The final amount far exceeded the amount of money that the Association had planned in the beginning (1,500 yen). The reporter writes “such patriotic spirit among the Koreans is very moving.” See “臺灣在住の半島人 輕機關銃二挺を獻納 愛國的至情の現れ [Koreans in Taiwan Show Great Patriotism by Donating Two Little Machine Guns],” *TNNS*, March 10, 1938: 2.

⁴⁵ “半島人が赤誠の現れ 親睦會席上で皇軍慰問金を醸出 [Koreans Show Loyalty to the Emperor by Collecting Military Comfort Fund at Friendship Gathering],” *TNNS*, March 21, 1938: 7.

⁴⁶ Kim must have returned to Korea after the war as his name is nowhere to be found in the 1947 Register. The President of Taiwan Korean Association in Taipei, Yang Eo-su 梁魚壽, was also a co-owner of a Korean brothel (Haruyama 1990: 41).

⁴⁷ Interview with Kim Sakko, July 5, 2020, Kaohsiung City.



Figure 4: Yim and the Women. The caption reads: “Korean Association in Taiwan Patriotic Women’s Club, 4281 (Korean era, which is 1948 A.D.), March 25.” Yim is the man in the middle. Courtesy of Park Sheung-mi.

Power Struggle within the Korean Association

One may wonder why a “Japanese collaborator” like Yim could remain in power and assume the position of a president in the postwar period. Korean expatriates in Keelung, considering its small size, most likely knew about Yim’s collaboration with the Military Police Corps. It is presumed that Yim’s leadership was needed to handle the postwar transition and also that pro-Japanese attitude was not deemed immoral—something to be condemned—at the time. After all, *kōminka* was the norm in the Japanese colony during wartime, especially since Japan warred with China in 1937, and colonial subjects were compelled to show allegiance to the Japanese emperor. Besides, ethno-centric narrative was not popular among the Korean expatriates in the early postwar period. This however does not mean that the legitimacy of Yim Du-uk was unquestioned. There remains in the archive a document sent by the Korean Independence Party and the Korean Liaison Mission in China informing the Taiwanese authorities that Yim’s Association had leftist ideological leanings and that they needed to pay

attention with ties to Korean and Chinese communists.⁴⁸ Such concerns led the Korean Liaison Mission in China to appoint Lee Su-jeong as a “liaison officer” in August 1947 to deal with troubles pertaining to Korean compatriots on the island. This included “helping the local authorities investigate Koreans who avoided registration and remained in hiding” as well as “educating Korean expats who had only a shallow understanding of Korean history and language.”⁴⁹ Perhaps this mission was too much for Lee, as he also served as a “standing board member” in Yim’s “Korean Association.” Details are not known, but he stepped down in October after two months.⁵⁰

Eventually, a man named Lee Sang-man rose to challenge Yim’s leadership. Lee was a Korean independence activist who fled from Korea to China after the March First movement of 1919 was brutally suppressed by Japanese colonialists. He was an ordained minister but had also assumed important positions in the provisional government, such as the president of the Accounting Yuan and chair of the Control Committee of the Korea Independence Party.⁵¹ He was sent by the provisional government to Taiwan as “director of the Taiwan Chapter of Delegation to the ROC” in early 1947.⁵² However, Chen Yi, the Chief Administrator and the head of the Taiwan Garrison Command, did not approve Lee’s appointment based on the reason that “there was no real need for such a post since most of the Koreans in Taiwan are waiting to be repatriated.”⁵³ Furthermore, a declassified Taiwan Garrison Command document reveals that Lee was suspected as a “pro-Soviet” figure and was put under strict surveillance. The same report mentions that Lee met two Korean expats (one of them is Lee Su-jeong) in his “secret hideout” in Beitou, Taipei, and sent them on a “clandestine trip” to different parts of Taiwan to make contact with other Koreans.⁵⁴ The mission was most likely to network with Koreans in other cities for the purpose of overthrowing Yim, but local intelligence agents suspected it involved “pro-communist activities.”⁵⁵ Even without an official endorsement from the Taiwanese government, however, Lee continued to carry out his plans and more than a year later on May 8, 1948 officially launched the “Korean Association in Taiwan,” assuming the

⁴⁸ “為韓僑在台活動情形電請查復由,” October 30, 1947, 臺灣韓僑協會成立, MAH, 020-110400-0003.

⁴⁹ “為函請將韓僑登記事宜移交本處辦理由,” August 19, 1947, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006.

⁵⁰ “國民政府外交部快郵代電第東 36 號,” November 10, 1947, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006.

⁵¹ “簽呈 外交部駐臺灣特派員公署,” February 15, 1947, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006.

⁵² According to the appendix made to the 1947 Register, Lee arrived to Taiwan in August 1947. Lee, age 65, was chosen for the post since he had health problems. The island of Taiwan, subtropical, modern, and free of war, was an ideal place for him to recuperate. It is no coincidence that he stayed in Beitou, which is famous for its hot springs.

⁵³ “韓國代表派李象萬為駐華代表團台灣主任事無設立必要電仰知照由,” March 24, 1947, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-11400-0006.

⁵⁴ “韓僑李萬象等案,” February 24, 1947, 韓僑處理事項, ATH, 00306500001007.

⁵⁵ One of the reasons Lee was suspected is that one of the two whom he had met was Kim Hakgeun, a native of South Pyongan Province (“North Korea”) had passed himself off as Chinese from Henan and Anhui. He also left Taiwan for Korea in October 1946 but returned to Taiwan after two months.

position of “Chairman of the Board.” The inaugural meeting, held at the Taipei Zhongshan Hall, was attended by one hundred twenty-six people, including dignitaries from the local government and US vice consul.⁵⁶ At the meeting, the members elected board members and decided new rules, which included: 1) smuggling would be strictly prohibited; 2) heavy drinking is not allowed; and 3) the use of Japanese language is prohibited.⁵⁷ These restrictions, especially the first one, seemed to target Yim and his allies.

Two persons in the new leadership worth noting were Park Jeong-hwan and Gil Yong-bin, who served as standing board members. Park, a graduate of the prestigious Waseda University, was only 28 years old.⁵⁸ A declassified document reveals that he was a secret agent sent by the military arm of the Korean Independence Party to spy on Korean expatriates in Taiwan.⁵⁹ Park arrived to Taiwan in April 1947 and lived in Keelung, unlike Lee and other leaders who resided in the capital Taipei. This was most likely to keep an eye on Yim Du-uk and other “left-leaning,” “unpatriotic” figures. Gil, aged 42, was a businessman. It is unknown as to how he won the trust of Lee and other leaders in the Association in order to be selected as one of the two standing board members, but perhaps it was because he was wealthy. Japanese-era records reveal that he once was a co-owner of Sengetsurō 鮮月樓, one of the two Korean brothels in Kaohsiung (Takao City Government 1939: 204).⁶⁰

The new leadership did not last long, however. Due to a strong resistance from Yim and his associates, namely the men in the fishing industry, Lee’s new regime collapsed in less than a year. There remains in the archive a letter sent by Yim and thirty-two other men to the Taiwan branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They complained that “a small group of malicious men is labelling the majority of us as ‘ill-educated fishermen’ and threatens whoever does not listen to them will be deported.” This, the letter continues, is destroying the unity of the Korean community and violates the sovereignty of the Republic of China. According to the report, Lee and the new leadership are “exploiting” fellow Koreans in the name of the “Refugee Relief Fund” to afford their luxurious lifestyles. Whoever refuses to contribute to the Fund is “either lynched or labeled as a communist spy.” The letter reports that Kim Il-je and two other men from North Korea were detained by the local authorities after Park Jeong-hwan and other

⁵⁶ Formerly known as the Taihoku City Public Hall during the Japanese rule, Zhongshan Hall is an official meeting place of the Chinese government. Important events, such as Taiwan’s handover to the ROC ceremony in October 1946, were held at this venue.

⁵⁷ “無題,” October 18, 1948, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006.

⁵⁸ “台灣韓僑協會理監事名單及履歷,” July 1, 1948, 臺灣韓僑協會成立, MAH, 020-110400-0003.

⁵⁹ “為密派聯絡人員協助由,” September 22, 1947, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006.

⁶⁰ The other Korean brothel, named Chōkarō 朝花樓, was run by Kim Chan-ho 金贊瑚. Kim served as president of 台灣朝鮮人會聯合會. See “半島人が赤誠の現れ [Koreans Showing Loyalty to Emperor],” *TNNS*, March 21, 1938. According to the 1948 Register, Gil arrived to Taiwan in “July 1947.” He must have left Taiwan after the war and then returned.

members accused them as “communist spies.”⁶¹ A rebuttal was made by Gil Yong-bin, accusing Yim and his cronies of insulting Lee Sang-man and attempting to overthrow his leadership by making false accusations and spreading them. The same letter reveals that Lee suffered a stroke in summer and since then had been lying in bed.⁶² A report found in the KMT archive written by Lee reveals his inner feelings: “Both old and young, men and women, all speak Japanese in everyday life and do not understand the national language (Korean) well...This broke my heart.”⁶³ He wrote he had a plan to go to Keelung and hold lectures on the “Three Principles of the People” and correct wrong ideas and prevent Japanese spies from infiltrating, but failed to do so due to financial problems and failing health. Moreover, according to Lee, as the law required that one apply for permission in advance to have meetings during the “Period of National Mobilization for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion,”⁶⁴ and that an observer be sent by the authorities to monitor the meetings, it was not easy to persuade people to attend the lectures. Lee laments, “...thus all I could accomplish was to compile a register [1948 Register]...but this is due solely to my incompetence and lack of moral leadership and not because our nation is inferior.”⁶⁵

On March 1, 1949, the Korean Association held a provisional general assembly meeting in Keelung and elected Yim Du-uk a new “Chairman of the Board.”⁶⁶ Around the same time, Lee Sang-man and thirty-nine other Koreans, including Park and Gil, applied to the Taiwanese government for permission to return to Korea due to “economic hardship.”⁶⁷ They rented a ship and left Keelung on August 1.⁶⁸ They asked the local government permission to take with them 850 million yuan worth of products, weighing 101 tons; the products included limestone powder, papers, alcohol, sugar, and water buffalo horns.⁶⁹ The group sought permission from the government to directly sail to Incheon and not to be called at Shanghai as Lee could not

⁶¹ The three were released after several months. “無題,” October 4, 1948, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006.

⁶² “無題,” October 18, 1948, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006.

⁶³ Lee Sang-man, “臺灣韓僑協會八九月工作報告書 [August-September Report, Korean Association in Taiwan],” 1948, date unknown, Party Archive Center, Cultural Communications Committee, Chinese Nationalist Party. The Korean Association was obligated to report to the Chinese Nationalists Party.

⁶⁴ It lasted from May 10, 1948 to May 1, 1991.

⁶⁵ Lee Sang-man, “臺灣韓僑協會八九月工作報告書 [August-September Report, Korean Association in Taiwan],” 1948, date unknown, Party Archive Center, Cultural Communications Committee, Chinese Nationalist Party.

⁶⁶ “呈為呈事三月一日選舉結果由,” March 8, 1949, 臺灣韓僑協會成立, MAH, 020-110400-0003.

⁶⁷ “呈為旅台韓僑歸國陳情由,” 臺灣韓僑協會成立, MAH, 020-110400-0003.

⁶⁸ “為韓僑吳成烈租用福海輪於八月一日駛韓電復查照書,” August 12, 1949, 臺灣韓僑協會成立, MAH, 020-110400-0003.

⁶⁹ “旅臺韓國人歸國僑民姓名及攜帶土產數量表,” 臺灣韓僑協會成立, MAH, 020-110400-0003. Another document suggests that the total value of the products was worth more than 1.6 billion yuan. Although Lee had nothing, many of the members had literally “tons” of things to carry. It is obvious that these people were trying to make a fortune from this opportunity.

bear any longer of a journey due to his poor health.⁷⁰ In the end, however, it is not clear whether Lee boarded the ship. According to Korean sources, Lee returned to Korea in 1949, and died in Seoul on January 8, 1955 (Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs 2021).

Becoming Korean: Decolonization and Building an Ethnic School and Church

As mentioned by Lee Sang-man, Koreans in Taiwan continued to speak Japanese in their postcolonial everyday lives. It was the language, as problematic as this may be to the Korean nationalists, they were most comfortable with and it was simply unrealistic and impractical for them to suddenly switch to Korean just because Korea was liberated and that they were no longer Japanese. The former colonial language was also an important means to communicate with Taiwanese neighbors; moreover there were no means of ethnic education in the early postwar period. A Korean school was built by the Korean Association in November 1949, four years after the end of the war, and even then it was “privately run” with no support coming from the government. The school had humble beginnings; Yim Du-uk, who served as principal, rented Taiwan Fishery Corporation storage areas as classrooms, and hired a young man who came from Mainland China as a school teacher (See photo below). Initially, there were only a handful of students and expenses were covered by the community. The school did not have its own building and campus until December 1952. The first Korean teacher sent by the government arrived to Taiwan in November 1957. He served as the principal and, together with his wife, taught the students Korean.⁷¹ Learning hangul, the Korean script, was of particular importance for students in building their identity as Koreans. According to Kim Bika, who surveyed education on ethnic Koreans in Northeast China, school textbooks taught students to love hangul and to be proud of this unique script which is “easy to learn and can express in writing more sounds than any other script in the world (Kim 2007: 348).”⁷²

⁷⁰ “靄公勳鑿日前晋謁,” June 26, 1949, 旅臺韓僑請求協助等, MAH, 020-110400-0006. It was required by the Chinese authorities that all ships going in and out of China must pass through Shanghai.

⁷¹ “僑胞生活貧窮 [Korean Expats Suffer Poverty],” *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, October 25, 1958: 3.

⁷² This textbook was used in Yanbian in 1947.



Figure 5: The caption reads, “Celebration of the Opening of the Keelung Private Korean Elementary School.” The fifth person from the right on the middle roll in suit and tie is Yim Du-uk. This photo was taken in front of the warehouse of the Taiwan Fishery Company. “檀記 4282 年” is 1949 CE. Courtesy of Park Sheung-mi.

Another important venue for ethnic formation was the church. The Korean churches in Taiwan were established by Jeong Seong-won, a female evangelist who was a native of North Pyongan Province. She was a school teacher turned evangelist; after working in a church in Pyongyang, she was sent by the church in 1933 to Mukden, Manchukuo, where she served in a Korean church as a missionary. Later she moved to Shanghai with her husband and family, and then fled to Taiwan on May 28, 1949.⁷³ The first church was built in Keelung (1950), followed by churches in Kaohsiung (1955) and Taipei (1957) (Republic of China Korean Association 1993: 32). The church grew through Jeong’s tireless efforts as she not only preached the gospel and managed worship services, but helped those in need, financially and spiritually. She taught Koreans their “mother tongue,” and to non-Korean spouses Korean culture, mannerisms, and cooking.⁷⁴ This effort won her the title, “mother of the Korean people in Taiwan (An 2011: 101).” Every Sunday, members gathered together for a worship service, in which the sermon

⁷³ Jeong came to Taiwan with her two daughters. She lost her husband in Shanghai, and became separated with her two sons (An 2011: 98-100).

⁷⁴ “僑胞의 할머니鄭盛元씨 [Grandma of the Korean Expatriates: Ms. Jeong Seong-won],” *Dong-a Ilbo*, November 16, 1962: 6.

was delivered and hymns sang in Korean using a Korean-language Bible and hymnbook. Reverend Gye Hwa-sam, the first missionary to the Keelung Korean Church, arrived to Taiwan in 1957 (An 2011: 108). Aside from Sunday worship services, participation in lunches afterward which included ethnic food (kimchi was a common side dish) and other gatherings such as home fellowships as well as seasonal activities such as the Christmas Service or the annual sport event were all cultural practices through which “Korean-ness” was appropriated. As there weren’t many recreational activities at the time, these events were well attended by community members, Christians and non-Christians alike (Wang 1984: 50-51).

According to a survey taken by the church in 1958, 44 out of 81 households in Taiwan were affiliated with the church. Keelung had the highest number with 21 out of 34 households being members of the church (An 2011: 110). The fast growth of the church perhaps is not irrelevant to the tough living condition community members had to endure. Life on ships was rough and the men were heavily into drinking and gambling and most of the time away from home, which put a strain on marriages. Many women, as a result, suffered from loneliness. It is no coincidence therefore that the church started as a home fellowship of these women under the guidance of Jeong, a female evangelist.

Koreans substantiated their Korean-ness through ethnic institutions like the school and the church. This did not necessarily mean that decolonization was complete and thorough, however. The people in the community continued to speak Japanese among themselves and to their Taiwanese neighbors, and though some later changed their names to Korean through the help of people like Jeong who could read and write Korean and Chinese, many did not bother to do so and they continued to call each other in Japanese names and nicknames.⁷⁵ Perhaps the politics of national language is best captured in the story I heard from a senior member in the Korean community. When President Rhee Syngman visited Taiwan in 1953, Korean residents in Keelung went up to Taipei to greet him. As they were gathering together for a group photo, Rhee, overhearing the adults using Japanese to urge the children to get in the picture, yelled: “Those who speak Japanese should go to Japan!”⁷⁶

It is understandable that Rhee Syngman and Lee Sang-man, who spent most of his life fighting against Japanese imperialism, were annoyed by the fact the Koreans in Taiwan continued to speak Japanese. However, it would not be fair to simply label them “pro-Japanese” or “unpatriotic.” After all, unlike those in Korea who were liberated from the Japanese rule and were enjoying self-governance, Koreans in Taiwan were forced to live under a new Chinese

⁷⁵ Most of the girls who were born under the Japanese rule had their names ending with “ko.” Some of them changed their names in 1949. For example, “朴正子” became “朴敬孝,” and “朴禮子” became “朴鈴心.”

⁷⁶ Interview with Kim Sakko, January 30, 2014, Kaohsiung City.

regime that was just as foreign as, if not more foreign than the previous Japanese rule. Although Chinese Mandarin replaced Japanese as national language, for Korean expats, Japanese was the language needed to communicate with local Taiwanese. Moreover, there were not a few international marriage; some Korean men, including Yim, had Japanese or Okinawan wives with whom they spoke Japanese. As a result, Japanese remained the “lingua franca” among Koreans in Taiwan in the early postwar era.

Travails of the Korean Community in Taiwan

The end of WWII, rather than the nominally celebrated liberation, was a beginning of new sufferings and hardships for Koreans in Taiwan. Kim Yong-ja’s father, for example, had run a tire repair shop in Hsinchu but became unemployed after the war because he couldn’t speak Chinese. The family decided to return to Korea, so they sold everything they had and set off for Keelung to secure passage on a ship but were unable to do so. Kim recalls being surprised to see so many Koreans on the pier because under Japanese rule, everyone spoke Japanese and Koreans on the island were hiding their ethnicity. Kim received Japanese education but she had to wait two years to get into elementary school because her father insisted she attend the school for Japanese children (*shōggakō*) instead of the one for Taiwanese children (*kōggakō*) to learn proper Japanese. She said it took two years to get permission and by the time she started, she felt embarrassed about being the oldest student in her class. The waiting to get into the Japanese school did not pay off as she ended up spending most of her school days running for shelter from US air raids. After the war, she was overaged to get into the Keelung Korean School and her father did not think girls needed education, telling her it was enough to just be able to write her name. Being the eldest daughter, Yong-ja had no choice but to marry a man whom her father chose—someone much older than her—at age 17 to support the family. Deprived of a formal education due to war as well as gender discrimination, she can speak but does not read or write well in Korean; “Japanese is my strongest language,” she shrugged.⁷⁷

While liberation meant losing a job and an opportunity to receive an education for Kims, it meant losing a breadwinner for the Parks. The Parks arrived to Keelung in 1942 after living in Japan for several years. They were originally from Geomundo (known in the West as Port Hamilton), a small group of islands off the southern coast of the Korean Peninsula. Their misfortune occurred while waiting for the ship to sail back to Korea. On the morning of March 12, 1947, Park Sun-jong, aged 35, left the house to buy some fresh fish for his son’s first birthday the next day, but he never returned. We now know that this was a dangerous time as Nationalist troops sent from Mainland China to quell the “rebellion” that had just landed in Keelung on March 9 and opened fire against the rioters, brutally restoring order and control.

⁷⁷ Interview with Kim Yong-jia, May 17, 2016, Kaohsiung City.

According to the eyewitness, Park was stopped and taken away with other Taiwanese men by the soldiers. The family searched for him but to no avail.⁷⁸ The tragedy forced the family to give up their plan to return to Korea. The family was devastated, especially his wife who was pregnant at the time of her husband's disappearance. She later delivered a child, but was not in the right mind to care for the newborn; the infant died several months later. The eldest son, who was only 14 at the time, quit school and took his father's place on the fishing boat to support the family.⁷⁹ He was later approached by Jeong and decided to attend the seminary in Taipei. Park Seong-tae became the first ordained minister in the Kaohsiung Korean Church in 1967.



Figure 6: Christmas Service at the Keelung Korean Church (1972). The Hangeul on the wall reads “Merry Christmas.” Women in their *hanbok*, traditional Korean dress, are singing hymns. Courtesy of Miyashiro Kiku.

Koreans held a privileged place in postwar Taiwan as the KMT regime was allied with the Republic of Korea in their fight against communism. Moreover, the KMT government, which

⁷⁸ For more details, see Amae (2014): 55-66.

⁷⁹ His name appears in the directory of Taiwan Fishery Company (1947) with his age given as 18. It likely he falsified his age in order to work on the boat. See “台灣水產有限公司基隆分公司現有船員移交名冊 [Register of Crews in Taiwan Fishery Corporation Keelung Chapter],” 農林水產分公司基隆辦事處陳鄧兩任交代清冊, NAA, 0037/84/0.

had harbored Korean independence activists during WWII and supported its independence after the war, was sympathetic to the plight of Korean diaspora in China and Taiwan, and thus implemented a lenient policy in dealing with them.⁸⁰ In addition to this, the postwar fishing industry was reliant on Japanese (including Okinawans) and Koreans. When all the remaining Japanese were forced to leave Taiwan after the 228 Incident in 1947, Koreans rose in the ranks of the fishing industry. Such preferential treatment didn't last long however: by the mid-1950s Koreans were being replaced by Taiwanese who had received the needed education and training. As a result, many Koreans lost their jobs and suffered economically, prompting Yim Du-uk to travel to Korea and appeal for help. In October 1958, Yim visited Seoul and requested that the government provide them a fishing vessel and a loan of one hundred thousand US dollars. It is not clear whether the Korean government complied with his request, but the situation does not seem to have improved, as a Korean news report in 1963 details:

A total of thirty-some people from five households strongly desire to return to Korea, and are planning to immigrate to Brazil if their request is not met. In the past six months, one hundred twenty-three people from twenty-three households from Taipei, Keelung, and Kaohsiung have applied to return home. Some Korean residents in Keelung purchased an eighty ton fishing vessel in August, but the boat remains in the docks due to lack of funds.⁸¹

The Korean Embassy also asked the Taiwanese government for assistance on behalf of their fellow countrymen. In December 1963, the Embassy contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asking if the government could appropriate two thousand cube kilometers of conifer to a timber company in Taichung set up by the local Koreans in light of the contribution they had made to the local fishing industry.⁸² The request was rejected, however. According to the Korean newspaper, 106 people from 55 households were being unemployed, compared to 128 people from 44 households with a regular job.⁸³ This type of economic difficulty continued into the 1970s.

Kim Il-je and some other Koreans who chose not to work at sea did fare better. After marrying

⁸⁰ After the Koreans in Shanghai complained about being put in the same concentration camp with the Japanese, the Nationalists government made adjustments, such as 1) Koreans be treated differently from the Japanese; 2) Koreans upon repatriation be given at least three months of living expenses and daily necessities; 3) Koreans not to be mistreated by military police and secret agents. See “改善辦法之意見,” April 8, 1946, 韓僑處理(一), MAH, 020-990600-3253.

⁸¹ “차라리‘브라질’로 버림받은 韓國人 [Rather be dumped in Brazil],” *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, October 9, 1963: 6.

⁸² “為韓國僑民協會在台設置製材工廠請予配材事 請查照核辦見復由,” December 30, 1963, 在臺韓僑(一), MAH, 020-010208-0002.

⁸³ “차라리‘브라질’로 버림받은 韓國人,” *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, October 9, 1963: 6.

a Taiwanese woman in 1953, he moved to Kaohsiung where he ran a small business. He later started a fish farm that made a fortune. He served as the president of the Korean Association in Kaohsiung for eighteen years from 1972 to 1990.⁸⁴ He told me that he did not see any future being on a boat and thus decided to seek opportunities on land. This decision paid off as Kim was able to send his children to the best public schools in Kaohsiung and family members became very wealthy. Other members of Korean families also benefited from preferential status given to foreigners to attend top Taiwanese universities without taking entrance exams. The economic status of Koreans in Taiwan improved further in the 1980s as their children were graduating from universities and landing on well-paid jobs. Some families made their way to the United States. Jeong, the Christian pioneer, moved to the US in 1972, following her daughter. She passed away in Los Angeles in 1993.

Conclusion: A Postcolonial Body

The children and grandchildren of individuals I mentioned in this article are still living in Taiwan. Despite being in Taiwan for over three generations, they are aliens according to the laws of the Republic of China (ROC). Thus, they are not entitled to some of the social welfare which are limited to ROC citizens, and the law requires them to renew their residential permits every three years. Some have married local Taiwanese and have chosen to naturalize by giving up their Korean citizenship.

Yim Du-uk served as president of the Korean Association in Taiwan until 1960. He suffered a stroke in 1962 and became bedridden, which caused his family to suffer great economic hardship (Cao 1995: 111). With the help of the family, he later moved back to Jeju Island where he died in 1973. He left no legacy in Taiwan or Korea, except as part of the *Encyclopedia of Pro-Japanese Figures*, published in Korea in 2000. The book discloses the names and deeds of “Chin-il-pa (親日派 pro-Japanese faction),” people who collaborated with the Japanese colonialists.⁸⁵ Yim is listed as “owner of a comfort station (Pro-Japanese Dictionary Compilation Committee 2009: 263).”⁸⁶ The three-volume book, in which more than four thousand Koreans including government officials and artists are labeled as “Japanese collaborators,” is seen as a landmark work in the long, yet never-ending process to decolonize Korea.

The story I narrated in this article may seem ignominious, as Lee Sang-man, a veteran Korean

⁸⁴ “새해엔 ‘호랑이 같은 祖國’ 보고 싶어요 [Wanting to see a Tiger-like Fatherland on a New Year],” *Munhwa Ilbo*, January 1, 1998.

⁸⁵ In Korea, “pro-Japanese” is synonymous to been called “traitors.”

⁸⁶ Among the 4,389 people, Yim Du-uk is one of the 20 men who were “owners of the Japanese military comfort station.”

patriot, lost to Yim Du-uk and a group of ill-educated fishermen, smugglers, and “Japanese collaborators” in a struggle for political leadership. But, that is not the message I wish to deliver. It is easy to jump on the bandwagon demonizing Yim for collaborating with the Japanese colonialists. He may have trafficked young women from impoverished and underprivileged families in Japan, Okinawa, and Korea to Taiwan and from Taiwan to territories beyond. Some of them may have been transported to the Japanese military comfort stations in Borneo as the declassified document suggests. Seok Hwak-sil may have been one of them. These crimes cannot be overlooked. Yet, there are not enough evidences to put a nail in the coffin. At the same time, the man who collaborated with the Japanese military lived another life in the postwar: “president of Korean Association in Taiwan.” Yim as the president worked hard to help fellow countrymen in need and in trouble. He built the Korean School. Although use of Japanese language was quotidian in the Korean community in postwar Taiwan, it is said that he did not condone a Taiwanese evangelist teaching Bible stories to the Korean children in Japanese (Yang 1985: 5).⁸⁷ When Kim Gu, leader of the Korean Independence movement, was assassinated in 1949, Yim, together with other men and women mourned his death, holding a commemoration service in Keelung. He traveled to Korea to seek help for the Korean compatriots in financial difficulties. Was he too not a patriot?

There are no perfect victims. A victim in one incident may be regarded as an offender in another incident, in effect blurring the line between victims and offenders. If so, instead of dividing ex-colonial subjects like Yim Du-uk and Seok Hwak-sil into a binary of “perpetrators/collaborators” and “victims,” can we not view them both as colonial/postcolonial bodies whose behaviors and thoughts influenced, desires molded, and even fate determined by the evils and inevitable of imperialistic reality into which they were situated? As colonial subjects, they were all under an inescapable gaze of Japanese imperialism which did not condone them to be just as they are. Instead, it cajoled as well as coerced them to become Japanese, in body, mind, and spirit. The end of the war and liberation was not the end of such misfortune. Many of them had no choice but to bear the burden of imperial residues; Japanese imperialism had left inerasable scars on their bodies and minds.

Tales of Korean diaspora in postwar Taiwan reveal that the collapse of the Japanese empire in 1945 was a beginning of painstaking (re)negotiations with new and old national cultures, including the one imposed as “their own”—a “Korean,” rather than a “liberation” or “restoration” as if things have been restored back to normal. Becoming Korean was a process,

⁸⁷ The local Taiwanese church had reached out to the Korean children in the early postwar period. Since the church was far from where the children lived, the Korean school classroom was arranged for the Sunday school. Yim took issue with the church when he found out that Japanese was being used to teach the Bible. It was only after the Taiwanese church acquired Korean Bibles and hymnbooks from Japan a few years later did Yim allow the Sunday school to be taught. Interview with Kim Sakko, July 5, 2020, Kaohsiung City.

long and for some perhaps never-ending, not unlike “becoming Japanese:” they were compelled to change their legal status, name, language, and even diet.⁸⁸ Yet, aside from their nationality, many things, including the language they spoke in everyday life, remain hybrid. As for ethnic Koreans who were born and raised in pre-WWII Taiwan, they had to cope with the reality that, with the end of WWII, their birthplace and a familiar everyday space suddenly became a “foreign land” while being bestowed a “homeland” that was more imaginary than real. The fact that they had to go through the travails of being under constant surveillance outwardly as well as inwardly shows that they are postcolonial bodies that could not easily fit into a single national entity. They live in a liminal, not national, space; they are too queer to be “Koreans.” Thus, to straightjacket a nation upon them would be a form of tyranny against which Korean independence fighters had fought.

Afterword

Kim Il-je passed away in Kaohsiung on January 3, 2019. He was 97 years old. Seok Hwak-sil’s death in 1950 still remains a mystery.

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⁸⁸ For example, grandmas in the Kaohsiung Korean Church, who grew up in Taiwan, told me that they think that Korean kimchi are too salty. The politics of becoming reminds me of Leo Ching’s argument on *kominka*, which he describes as a state of being (Japanese) and not a process of becoming. Koreans were not given a choice but to be Korean (since liberation), and likewise it was up to them to strive to become a “Korean.” See Leo (2001), chapter three.

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