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Narrating the Diasporic Self as Shaman: A Quest for Self-Healing and Social Transformation in Lee Yang-ji's *Nabi T'aryŏng*

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This essay presents the case of the literary construction of perhaps the most important women's autobiographical voice of resistance to emerge from the Korean diaspora in Japan. The creation of Lee Yang-ji (1955–1992), one of the best-known writers of *zainichi* literature, is a performative voice of protest against the forced imposition of racial, cultural, and gender identity.

Zainichi literature is the genre of literary works written in Japanese by *zainichi*, Korean colonial immigrants and their descendants who became stateless in Japan in 1952.¹ Throughout most of the postwar period, the discourse on *zainichi* literature excluded women, as it had been shaped and canonized by male authors and critics. It was not until 1982 that the literary voice of the first successful *zainichi* woman writer, Lee Yang-ji, emerged when *Nabi T'aryŏng* (*A Ballad of a Butterfly*) was published. As a writer, Lee often produced works of fiction that placed strong emphasis on the same autobiographical elements she explored in her first novel, *Nabi T'aryŏng*.² One of these repeated motifs includes the inner struggle of a young *zainichi* woman, isolated from the dominant ethno-national group, both in Japan and in South Korea, and the inspecting gaze cast upon her in-between existence as a *zainichi* woman—that is, as the ambiguous Other, who is neither completely Japanese nor entirely Korean. In *Nabi T'aryŏng*, although feeling a constant and intense pressure to assimilate either into the dominant collective identity of Japan or South Korea, Lee's female protagonist relentlessly endeavors to find her individual identity and voice beyond national, racial, and cultural-linguistic boundaries. By narrating a woman's unyielding resistance to any particular fixed group



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identity imposed on her by others, Lee represents her autobiographical narrative as a site of protest against power and domination. It is her means of self-transformation.

This essay explores how Lee integrates the diasporic notion of the in-between/ambiguity into her autobiographical narrative, *Nabi T'aryŏng*, as a way to subvert discourses of otherness and exclusion surrounding *zainichi* women born in postwar Japan. Special attention will be given to the ways in which the author narrates her heroine's inner pain of enduring the shame of being the ambiguous Other, or what Julia Kristeva calls "the abject," an individual excluded from the public sphere and forced into isolation as a person with ambiguous ethnic, cultural, and/or national roots. For Kristeva, the abject represents a threat to the existing social structure sustained by members of a dominant group, because of its characteristics that defy complete assimilation into the group's way of life, such as its language, social behavior, and norms. For the purpose of preserving the uniformity and purity of the dominant culture's collective tradition and identity, the abject being is relegated to the margins of society as a repulsive, deviant Other. Through the discussion of Lee's literary representation of her heroine's profound sense of alienation and isolation, this essay will show how Lee problematizes a homogeneous cultural identity as "we" in the context of collectivist nationalism, an identity that often acts as a collective oppressor by devaluing and excluding the individual voice of the internal Other that threatens its purity.

In *Nabi T'aryŏng*, the protagonist's spiritual struggle to overcome the idea of herself as an abject manifests itself in the ways in which she attempts to find her own individual voice through a variety of verbal (e.g., Korean and Japanese) and nonverbal (e.g., musical) forms of self-expression. In particular, the heroine's nonverbal performance in the traditional Korean arts is used in critical scenes, including the one in which she journeys from Japan to South Korea in the hope of finding a sense of belonging. Toward the end of the story, she gradually finds her way out of life's struggles through her encounter with a *salp'uri* dance, a performance closely associated with Korean women's traditional mode of expression, shamanism. It is through engaging in this nonverbal self-expression that she finally gains a sense of emancipation from the official languages of Japanese and Korean, which embody compulsory ethno-nationalism, enabling her to overcome the fear of social isolation and restore her broken connections with the world. Through a close textual analysis of the protagonist's journey to find the power of acceptance of cultural, racial,

and national ambiguities that capture her diasporic existence, this essay demonstrates how Lee Yang-ji uses her narrative as a medium to transform her self-image from that of a *zainichi* woman—a gendered racial identity marked by its victimhood and abjection—into a more amorphous but empowered figure as a transnational storyteller of the Korean diaspora in Japan.

Lee's Autobiographical Subversion of the Colonialist Production of *Zainichi* Women as the Other

“I belong to no race nor time. I am the eternal feminine with its string of beads.”—Zora Neale Hurston

“As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.”—Gloria E. Anzaldúa

Nabi T'aryŏng is retrospectively narrated by “I” (*watashi*), a woman in her twenties, looking back on past pivotal moments in her life leading up to the final scene, in which she reflects upon her most recent memories, especially concerning the deaths of her two brothers. Strongly moved by the desire to reflect on her life in a written form—“as if writing a will”—Lee made her literary debut with this piece of work, through which she began to link her private life and memories to her public performance as a writer.³

Lee narrates *Nabi T'aryŏng* through her alter ego named 愛子, the Chinese characters are read as “Aiko” in Japanese and “Aeja” in Korean.⁴ The different pronunciations of her name represent the symbol of her identity—torn between two languages, two cultures, and two national histories. Much of the narrative is written in the form of a monologue, in which the heroine expresses the inner feelings of inadequacy and isolation she always felt but often suppressed as a young *zainichi* woman caught between Japan and Korea. She desperately tries to find a place to belong within the ethno-national communities of Japan and South Korea, but her attempts repeatedly fail, as she feels a constant pressure under the dominant collective gaze to give up or hide much of who she is. *Nabi T'aryŏng* narrates how this gaze, which perceives Aiko/Aeja as the ambiguous Other, causes in her a strong feeling of displacement and the loss of both her identity and voice, in both societies. The pain she feels in relation to this sense of loss manifests itself in various hallucinations,

including the image of a white butterfly that is visible to her when she feels especially trapped in her world full of pain and sorrow. The frequent appearance of the butterfly serves to emphasize her deep despair about the impossibility of putting her pain into words. Unable to find a way to express her pain in any of the official languages in Japan and Korea, she gradually loses control over her own identity, which becomes dominated by this externally imposed vision of her marginalized self-image. Caught between the two sides of her identity as Aiko/Aeja, the white butterfly reflects, in her eyes, a deeply internalized view of herself as the voiceless Other—a living being hovering aimlessly in the air with no permanent home and no voice audible to the ears of its distant observers.

The protagonist's voice flashes back and forth in time to retrace her journey of transformation from a socially rejected *zainichi* girl into a grown woman who is re-evaluating the significance of the past events that have brought pain into her life. The first half of the story narrates how the heroine spent her youthful days in Japan, hiding behind the mask as a Japanese girl called Aiko, the name her father encouraged her to use in order to conceal her Korean roots from Japanese society and to avoid discrimination. This autobiographical alter-ego, Aiko, is a second-generation *zainichi* woman, raised by Korean parents whose growing hostility toward each other drives the entire family into ten painful years of a divorce process. The parental conflict forces Aiko and her siblings to form two opposing camps at young ages: at the early stage of separation, her father takes her two male siblings into his household, and Aiko and her sister live with her mother. Aiko's inability to choose between her parents and to develop a sense of stability and belonging drives her to drop out of high school and run away from home. The opening scene of *Nabi T'aryŏng* starts with the reflective voice of "I," remembering the feeling she experienced when returning to her family home in Tokyo from Kyoto, where she spent two years as a runaway teen:

Dusk was falling. The city began to ignite itself with illumination. [...] All the buildings that stretched before my eyes remained the same in their layout as before I left Tokyo. I felt like someone who'd just come back from a foreign country in a different time zone. The two contradictory feelings of inadequacy and familiarity were simultaneously circulating around my entire body through my veins, and my body felt completely out of balance.⁵

This passage, in which Aiko stands in the middle of Tokyo in the twilight upon her homecoming, epitomizes a theme that recurs throughout the narrative: the borderline experience of feeling in-between, and of suffering from constant emotional and social instabilities. The outside scenery in the twilight, when the world is neither completely lit nor entirely dark, reflects Aiko's inner feelings about her home. In this scene, the city view, fading into the approaching darkness of night, represents Aiko's increasing uneasiness and anxiety about returning to her dysfunctional home, where she and her siblings are constantly forced to take sides in conflicts between their parents. The movement of traveling across the geographical border between Kyoto and Tokyo gives her a profound feeling of rupture in her sense of identity, heightening in her a keen awareness of being never at her own home. By opening her narrative with a description of the capital city, an outside world that evokes ambiguous emotions in the inner landscape of Aiko's heart, Lee Yang-ji foreshadows the life story she is about to share with her readers, in which her protagonist's attempts to understand reality through her own perceptions and the experience of her body—not through the dominant culture's worldview and language—painfully isolate her from the community to which she desperately wants to belong.

The narrator often narrates flashbacks to her girlhood days, during which her feelings of helplessness against the authoritative power of her father grew more intense as the years went by. Aiko remembers how frequently her father used to snatch her from school and drive to *Kawaguchi-ko*, a lake famous for its proximity to Mount Fuji, for the purpose of convincing her that he was the victim who was suffering from the divorce process, with her mother as the aggressor:

“Though I don't want to tell you such a thing . . .”

Each time my father punctuated his side of story with this set phrase, I began to glare at Mount Fuji. [...]

“Women from *Cheju-do* are uncultured. After all, they don't look upon men as men. I don't want to tell you such a thing, but you must understand why the relationship between your dad and mom has deteriorated in the way it has. If you girls can't understand the roots of all this, you will end up becoming someone just like her.”

[...] The stale air of the closed space in the car constricted my body; I became overwhelmed with feelings of frustration, as if I had a toothache. Reflected in my [tearful] eyes, Mount Fuji began to look wobbly and distorted.⁶

It should be noted that Lee Yang-ji's father, on whom Aiko's father is modeled, had emigrated from Korea's Southern-most island of *Cheju-do* during the Japanese colonial period. He adopted a Japanese family name to conceal his Korean roots, and later on, the prejudice he experienced drove him to insist that the whole family (re-)gain Japanese citizenship along with him.⁷ In the above passage, Lee uses the image of Mount Fuji—Japan's iconic national emblem—to represent the vision of the nation as the main ideological source for Aiko's father's aggression. In donning such an aggressive attitude, he attempts to prove his innocence and his wife's guilt in the divorce court so that he can feel justified in casting her out of the marriage. Here, he is taking his daughter toward Mount Fuji by force, an act symbolic of his arrogant demand for her submission to assimilate herself into the Japanese nation. His scornful comments about his wife further illustrate his gratuitous violence against his daughter. His statement conveys his concern for the well-being of his daughter living with his wife, who, being uncultured and unruly by nature, is a threat to the social order in the closed community of his house. Aiko's immediate physical reaction to her father's concerned voice—a strong feeling of constraint in “the stale air of the closed space in the car”—however, signals her repressed sense of entrapment in the dysfunctional family controlled by her father. By suggesting that Aiko's rejection of his plans would turn her into an unruly *chōsenjin* (ethnic Korean)—an object of disdain in his eyes—her father threatens her with abandonment if she refuses to submit tamely to his authority.⁸ The demand that she accepts this view of her mother as an outcast and relinquish her own Korean ethnic heritage brings tears to Aiko's eyes, which keep glaring at Mount Fuji all through his speech. Inside the car driven by her father rushing toward his chosen destination or goal, that is, to establish a pure subject for himself as *nihonjin* (a Japanese person) by erasing the ethnic ambiguity from his life, including his Korean wife, Aiko is experiencing a gap between what she hears (her father's scornful comments on *chōsenjin*, juxtaposed with his secret vision of Mount Fuji as an object of reverence) and what she sees (Mount Fuji as a symbol of authoritative oppression).⁹ The perceptual gap that the visual image of Mount Fuji creates between Aiko and her father stands as a metaphor for the constant pain Aiko experiences as a child who is financially and emotionally dependent on her father for survival—the pain described as having a toothache without finding any cure. In her tearful eyes, she sees both Mount Fuji and her father as the distorted sources of her emotional confusion in trying to establish her

identity, for, while they both provided her with her place of birth, they question her legitimacy as a respected member of the community. By highlighting the psychological and physical dangers Aiko feels inside her father's car, Lee Yang-ji draws attention to the complexity of systematic discrimination surrounding the assimilation process for *zainichi* in postwar Japan, in which they are forced to internalize the social structure of Japanese nationalism and its accompanying attitude of superiority, sustained through a strong disaffection for those of supposedly inferior ethnic origins, or more specifically, former colonial subjects, such as *chōsenjin*.

Throughout the narrative, Lee Yang-ji often depicts visual hallucinations and distortions in Aiko's perception of reality accompanied by a powerful sensation of pain in her physical body. Through such pain, she recounts Aiko's mental distress under the structures of Japan's nationalist and racist ideologies. Unable to find a secure place of belonging as a teenager, Aiko drops out of high school and leaves home for Kyoto, where she works as a live-in maid in a *ryokan*, a traditional Japanese inn, to escape the painful situation at home. But despite her inner resistance against her father, who forces her to relinquish her Korean cultural heritage, Aiko feels even more conflicted in Kyoto, where she realizes that outside her "safe" environment at home, she needs to hide behind a disguise as a Japanese girl called Aiko. In the following passage, Aiko recalls how her escape from her family home forced her to realize the impossibility of avoiding submission to—and assimilation into—the patriarchal national system envisioned as Japan:

Unable to maintain balance between two large magnetic forces of the vital energies of my parents, all I could do was to grovel and look up at them. My already fragile pride and voice, which were becoming increasingly more pent-up between my parents' hostile, repelling magnets, began to atrophy. I ran away from home by forcibly dragging my body away. Yet, here in this small *ryokan* in Kyoto—with a large hole in the ceiling of the staff room and the damp bedclothes I sleep in—I am still groveling and looking up at the ceiling, from which the mice could fall down on me at any minute.

“What if my secret comes out? If it comes out, I won't be able to stay here anymore.”¹⁰

The first part of the passage describes how her parents' constant conflict with each other leaves Aiko no choice but to “grovel” and

suppress her own opinion or voice, silencing her freedom of expression. The latter part of the passage shows how Aiko's hidden ethnic origins begin to haunt her as she gets out into the world, where she harbors an indefinable but constant fear of “the mice fall[ing] down on her”—the moment her secret becomes known—when she will be excluded from Japanese society. Aiko remembers how constantly this visual image of “the mice inside the ceiling” possessed her with fear and anxiety while working in Kyoto—the object of an image that is entirely in her mind, despite it feeling as real as if it were physically present. This hallucinatory image serves in the narrative to designate a source of Aiko's mental anguish—that is, the Korean part of her identity named Aeja which remains hidden in a dark space, separate from the official reality in which the Japanese Aiko lives. From the moment she enters the world on her own, her thoughts are dominated by an overwhelming fear of her hidden identity being exposed, which will turn her into a repulsive Other, just like her mother, whom her father has rejected and is trying to exclude from his life. Clearly, Aiko's sense of shame as *chōsenjin* has its roots in her father's internalized sense of Japanese colonial racism. Through her emphasis on Aiko's constant feeling of danger inside and outside the home, the author represent both the conflict between the heroine's parents and her sense of shame as *chōsenjin* as inseparable from the history of Japanese colonialism and the discourse of assimilation of ethnic Koreans into the authoritative, patriarchal power of the Japanese Empire.

Words that Hurt: Verbal Pain and the Violence of Dominant Language

Working as a live-in maid in a *ryokan*, Aiko continues to act as a normal Japanese girl by hiding her dark secret. Despite her constant struggles to belong, her sense of alienation only increases every day. However, Aiko gradually develops profound sympathy for one of her co-workers, a woman named Chika, whom the *ryokan* workers regard with disdain due to her social behavior, which they arbitrarily deemed deviant. The following lines narrate Aiko's recollection of the days during which she frequently experienced the fear of vicarious exclusion from the *ryokan* community, as she observed the mental and physical violence visited ritually on Chika:

[As a live-in maid,] Chika was residing in a small room on the mezzanine near the back door [for forty years]. Whenever I approached

the small ladder leading to her room, I could smell some indefinable pungent odor or something rotten and musty—half-eaten bread, moldy fish cakes, and egg shells [...]. At mealtimes, she would gather all the leftovers from the customers' meals in her bowl, pour her soup and raw eggs into the bowl, stir them up with her chopsticks and eat.

[...]

“That crazy woman. I guess she [Chika] is *chōsen* [チヨーセン],” said the head clerk, Yamada, as if it were a pet phrase of his, and when I heard this phrase, the chopsticks in my hand automatically stopped moving.

We could never rely on Chika to clean up the dishes and leftovers at all. [Whenever such incomplete tasks were pointed out,] she would say, with her hand over her mouth, “Is that so?” while smiling and shaking her body coquettishly.

“Chika, hurry up and finish the dishes left in the inner room!” Shouting, the head mistress came into the kitchen with her waist bent. She disciplined Chika on every occasion, by beating her up with her grandson Kenichi's bamboo sword in front of everyone. Chika didn't seem to know how to put an “I-am-weeping” expression on her face. No matter what cruel treatment she received, she always smiled with her hand over her mouth and said, “Is that so?” Such reactions made the head mistress even more furious at her.¹¹

The above description of the head mistress hitting Chika cruelly “in front of everyone” suggests that such violence is accepted as the customary practice in this *ryokan* community. Clearly, the justification for such violence comes from this closed society's perception that Chika's departures from the social order of the community disturb it; she cannot act in accordance with its established rules, such as completing the tasks assigned to her in an efficient and timely manner. In this scene, the portrayal of Chika's room, in which she has lived for the past forty years, serves to further emphasize Chika's marginalized existence. Her room is located in the in-between, dimly lit area of the building (“on the mezzanine near the back door”), throwing into sharp relief the well-lit front entrance hall, which represents the public face of the *ryokan*. This room is also filled with “some indefinable pungent odor” caused by her habit of keeping her “half-eaten” food in it. Here, it is suggested that the staff sees Chika as the visual embodiment of the filth and nauseating odors that emanate from her place of residence, which makes her “disorderly” behavior—including the way she eats the customers' leftovers with “her soup and raw eggs”—the source of their strong repulsion toward her. The stigma the staff attach to

Chika is thus attributed to the space that she inhabits, a liminal space that constantly challenges the fixed boundaries of the communal *ryokan* identity from within, blurring the border between the civilized Japanese (equipped with proper hygiene and manners) and the uncultured Other (associated with filth and disorderliness).

To this community, however, the most threatening aspect of Chika's existence is her inability to don proper social masks. In the above scene, what humiliates the head mistress and makes her "even more furious" is Chika's habitual response of "Is that so?" accompanied by a smile on her face, while she is clearly suffering physical violence under the guise of discipline. Such reactions obscure the important distinction between her submission to and resistance against the head mistress as a moral disciplinarian, thereby making her the ambiguous and unruly Other—a security threat to the harmony of the *ryokan* community unified by the sense of shared norms.

Chika's ambiguous external expressions (both facial and linguistic), which defy clear translation, make her the abject of this closed society. According to Julia Kristeva, an abject being must experience constant marginalization in the community she lives in because of the stigma of being seen as repulsive and abhorrent. Unlike an object (other) that can be fully perceived by the subject (self) through its fixed name inscribed in a social realm of language, a perceived presence of the abject, existing between self and other, evokes a strong feeling of revulsion in the mind of the subject.¹² Kristeva says:

It is [...] not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. [...] Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. [...] [The abject] is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you....¹³

Through the use of metaphorical language, Kristeva suggests that, when viewed from the perspectives of a collective identity of the dominant groups in society, the abject represents what "does not respect borders, positions, rules": someone who does not function and live in conformity

with the dominant group's social norms. In the above scene from *Nabi T'aryōng*, Chika's habitual, ambiguous response ("Is that so?" said with a smile) to the frequent abuse is what gives Chika an abject quality, as it symbolizes "a hatred that smiles" in Kristeva's words—a hatred that, because it "draws attention to the fragility of the law," disrupts the cultural norms and traditions of Kyoto, which the *ryokan* community represents. Kristeva's analysis suggests that what makes Chika the abject of the community in which she lives is not filth or ill-health, but those ambiguous features and traits of her public behavior and expression which are perceived as deviations from the dominant culture's norms.

By narrating Chika's unvoiced pain and suffering through the eyes of a *zainichi* woman who feels a strong sense of not belonging in Kyoto, a city many regard as the spiritual home of *nihonjin*, Lee Yang-ji sheds light upon Aiko's increased fear of the invisible stigma inscribed into her *zainichi* body, a body that has been constantly rendered racially ambiguous and biologically unfit for full participation in modern Japanese public life.¹⁴ In Kyoto, Aiko gradually becomes more conscious of her suppressed feelings of pain attached to her racial background through her encounter with Chika, who remains susceptible to the majority's whims, including when the head clerk says, "That crazy woman. I guess she is *chōsen*." Here, he is using the word *chōsen* as the ultimate insult against Chika: She must be a *chōsenjin*—a *zainichi*—because she is such a "crazy woman" with her ill-defined nature. Despite the fact that his comment is not directed at Aiko, Aiko's immediate reaction to his remark—her temporary inability to move her chopsticks—represents her uncontrollable fear of the colonialist image of *chōsen* women, an image that remains deeply rooted in contemporary Japan.

In Kyoto, through a growing awareness of her repressed sense of inferiority, Aiko develops a keen awareness of the ways in which Japan's national identity is sustained through the repetition of collective performance of traditions, such as nonverbal social behaviors and the use of the national language. In the following lines, Aiko is reminiscing about how she was attempting to fulfill her role as a model Japanese maid in Kyoto by being perfectly obedient to the social authority of the *ryokan*'s owner, while, at the same time, she felt a strong sense of incongruity between her social behaviors and her living body:

It was a tradition of this *ryokan* that every staff member went to the owner's quarter before bedtime and paid their respects to the entire family through the *fusuma* door.

“Please excuse me for going to bed before you.” As I raised my face from bowing, I could gain a glimpse of the Emperor’s family portrait hung on a wall through an opening of the *fusuma* door. Each time the image caught my eyes, I felt uncomfortable dizziness while hearing all my joints creaking at the same time.¹⁵

Here, Aiko is performing the formal ritual of bowing her head respectfully to the owner’s family as part of her daily routine in the *ryokan*, in which the staff deliberately performs customary gestures while putting on their traditional costumes, the purpose of which is to preserve, through acting upon, the ancient Japanese cultural traditions. However, her immediate reaction—the dizziness and physical constraint at catching sight of the “portrait”—indicates her understanding of how, through her participation in the collective performance of bowing, she is figuratively submitting herself to the Emperor who, as the ultimate paternal authority, stays at the top of a hierarchy of social divisions that force *zainichi* women into social isolation as abject beings, whose presence threatens to disrupt the notion of normative femininity related to women’s biological and reproductive roles in maintaining Japan’s racial uniqueness. This physical reaction of Aiko’s, in which her suppressed emotions suddenly manifest as the physical symptoms of losing control over the mobility of her own body, is often repeated in the story, as when she reacts to the degrading and insulting comments about “crazy” women of *chōsen* (as referring to her mother and Chika) made by her father and the *ryokan*’s head male clerk. Lee Yang-ji uses this repeated motif to represent Aiko’s deep sense of entrapment in relation to her *zainichi* female body, which highlights the dilemma of, on the one hand, wanting to belong to the community, while, on the other, resisting assimilation into a patriarchal nationalist system that rejects her.

Retracing Body Memories, Unearthing the Silenced Voices

After spending two years in Kyoto and returning to her parents’ home, Aiko begins to engage in the act of self-inflicted violence, such as burning her skin and binge drinking, as an external way to express her inner turmoil that cannot be put into words. In the process of turning the invisible pain kept hidden inside as an unofficial consciousness into an external reality (e.g., burn scar), she eventually finds a way to physically express and voice the ineffable feelings of pain in a positive way through musical performance, by learning how to play the *kayagŭm*, the Korean stringed

instrument, in place of the Japanese *koto*, a similar stringed instrument that she has played since her early teens:

The *kayagŭm* created a low tone. It produced the echoes on the sound as if it were trembling with frustration, being unable to convey the depth of emotions hidden inside. A *kayagŭm* player didn't use ivory picks; she played it [with bare fingers,] with the instrument placed on her lap. Its sound, therefore, echoed through the tips of the fingers—the body of the *kayagŭm* made of a single piece of paulownia wood—and then the body of its player.

[...]

Each time I touched the *kayagŭm* with my bare fingers, an instrument that had been played for fifteen hundred years, the sound created a concrete strain that built a connection between myself and *uri nara* ["our" or "my country" in Korean], the Korean word that had always sounded so foreign to me before.¹⁶

Throughout the first half of *Nabi T'aryong*, the author emphasizes the underlying significance of Aiko's father's enmity toward what symbolizes *chōsen* or "*uri nara*" for him as a consequence of the violent powers associated with Japanese colonialism. As a former colonized Korean, Aiko's father feels the need to erase the racial ambiguity and cultural otherness from his life in order to be included in the nationalist system called postwar Japan. This leads to his attempts to exclude his wife from the family, while trying to make his young, pliant daughter look and act an ideal Japanese woman through her mastery of the ritualistic performance of traditional Japanese arts.¹⁷

The shift from being a *koto* player to a *kayagŭm* performer shortly after her twentieth birthday signifies the first step in Aiko's journey to free herself from the invisible violence of male authority in the Japanese (colonial) nationalism, which defines its powers not only by making *chōsenjin* feel ashamed of their Korean race and ancestral bloodline—which, by their definition meant inherently inferior to *nihonjin*—but also by forcing them to abandon their Korean cultural heritage. The above passage demonstrates how playing the *kayagŭm* touches a chord in Aiko more than playing the *koto*, which indicates the (re)discovery of her suppressed voice and identity in relation to her Korean ancestry. Aiko feels a strong connection with *uri nara*, her ancestral land of Korea, through her sensuous experience of the sound she creates while playing the *kayagŭm*—a sound that has been passed down through the generations over fifteen

hundred years. Although the *kayagŭm* and the *koto* are sister instruments, they have developed different ways of producing sounds. While a *kayagŭm* performer plays the instrument with bare fingers, placing its head on the lap, a *koto* player plucks the strings using plectrums (like guitar picks) called *tsume*, which means nails in Japanese, and rests the right end of the instrument on a stand. One of the most significant differences between the two instruments is how playing the *kayagŭm* causes pain, as the player plucks the thick strings with bare fingers until the bare skin of her fingers becomes calloused (as strong as nails) after having played the instrument repeatedly over time. Through the direct contact of the strings with the flesh of the performer's fingers, the *kayagŭm* renders a lower tone when compared to the sharp sounds the *koto* player produces using plectrums. Accompanied by the constant vibrations of the strings, which are directly passed on to the performer's body, this low tone can echo in human ears as quivering and emotion-laden sounds, such as a sobbing voice. Unlike the *koto*, which Aiko played with a pick while placed on a stand—thus artificially separated from her body—the sound Aiko produces on the *kayagŭm* using the flesh of her body provides a new vehicle that allows her to express the inner emotions hidden beneath the surface of her social mask as an obedient and well-mannered Japanese woman. By finding the voice of her living body (as opposed to only the brain), she gains her hopes of becoming strong enough to overcome the pain in her life, caused by the violent imposition of the dominant group's language, values, and worldview. She does so through retracing and reconnecting herself with her ancestral and cultural heritage.

Despite the (re)discovery of the sound of *uri nara* as a medium for developing her own individual voice, rather than engaging the voice (the language) of the powerful groups in society, Aiko finds it difficult to internally maintain her newly found voice when in public. Soon after beginning to take the private *kayagŭm* lessons, Aiko develops a comforting sense of safety and belonging that she has sought all her life within her music teacher Ms. Han's house. There, she can express what was once forgotten and omitted in her physical voice: the rhythm and musicality of the sound that connects her to the Korean part of her identity. Although she can freely sing her emotions without fear of reprisal inside her music teacher's house, once she goes out in public, especially where crowds gather, she is immediately thrown back into a state of anxiety:

I left Ms. Han's house after my music lessons, crossed the street by the crosswalk, took the Yamanote line and held on to a strap on the train. I

soon noticed that the *changdan* rhythm, *sanjo*, and all the melodies accompanied with the Korean music I had felt inside my body completely disappeared. I tried to draw in a string attached to the sounds of my memories, wanting to hum a tune to myself. I desperately tried to bring the rhythm back into my body by tapping on my knee. All the sound had gone by then, however, never coming back to me, no matter how hard I shook my head and moved my shoulders. The view of Tokyo from the train window, the conversation of the women next to me, the voice of the announcer on the train, the sweat I felt in my hand holding onto a strap, and a man's arm touching my shoulder frequently. Every one of these ordinary sensations that surrounded my body in the public space kept oppressing and interfering me so persistently that, eventually, all the sound and voice [I had discovered in Ms. Han's house] vanished completely.¹⁸

Inside Ms. Han's house, Aiko finds comfort in what represents *uri nara* for her, including the color of kimchee, the scent of garlic, and the traditional Korean rhythmic cycle called *changdan*. All of these subjective bodily sensations provide her with a means to retrace her personal identity and voice back to her ancestral roots in her imagination, to restore her broken connections with her cultural heritage, and to find a sense of belonging and acceptance in the world. While out in public, on the other hand, in particular when her body is hit by the sound of language from the outside (such as the passengers' conversation), she feels forced to disconnect herself from what was discovered in her body at Ms. Han's house. In the scene above, while on the train, Aiko's attempts to imagine her physical body as a site of her alternative memories, voice, and subjectivity as a *zainichi* woman fail, and this seems to symbolize her feeling of helplessness under close surveillance of the Japanese masses in terms of the deviant speech that subverts the power of majority ethics in Japan. Knowing that her social position is fundamentally defined by her relationship to her social authorities, such as her father, the modern nation imagined as Japan, and its citizenry conceptualized as *nihonjin*, Aiko feels implicit pressures not to speak her voice in public—break her silence—and reveal that she is, in fact, not a subject (Aiko), but an in-between object being (a *zainichi* woman).

Breaking the Silence in the Realm of Performance

In *Nabi T'aryōng*, Lee Yang-ji underlines the psychological pressure Aiko endures while hiding her identity as *chōsenjin* by repeatedly using the motif of Aiko's physical symptoms of illness and constraint. As the story

develops, Aiko's physical symptoms begin to strike her more often, especially when she is in enclosed public places, constantly alerting her to possible dangers from members of the Japanese masses. In the following passage, Aiko recollects how she began to feel threatened for her life in public, triggered by her sudden, intensified fear of being caught with the Japanese crowds inside a train. Accompanied by her eldest brother, Tetsu, she takes the train, but soon begins to have strong feelings of ill-being in the closed space of the crowded conveyance:

[In the closed space of the stuffy train,] I felt suffocating and uncomfortable nausea.

[...]

“Kill me, kill me. Go ahead and kill me if you want to.” After murmuring such a phrase, I realized that my eyes had already been overflowed with tears without my knowledge. [...] Unable to stop my tears from relentlessly flowing, I burst into convulsive sobs—I had no control over what I was doing.

“What’s wrong?” Tetsu asked in surprise. At that moment, I lost the sense of support that had barely kept me standing and crouched down.

“Hey, stop it.” I heard Tetsu’s voice in the distance. I felt all of the passengers’ eyes resting on me.

[...]

Out of nowhere, I suddenly heard a man’s voice say, “She is crazy!”

[I responded to that voice by repeating the same phrase,] “Kill me, kill me. Go ahead and kill me if you want to.” I felt heavy in my head and my running nose choked me. Bitter liquids were threatening to gurgle up into my throat and spill out of my mouth. I bit my lower lip. The door was finally open. Tetsu and I rushed out of the subway onto the platform, as if we were being pushed out by other passengers. I knew I had a knife stabbed in my side. I placed my hand on the wound, but there was no knife—there was no wound to be found.¹⁹

In this scene, Aiko's repressed feelings of trauma and shame over her existence as *chōsenjin* within Japanese society finally becomes known to the public through a public outburst that expresses her despair and helplessness. The enigmatic soliloquy that Aiko repeats twice (“Kill me, kill me. Go ahead and kill me if you want to.”), accompanied by the dramatic act of sobbing, breaks through the outward mask called Aiko, which she has donned all her life and through which she adjusts her inner feelings, in conformity with the established rule of a closed society, allowing her to be considered a “normal” Japanese girl. Being fully aware that such performance, both verbal (soliloquy) and nonverbal (crouching

down and wailing uncontrollably), makes her seem like “a crazy woman” in the public eyes, Aiko panics when she thinks of how her own external expressions can overwhelm her conscious control, as, all the while, she continues to suffer sudden, unexpected pain and discomfort in her body. This scene is a pivotal moment for the entire narrative, as Aiko’s recurring corporeal sensations of distress, which she has managed to keep private in previous scenes, push her to the breaking point and force her to break her silence about the psychological trauma she has endured. Despite the underlying significance of this scene, however, the author’s description of the details of what happens to Aiko, both physically and psychologically, remain vague. By leaving her readers with this ambiguity, Lee Yang-ji invites them not only to vicariously experience the complete confusion Aiko is thrown into in this scene, but also to turn their attention to her feelings of helpless desperation over losing bodily control in a closed public space, from which she finds no escape. In so doing, the author represents this closed public space, dominated by the crowd’s judgmental witnessing of Aiko’s “deviant” performance, as a metaphor for the normality of the dominant culture’s unified values and identity, as perceived through Aiko’s lens. The invisible power of the collective, thus, constantly arouses an undefined fear in her body that finds no escape from the imagined community of Japan, in which Aiko is gradually being deprived of her individual identity and dignity as a human being.

Throughout the narrative, Aiko’s unruly tongue, associated with her racialized body as *chōsenjin*, is placed in opposition to the controlled male tongue (e.g., her father, brother, and Japanese boyfriend), which symbolizes the imposition of a colonialist national language and its disciplinary authority over her existence. In the above scene, when she breaks her silence, sharing her inner trauma with others on the train, Aiko’s spoken words are immediately altered by them (including her brother) into mysterious, unintelligible soliloquies—her tongue becomes an abject member of the Japanese society as soon as it makes a sound. With the overwhelming majority of the Japanese remaining ignorant about the darker sides of Japan’s modern history surrounding its colonization of Korea, it makes sense that the heroine’s public voice is denounced as what bell hooks calls “crazy talk, crazy speech,” a disobedient female voice that disrupts the existing social positions, roles, and rules in a patriarchal national system.²⁰ Feeling caught inside her abject body, she begins to suffer from an existential crisis, which manifests itself in the physical symptom of severe nausea: she is unable to either keep “bitter liquids”

down completely or vomit and expel them from her body entirely. At the end of this scene, which has Aiko finally getting off the train and discovering no external wound in her side (after being certain that someone in the crowd stabbed her with a knife), the author is emphasizing the depth of Aiko's psychological wounds, which are exacerbated by the fact that there is no visible evidence of her inner experiences, and no matter how hurt she is, her cries for help are largely ignored.

Towards the end of the story, the setting shifts from Japan to South Korea, as the heroine's growing desire to re-discover her voice in relation to the suppressed part of her Korean identity leads to her decision to escape Japan. In South Korea, she hopes to positively re-define who she is as a Korean Aeja by forming an empathetic connection with the people of *uri nara* through her mastery of traditional Korean arts. While continuing her *kayagŭm* lessons, Aeja also learns a traditional Korean performing art, "a solo oral technique" of musical storytelling known as *p'ansori*.²¹ Despite her initial hopes for rescuing her sense of connection with the world through reconnecting with her ancestral and cultural heritage, however, Aeja only relives her pain and fear all over again; in South Korea, she is viewed as a person with an imperfect national identity who speaks Korean with the Japanese accent. In the following lines, the narrator is recollecting the days during which her sense of inadequacy and isolation in South Korea was heightened—particularly when receiving *p'ansori* lessons from a master, Ms. Park, along with other pupils. Unable to pronounce "proper Korean" while singing a musical *p'ansori* narrative, her sense of inferiority as a *zainichi* woman deepened:

[One day] when I was receiving a lesson on *Paekbalga* from Ms. Park, I heard other pupils giggling behind us. Such giggling made me realize that, in fact, Ms. Park, too, was withholding her laughter with a troubled brow. [She said to me,]

"Sing the same part one more time."

It puzzled me because I didn't know what was going on, but I sang it anyway. It raised their giggles again. [Ms. Park said,]

"Aeja, a waterfall is '*pok po*' in Korean. But you keep saying, '*bŏ bŏ*,' see? Can you hear the difference?"

I couldn't recognize the difference between the two words, but I tried to sing the same part over again.

"Aeja, when saying '*pok po*,' you need to build up tension around your lips and then pronounce the words with a burst of air. Your pronunciation sounds like '*bŏ bŏ*' instead, which means 'to kiss' in Korean," said Ms. Park, and muffled giggling immediately turned into

an explosion of laughter. Hearing such laughter behind me sent my back muscles into spasm.²²

The above passage illustrates Aeja's feeling of shame when she speaks Korean with incorrect pronunciations, and the consequent disaffection and disdain she feels from her fellow Koreans. Just as in Japan, Aeja feels her in-between-ness. Because she must sing aloud, people are able to hear her Japanese accent and silently label her as a non-member of the united national community of South Korea. She has difficulty pronouncing the Korean word "*pok po*," which not only makes her inferior to other pupils, but also disqualifies her from becoming a potential inheritor of the purity and authenticity: *p'ansori* performances represent the national culture of South Korea.²³ In South Korea, too, her *zainichi* tongue represents the transgression of the national boundaries between purity (home) and contamination (foreign), and the insider and outsider speech.

While heightening her sense of belonging nowhere by repeatedly failing to establish felt-level mutuality through her communication with her fellow Koreans, Aeja begins to have the same physical symptoms of illness in South Korea just as experienced in Japan. When entering such crowded public places as a market and a landmark building, she finds it hard to breathe, feeling nauseous among the Korean masses. In addition to the recurring illness, she often sees visual hallucinations in Korea, including a white butterfly that appears more frequently than any of her other visions. Despite its repeated appearance, the author's explanation for this phantom image remains ambiguous throughout the narrative. However, Lee Yang-ji provides her readers with a nonverbal cue that suggests a shift in her protagonist's sense of who she is, which takes place along her inner journey toward fuller self-acceptance. Each time the heroine catches the sight of a butterfly in her imagination/hallucination, the same image is paired in her mind with different meanings—at the beginning, it is a voiceless being flittering about aimlessly, and later, it is perceived as a strong-willed, beautiful creature dancing with the wings of freedom.

The Dancing Body of a White Butterfly: Embracing Ambiguous Belonging and a Transformative Self

“Dance was at first an escape for me from conflicting language ideologies, because while dancing I didn't have to choose whether to speak Japanese or Korean. [...] While in a

[Korean] dance, I can retrace my roots even all the way back to [...] ancient times, and my mind is filled with nothing but a deep sense of appreciation for my ancestors.”—Lee Yang-ji

In the novel, Aiko/Aeja sees the vision of a white butterfly in critical scenes, including the one in which her life’s pain has reached its unbearable peak in Japan, leading to her decision to escape to South Korea. In South Korea, the white butterfly becomes visible to Aeja, connected to her memory of a female shaman performing a *salp’uri* dance, a type of nonverbal performance closely associated with Korean shamanistic traditions. In the following passage, Aeja is retracing the memory of her first experience of the *salp’uri* dance while in her room in Seoul. Here, she is remembering how, while attending the performance, she saw a white butterfly flying around a long white scarf carried by the dancer during her performance:

The tiny hall with a capacity for about 100 people was packed. [...] From where I was sitting, I could see the tips of [*salp’uri* master] Ms. Kim’s fingers, the spots on the back of her hand, and the drops of sweat shining on her forehead.

[I could also see] her eyes, her gaze, and the color white—the traditional white costume of *ch’ima chōgori* and the white scarf in her hand—it was a white *salp’uri* dance. [...] I could clearly hear the sound of the performer’s breathing. There seemed to be a smile on her face, but she was definitely not smiling. She also looked as if she would burst out crying at any moment. I could see a pained and imploring look on her face. Yet, one couldn’t call it “imploring” exactly; it was more like the silence that came from a deep sense of resignation in life. Her resolute gaze revealed no flattery toward her audience. I sensed a smell filtering out of her entire body. Yes, it was the smell—there were no other words to describe what I felt from her presence on stage—it was *han*.²⁴

In this scene, Aeja is recollecting how she intuitively made an instant but powerful connection with Ms. Kim, through the atmosphere of acceptance and empathy created by her live performance of the *salp’uri* dance, a nonverbal solo dance that was originally performed in Korean shamanistic rituals.²⁵ Literally meaning “to release *han*, or emotional difficulty” (the word *sal* in *salp’uri* means *han*, and *p’uri* to release it²⁶), *salp’uri* is known as a dance that embodies *han*.²⁷ Though defined above, the term *han* is a concept that defies any fixed definition. Generally, it

represents a troubled state of mind resulting from the accumulation of suppressed emotions—in particular, such feelings as anger and resentment. In the context of patriarchal Korean culture, this concept is closely associated with what can loosely be called the feminine mode of expression, as it has played a key role in women’s artistic practices—especially those that flourished during the Chosŏn period (1392-1910), including shamanism.

Korean shamans are usually women, and they traditionally came from a class of social outcasts that included traveling artists and courtesans who faced severe discrimination in their everyday lives. Implicit in the tradition of a *salp’uri* dance is that a performer herself becomes a living symbol of the confluence of personal and collective feelings of *han*.²⁸ As a socially marginalized woman, who has acknowledged her own profound hardship and suffering in her own life, a shaman is believed to have a greater capacity to relate with a wide range of immeasurable *han*, which each of her clients seeks to release through a shamanistic ritual. Since the Chosŏn period, both the shamans and spectators have mostly been women, and all the spectators are encouraged to participate actively in a ritualistic performance (such as a shamanistic dance), through which “they can have a moment of fun and a good cry.”²⁹ Such collective performances have created a spiritual community for women outside the political and patriarchal ideologies, in which they could share and release their suppressed feelings of *han*, which have mostly resulted from the social oppression of women.

In the above scene from *Nabi T’aryŏng*, Aeja feels an intimate sense of connection when attending a live performance of a shamanistic dance, which helps her release and heal her personal feelings of *han*, including the sense of alienation she has accumulated by living in Japan and South Korea. Here, Aeja is seeing Ms. Kim’s “eyes, her gaze, and the color white,” hearing the rhythm of her “breathing” and smelling *han* “filtering out of her entire body.” Through all of these sensual experiences, she feels alive in her own body and (re)connected to the outside world. What helps Aeja escape from the psychological prison built with a fixed identity as an abject/a *zainichi* woman—a self-image that was one-sidedly imagined, observed, and categorized only in the heads of her distant observers—is the relational bond created between an artist (Ms. Kim) and an audience (Aeja). What Ms. Kim radiates from her entire body, the “smell” of *han*, elicits a strong response from Aeja, and this smell becomes visible to Aeja through the dancer’s non-verbal public performance. Ms. Kim’s *han*—her

inner trauma and pain—speaks itself through the silence and her bodily expression. In her performance, the unfathomable depth of her *han* manifests itself in ambiguous external expressions: for example, a facial expression that makes it difficult for an audience to fully understand if she is either smiling or crying. Just like Chika’s ambiguous responses that make her the object of the *ryokan* community, the enigmatic look on Ms. Kim’s face reflects a deeply internalized view of herself as an object being/a social outcast—a female shaman.³⁰ Unlike Chika’s (and the heroine’s mother’s) utter helplessness, which seemed to stem from a deeply internalized social role as abject, imposed upon her female body by Japan’s public culture (a body that should remain private in shame and secrecy), Ms. Kim’s live performance implies that she has made a conscious decision to remain in an in-between realm as a medium/shaman/healer, a decision that bespeaks “her resolute gaze,” which shows “no flattery toward her audience.” While participating in Ms. Kim’s live performance, Aeja is experiencing an epiphany, which changes the way she sees herself in relation to others by discovering an ancestral woman of experience who can positively impact her life. Through the spiritual connection she builds with Ms. Kim’s physical being—dancing in a white costume, with a long, billowing skirt called *ch’ima* that deeply imprinted on Aeja’s memory as the vision of a white butterfly—Aeja begins to transform her self-image from a phantom object of observation into a living body that dances and sings by her own free choice.

Using her autobiographical narrative as a link to the spirit of her female ancestors—Korean shamans—Lee Yang-ji identifies with them as what Gloria E. Anzaldúa calls “border women,” those who reside in a place of ambiguity across the boundaries between two worlds—this world and that of the Other—and who refuse to be trapped on one inferior side of the border.³¹ Throughout the first half of *Nabi T’aryŏng*, the narrator reminisces how her body had been subject to the total control of multiple male authorities since birth—her father and Japanese colonizers (including her Japanese boyfriend) with the Emperor at the top of the colonial hierarchy. As a young *zainichi* woman, she occupied the lower stratum of Japanese society, in which both a female and a colonized identity were shaped by male power through the control of the weaker and inferior Other in need of guidance and protection. Through her encounter with a *salp’uri* dance, however, she begins to claim her identity positively by separating her own body from its meaning as “the *zainichi* Other” imposed on her by colonialist ideology. In other words, what the above passage suggests is

the beginning of a young woman's recovery of her living body from patriarchal nationalist narratives that shame women who deviate from normative womanhood. In retracing her personal identity as it relates to the specific feminine traits shaped by her Korean ancestors' shamanistic tradition, Lee Yang-ji presents her autobiographical artistry as prayer for emotional strength to break the silence—both her own and that of many others who desire to escape from the psychological prison built with such social conditions as stigmatization, isolation, and “imperfect” womanhood.

Lee Yang-ji suggests such an inner transformation of the protagonist's self-image in the novel's last scene, in which she engages in a solo performance of a *salp'uri* dance, dressed in a traditional Korean shaman's white costume. This scene starts with Aeja receiving a phone call from her sister in Japan, notifying her of their second brother's death. Having suddenly lost her oldest brother, Tetsu, several months ago, Aeja faces a time of great sorrow and loss over her two brothers who have died young. *Nabi T'aryŏng* ends with an implication of the heroine's conscious decision to accept life as it is, including the ultimate unknown for humans—death—as an inseparable part of her being:

Tetsu had died and then Kazuo died. I felt a powerful wind rising up around me and its magnetic force lifting my body up. I, too, would die someday, joining this flow of wind energy.

Dawn was approaching. [...] I dressed myself in the white *ch'ima chŏgori* costume and a pair of clean, white socks. With a long white scarf in my hand, I went up to the rooftop.

[...]

[The city view of Seoul] had remained unchanged throughout the past year. No, it changed through time; only it was imperceptible to me. Ten or even twenty years from then on, it would endlessly undergo a breathtaking transformation.

Uri nara was alive. The landscape transformed itself over the course of time. In the movement of time, I'd play the *kayagŭm*, sing the *p'ansori*, and perform the *salp'uri* dance. I'd always remain receptive to the passing of time. To live every moment of life was inalterable, no matter where I went.

The *kayagŭm* began its melodious sound in my ears. The white butterfly flew high up in the air. Following the movement of the butterfly, I performed the *salp'uri* dance. Accompanied by the endless rhythm of the *kayagŭm* sound, the long white scarf was streaming in the strong wind.³²

Here, the heroine is standing alone on the roof of her lodging in the midst of a cold winter morning in Seoul; icy winds cut through her body dressed only in the thin fabric of *ch'ima chōgori*. This scene directly parallels the opening scene: in both scenes, she is standing alone in a landscape at dusk/dawn, during which the world is neither completely lit nor entirely dark, and such an outside scene is integrated into her inner experience of having an ambiguous identity. Unlike the opening scene—in which the city view at dusk, fading into the darkness of night, represents her deploring sense of not belonging at home—the last scene, in which she looks at the sun rising, indicates that she realizes that she has gained a new way of seeing the external reality laid before her eyes. She is no longer a helpless young woman who constantly attempted to escape oppressive social conditions. While looking at the vision of a white butterfly with new eyes, she has increased her inner strength to accept the pain associated with her ambiguous identity in relation to the fluid nature of her diasporic existence.

Through the verbal representation of her heroine dancing in the winds, which catch her long outer skirt and thus make her body float like a white butterfly, Lee uses the visual cue to imply a shift in her protagonist's perspective about herself both as a person and in relation to others. By portraying the image of the heroine's dancing body like a white butterfly, the author represents the discovery of her protagonist's new sense of self in relation to her female Korean ancestors without labeling this personal identity with any fixed names, meanings, or categories. In the above scene, while engaging in a ritual dance of *salp'uri* in a personal manner of both remembering and releasing strong attachment bonds she has built with her two brothers in this life, she is also using her performing/living body as a link to her female ancestors—Korean shamans. The vision of the butterfly dancing in the air along with her thus indicates a shamanistic identity of her own choosing—an identity that is both personal and collective—through which to communicate with both the living and the dead, the visible and the invisible, as well as Japanese and Korean. Unlike the function of the dominant culture's language as a collective performance that defines the fixed boundaries of identity, the heroine's discovery of a collective performance in Korean shamanism helps her transcend such fixed boundaries, constantly leading her to a place of a new light and of a new self in the endless rhythmic cycle of life.

Through the literary representation of her heroine's inner voice

expressed in the multiple nonverbal languages, Lee Yang-ji endeavors to create a new language for her autobiographical expression, which generates an alternate vision that can defy her own self-image defined by others. The author's own persistent quest for finding a safe place to express her own voice as an individual human being, unrestricted by the language of social authorities, becomes manifest in the last scene, in which the novel's heroine transforms the pain and isolation of her in-between-ness into a positive self-affirmation through artistic performance as directly connected with her living body. No longer are her nonverbalized experiences, emotions, and voices contained within the boundary of her individual body; they are now shared with others in the realm of creative self-expression—an amorphous realm in which it is difficult to set fixed boundaries of culture, race, gender, and nation.

NOTES

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to one of my mentors at UC Berkeley, Professor Trinh T. Minh-ha, a true inspiration in both my personal and academic life. She introduced me to a fascinating world of the autobiographical narratives by women of color in America, such as Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Zora Neale Hurston, and bell hooks, whose writings inspired me to focus my first publication on exploring a literary representation of the lived/living experience of a *zainichi* woman who faces many forms of violence, abuse, and harassment in her daily life. This essay keeps references to existing academic inquiry on *zainichi* to a minimum, with the specific aim of subverting the accepted knowledge about us, which often reduce our existences to a unitary racial identity as a postcolonial Other, namely “*zainichi*.” All the feminist voices of the aforementioned women of color resist in their own writings any fixed views about themselves by others, and their voices encouraged me to raise my previously suppressed voice, both as a descendant of unwelcomed colonial immigrants in Japan (“*zainichi*”) and as a linguistic minority woman (a non-native speaker of English) in American academia. I want to thank all these women for giving me the courage to overcome the fear of being judged and “corrected” by members of majority groups and challenge a serious lack of *zainichi* women scholars’ voices in the academic field of *zainichi* literature. Finally, I would like to thank Lee Yang-ji for positively impacting my life through her literary productions.

¹ *Zainichi* literally means “living in Japan,” but the term typically refers to a specific group of “foreigners” residing in postwar Japan—Korean residents who can trace their diasporic roots to Japan’s colonial rule of Korea (1910–1945).

Starting in 1910, in which Korea became Japan's colony, Koreans were to be fully assimilated into the Japanese Empire as subjects of the Japanese Emperor. Ethnic Koreans living in Japan during the colonial period were thus considered Japanese nationals. When the Treaty of San Francisco officially ended the American occupation in Japan and the Japanese government regained its full sovereignty in 1952, they were stripped of their Japanese nationality and civil rights with no advance notice. Having lost their citizenship, *zainichi* were denied many of the basic rights of a Japanese citizen. From the late 1960s to the late 1990s, they gradually began to have access to basic rights (e.g., access to health and social care services, and public and private sector employment), and their struggle for racial equality in Japan continues throughout the postwar years (1945–present). For an overview of the *zainichi* experience in Japan, see Sonia Ryang, “Introduction: Resident Koreans in Japan,” in *Koreans in Japan: Critical Voices from the Margin*, ed. by Sonia Ryang (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 1–12.

² For nearly ten years—from her 1982 debut until shortly before her sudden death at the age of thirty-seven—Lee Yang-ji often produced literary works that were largely autobiographical. The use of this particular form—autobiographical narrative—has been the dominant form in *zainichi* literature. Since 1945, autobiographical writing has occupied a central part of this literary tradition, largely because questions surrounding self, identity, and belonging began to hold a significant place among *zainichi* male intellectuals at the end of Japan's colonial rule of Korea. This was a historical moment for those who, by not returning to their newly-liberated ancestral land of Korea, which was soon divided in 1948 and then turned into a battlefield during the Korean War (1950–1953), became aware that they (and their descendants) would live in Japan permanently while remaining in the precarious position of assuming ambiguous identities in a culture that did not entirely accept them. In exploring the question of what it meant to be a *zainichi* self as a former colonial Other living in postwar Japan, these pioneering male writers looked not only to themselves for their literary resources but also to their people, *zainichi* (including the memories of the first generation *zainichi* from Cheju, escaped to Ikaino, Osaka, as traumatized refugees), as the primary subject matter.

³ Lee Yang-ji, “Watashi ni totte no bokoku to nihon” (1990), in *Lee Yang-ji zenshū* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1993), 660. All English translations in this article are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ After World War II, Koreans living in the Korean peninsula reclaimed their ancestral names, which had previously been replaced with Japanese ones under the *sōshi kaimei* policy during the colonial period. The majority of Koreans who continued to live in postwar Japan (*zainichi*), on the other hand, retained their Japanese names to conceal their ancestral roots from Japanese society—even in the present day. It is still common practice among *zainichi* to have two names

(“real” Korean names and Japanese “pass” names), but only use Japanese names in public spaces, such as at school and in the workplace, in order to avoid racial discrimination. Lee Yang-ji’s family was no exception, and Lee had always used her Japanese name, Tanaka Yoshie, in public spaces since her childhood (“Yoshie” is the Japanese pronunciation of the author’s name, 良枝, which is pronounced “Yang-ji” in Korean). When she (re-)gained Japanese citizenship along with her parents at the age of nine, Tanaka Yoshie became her official name. Since her literary debut, however, she always used her original but unofficial name—Lee Yang-ji—as a public writer.

⁵ Lee Yang-ji, “Nabi T’aryöng,” in *Yuhi/Nabi T’aryöng* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1997), 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

⁷ Lee Yang-ji, “Watashi wa chōsenjin” (1977), in *Lee Yang-ji zenshū*, 579. See also Lee Yang-ji, “Sanjo no ritsudō no naka e” (1979), in *Lee Yang-ji zenshū*, 596.

⁸ During the colonial period, the term *chōsenjin* (ethnic Koreans) became associated with the Japanese colonialist view of the inferior ancestral lineage of Korean blood, which not only rationalized the racial superiority and purity of the “master” Japanese, but also sanctioned Japan’s mission to civilize its colonial races by assimilating them into the Japanese Empire. During the first half of the colonial period, the Japanese government created two types of Japanese subjects by establishing two family registration systems (*koseki seido*) within the empire, which legally distinguished ethnic Japanese from the colonized people. During the colonial period, this national registration system played a central role in legally including *chōsenjin* as imperial subjects, eligible for military draft and forced labor, while excluding them from the attainment of equal civil rights and status under the law, making them unalterably alien and biologically inferior. Right after the war ended, the data stored in this registration system practically served to divide *nihonjin* (ethnic Japanese) from the impure-blooded, formerly colonized *chōsenjin*, which later allowed for the legal denial of Japanese citizenship for *zainichi* in 1952. Today, the term *chōsenjin* is still used in Japan as an ethnic slur for *zainichi* (while South Koreans are called *kankokujin*). On the development of modern Japan’s family registration system, see David Chapman and Karl Jakob Krogness, eds., *Japan’s Household Registration System and Citizenship: Koseki, Identification and Documentation*, (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁹ Today, Japanese citizens are referred to as *kokumin* (people of the nation) or *nihonjin* (the Japanese people) in Japanese. In contemporary Japan, the term

nihonjin has a very narrow definition: an ethnic Japanese person with Japanese nationality, who is a native speaker of the Japanese language.

¹⁰ Lee, “Nabi T’aryōng,” 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28–29.

¹² Facing the abject, for example, a corpse, existing between life and death, can be extremely disturbing, but according to Kristeva, this very psychological reaction, such as disgust, horror, and nausea, is what the subject needs in order to draw the boundaries between the living and the dead, and inside (us) and outside (them). In other words, it is through a psychological process of rejecting the abject that the subject (re)gains its pure consciousness as “I/we” with a fixed name and identity. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴ Kyoto is widely known for its strong emphasis on the preservation of the uniqueness of Japanese culture and Japanese-ness (*wa*) represented by a range of cultural heritage and historical sites. Kyoto city’s official website describes Kyoto as “*nihon no kokoro no furusato*” (Japan’s spiritual home), declaring its mission to protect *nihon no kokoro* in order to pass it on to the next generation. Kyoto City Official Website. <https://www.city.kyoto.lg.jp/sogo/page/0000210514.html>. Accessed September 4, 2019.

¹⁵ Lee, “Nabi T’aryōng,” 30.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45–46.

¹⁷ Prior to her literary debut with *Nabi T’aryōng*, Lee Yang-ji published a few personal essays, in which she wrote autobiographically about her families’ and her personal struggles as *zainichi* Koreans. In them, she mentions how she played the *koto* during her teens, while receiving lessons in other traditional Japanese arts, including Japanese dance (*nihon buyō*). This was part of her father’s attempts to assimilate her into mainstream Japan by training her to become “a Japanese woman with traditional femininity” (“*nihon teki na josei*”). In her first work of autobiographical fiction, *Nabi T’aryōng*, Lee delves into the issues surrounding her father’s envisioned ideal of assimilation—conforming to the mainstream—in a way that she did not explore in her personal essays. Throughout her career as a writer, she has used the power of fiction to find a way to express her voice in relation to such sensitive issues as racism in postwar Japan and gender-based violence among *zainichi* families. Lee, “Sanjo no ritsudō no naka e,” in *Lee Yang-ji zenshū*, 596. See also Lee, “Watashi wa chōsenjin,” in *Lee Yang-ji zenshū*, 579–91.

¹⁸ Lee, “Nabi T’aryōng,” 46–47.

¹⁹ Ibid., 48–50.

²⁰ In *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, bell hooks shares with her readers the personal pain she experienced as an African American woman in the process of rising to become a public writer. Growing up in the African American community, she was taught not to question social authorities: if she did, she would be punished by being labeled as a girl with “crazy talk, crazy speech” (p.7). She explores how women who are in the vulnerable position within an oppressed group, in particular poor and working class women of color, tend to deeply internalize their historically assigned roles as the voiceless and powerless Other. hooks writes:

Our speech [...] was often the soliloquy, the talking into thin air, the talking to ears that do not hear you—the talk that is simply not listened to. Unlike the black male preacher whose speech was to be heard, who was to be listened to, whose words were to be remembered, the voices of black women [...] could be tuned out, could become a kind of background music, audible but not acknowledged as significant speech.

bell hooks, “talking back,” in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 6.

²¹ *P’ansori* is “a long form of vocal music in which [a performer] sings a work of narrative literature with appropriate dramatic gesture.” It is usually performed by a single vocalist, accompanied by one drummer playing a barrel drum. See Marshall R. Pihl, *The Korean Singer of Tales*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series 37 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 3.

²² Lee, “Nabi T’aryŏng,” 88–89.

²³ In 1963, *p’ansori* was designated by the South Korean government as Intangible Cultural Asset Number 5—one of the intangible Korean national treasures.

²⁴ Lee, “Nabi T’aryŏng,” 97–98.

²⁵ Lee Yang-ji, “Fuzoku dentō buyō—mōt no ibuki” (1987), in *Lee Yang-ji zenshū*, 610.

²⁶ Lee, “Nabi T’aryŏng,” 101.

²⁷ *Han* is a difficult term to translate into Japanese or English, and its interpretation varies even among scholars. This essay follows Lee Yang-ji’s interpretation of *han* in the context of Korean shamanism, with the aim of exploring how the concept of *han* provided a vehicle that helped Lee situate herself as a writer/artist/dancer within Korean shamanistic self-expression and its legacy of socially marginalized women’s survival strategies. Lee, “Fuzoku dentō buyō,” 611.

²⁸ Ibid., 611.

²⁹ Jonghyun Lee, “Shamanism and Its Emancipatory Power for Korean Women,” *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 24.2 (2009): 195.

³⁰ Lee Yang-ji’s real-life *salp’uri* teacher, Kim Suk-cha (1927–1991), on whom Ms. Kim is modeled in the novel, came from a hereditary shaman household. Lee, “Fuzoku dentō buyō,” 611.

³¹ As one of the pioneers of lesbian Chicana authors, Anzaldúa uses praxis of her narrative voice as a gesture of resistance to assimilation into the dominant modes of language in America (i.e., English), which often suppress the disharmonious voices of the “contaminating” beings that threaten power and dominance. In her autobiographical narrative, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa claims herself to be “a border woman,” an in-between identity that refuses complete assimilation into the Chicano patriarchal culture, as well as the white privileged feminist community in America. See Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. (San Francisco, Calif.: Aunt Lute Books, 2012).

³² Lee, “Nabi T’aryōng,” 102–03.