

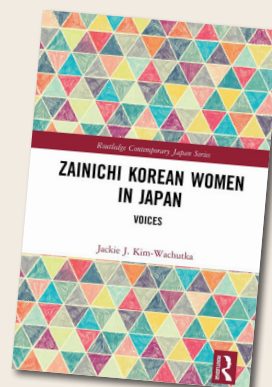
BOOK REVIEW

Zainichi Korean Women in Japan: Voices

By Jackie J. Kim-Wachutka

Routledge, 2019
ix + 265 pages.

Reviewed by John LIE



Zainichi Korean Women in Japan: Voices is something of a sequel to Jackie J. Kim-Wachutka's 2005 book, *Hidden Treasures: Lives of First-Generation Korean Women in Japan* (written as Jackie J. Kim). Both books painstakingly recollect and record voices of ethnic or diasporic Korean (Zainichi or Zainichi Korean) women. The book under review begins with first-generation women's memories but extends its purview to second- and third-generation women on sundry topics. Whereas the earlier book primarily recorded voices from Osaka, the geographical focus of the book under review is Kawasaki, a historically working-class city south of Tokyo. Both books together convey shards of memory and narratives of identity with concrete voices and in so doing delineate a prosopography of Zainichi Korean women. Although there are numerous—at times the bulging bibliography seems to suggest countless—volumes on nearly every aspect of Zainichi Korean lives in Japanese, Kim-Wachutka's duology stands as a valuable contribution to English-language writings on Zainichi Korean women.

Personal narratives constitute the data, method, and theory for Kim-Wachutka. As raw materials of the book under review, personal narratives are surely its greatest strength and constitute its primary scholarly contribution. Extended interview transcripts, or oral-history narratives, at times run for pages. They are welcome insofar as they provide rare glimpses into the world of Zainichi Korean women for Anglophone readers. Especially for first-generation women, who mostly arrived during the period of Japanese colonial rule over Korea, the overarching themes, in the words of Kim-Wachutka, point out "that a woman's fate is one of hardship and sacrifice, simply because females, without exception, always come second to men" (p. 2). Recollections of historical and continuing suffering and bitterness provide trenchant looks into the lives of first-generation Zainichi Korean women.

The collective memory of poverty and discrimination that characterizes the first generation transmogrifies into incoherent, complex identities and narratives for younger Zainichi women. As the author is well aware, there are no obvious or simple essential commonalities for the ethnic Korean population in contemporary Japan (and I would hazard that the diversity is true for almost any point in the past). Beyond the longstanding political divisions that mirror the divided nations that comprise the Korean Peninsula, there are fundamental differences based upon generations or ethnoracial constitution (such as

“mixed-blood” Zainichi born of an ethnic Korean parent and an ethnic Japanese parent). As the author summarizes, “Many Zainichi women described themselves as selves in-between” (p. 158). But which selves?

Kim-Wachutka’s reliance on personal narratives at the expense of other methods vitiates *Zainichi Korean Women in Japan*. The reader is given almost no historical, cultural, or sociological backgrounds or contexts. As much as the author is conscious of the profound diversity of the Zainichi Korean population, we learn precious little about the divides based upon immigration history (perhaps the most visible Korean presence in Japan today are recent immigrants from South Korea, who share little with the extant Zainichi Korean population save for their putative ethnicity), profoundly distinct articulations of ethnic identity (consider only that many Zainichi Korean women or men live as “ordinary” Japanese women and men, and occlude their ethnic origin and identity), or sharp, seemingly unbridgeable gaps based upon educational credentials or wealth inequality. Although Kim-Wachutka seeks to pepper her analysis with Western theorists’ nuggets of wisdom, her refusal to offer contexts—a theoretical perspective—elides the lives of many other Zainichi Korean women. Although the notion of representative sampling may be beside the point, one nevertheless must wonder about those to whom she did not listen. Many young Zainichi Korean women would surely not find themselves in the book under review.

To be sure, Kim-Wachutka offers two forays beyond personal narratives. In chapter 5, she delves into two journals published by Zainichi Korean women: *Hōsenka* and *Chi ni fune o koge*. As helpful as the discussion of Zainichi Korean women’s literary expressions is, one cannot help but yearn for other, much more widely disseminated forms of cultural expression, whether award-winning novels or critically acclaimed movies by Zainichi Korean women. In chapter 8, the author turns to ethnic clothing in the form of the traditional *chōgori*. As she concludes, “Wearing the *chōgori* reminded Zainichi women of the history of subjugation under Japanese rule, denial of one’s ethnic identity, and the risk of being exposed and becoming a target of discrimination” (p. 175). The more salient point is that the traditional garment—save for those attending ethnic Korean schools run by a North Korea-affiliated ethnic organization—makes a rare appearance for almost all Zainichi Korean women, reserved as it is for weddings and other extraordinary occasions.

For readers who cannot read Japanese but are interested in Zainichi Korean women, Jackie J. Kim-Wachutka’s *Zainichi Korean Women in Japan: Voices* offers intriguing glimpses via transcribed and translated voices. Her duology marks a significant contribution to the Anglophone study of Zainichi Korean women.