

金城一紀の『GO』における在日アイデンティティー

ポール・スミンキー*¹

Korean-Japanese Identity in Kaneshiro Kazuki's *GO*

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Abstract

『GO』という小説の中で、金城一紀氏は杉原という若い在日韓国人が自分のアイデンティティーを探る冒険を描いた。

外国人登録法や指紋押捺や民族学校の地位の問題などを取り上げ、語り手の皮肉やユーモアに溢れた解説によって、日本社会における在日朝鮮人・韓国人に対するあらゆる差別を厳しく批判している。

一方で、在日社会における差別や民族学校の窮屈な雰囲気にも焦点を当てている。民族学校に通っていた杉原は、警察の嫌がらせや日本の生徒のいじめを受けていたが、その差別のおかげで、民族意識が強くなっていた。同胞の温かい友情と先輩たちの反発的な態度は、在日社会から日本社会へ入り込む勇気を杉原に与えてくれたが、民族学校の先生たちが杉原を「民族反逆者」と批判する。在日社会はもっと外に目を向けるべきだという批判が示唆されている。

日本の高等学校に入学した杉原は、朝鮮人を倒せば評判がよくなると思っている「挑戦者」を次々と敗る。色々な辛い経験を通して、杉原は次第に考え方を変えていく。差別しか考えないと、自分もその差別で定義されてしまうことに彼は気づいた。もっと健全なアイデンティティーを目指した杉原は、結局自分のことを、国境を越えた「朝鮮人でも、日本人でもない、ただの根無し草」として理解する。金城氏はレッテルを張られることを一番嫌うかも知れない。

日本を象徴している桜井が杉原を在日韓国人としてではなく個人として受け入れた最後の場面は、金城氏の日本社会への希望と期待を反映している。

KEY WORDS: *Kaneshiro Kazuki, GO, Korean-Japanese, Identity, Discrimination*

1 Introduction

Ethnic Koreans comprise the largest minority group in Japan. According to the 1995 census, there were 560,414 Koreans living in Japan, a figure that represents approximately 49% of all foreigners. When one accounts for the many Koreans that have acquired Japanese citizenship, those of Korean background account for an estimated 1% of the entire population.

Although a small number of Koreans lived in Japan before Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, the largest influxes resulted from Japan's increasingly strict colonialist policies. Poverty drove many Koreans to Japan in search of employment, and from 1939 until the end of World War II, many more were forcibly brought to Japan

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as wartime laborers in coal mining, metal mining, construction, and other fields. Many young Korean women were forced to work as “comfort women,” or army prostitutes. During the colonial period, Japan followed a policy of forced assimilation, and Koreans were granted Japanese citizenship, expected to learn Japanese, and forced to adopt Japanese names.

With the end of World War II in 1945, many Koreans returned to their homeland, but between 500,000 and 600,000 remained in Japan, or returned as illegal immigrants, primarily because social and economic conditions made it difficult or impossible to live in Korea. In 1947, Koreans were required to register as aliens under the Alien Registration Law, and in 1952, were stripped of their Japanese nationality. Relegated to the status of foreigner, Koreans have been denied voting rights, social benefits, and the ability to apply for many public jobs. Under the Alien Registration Law, all foreign residents sixteen years and older were required to be fingerprinted and to carry their Certificate of Alien Registration with them at all times, policies that most Koreans have found to be demeaning.

The situation for Koreans in Japan has gradually improved: in 1991, Koreans who lost their Japanese nationality in 1952 and their descendants were granted permanent residency, and in 1992, the fingerprinting requirement was abolished. In 1996, the government reversed its policy of pressuring local governments to require public servants to have Japanese citizenship. Recently, there has been much debate over whether to grant suffrage to permanent residents, and a small number of prefectures have passed bills granting suffrage in local elections to permanent residents. The harassment of Koreans by immigration officers also seems to have lessened (Ryang 126).

In spite of these improvements, it is clear that Koreans—especially those that do not hide their Korean ancestry—face discrimination. For example, the Japanese government has refused to recognize ethnic Korean schools, a fact which makes it extremely difficult for graduates of these schools to enter Japanese universities. As recently as 1998, the U.N. Human Rights Committee wrote, “The Committee is concerned about instances of discrimination against members of the Japanese-Korean minority who are not Japanese citizens, including the non-recognition of Korean schools” (Nihon Bengoshi Rengoukai 253). Koreans also continue to face job discrimination: in particular, the Home Affairs Ministry continues to instruct local governments to “restrict noncitizens’ access to jobs that involve the exercise of public authority and formation of public opinion” (U.S. Department of State). Koreans also face various forms of social discrimination, such as bullying by students and harassment by police. Kaneshiro Kazuki points out that students of Korean schools are often harassed by police and right-wing groups (Chuokoron 265).

Since Koreans have been severely restricted by their status as foreigners, the issue of acquiring Japanese citizenship has been an important concern for most Koreans. Many Koreans have been reluctant to naturalize because they see it as a denial of their ethnicity. Indeed, the government has made it difficult for Koreans that naturalize to maintain their ethnic identity: those that naturalize have been pressured to take Japanese names, and all applicants are investigated to make sure they have adequately acculturated. Given that the government has discretionary power to refuse any application, for any reason, this *sokou chousa* (or “personal conduct survey”) has been seen as another form of harassment. Indeed, one Korean was recently told to wait another five years because he had a couple of parking violations (Matsubara).

Even so, an increasing number of Koreans do naturalize: for example, 9,842 Koreans gained Japanese citizenship in 2000. Fukuoka Yasunori attributes this increase to changing attitudes among young Koreans: “The younger generation today seems to consider naturalization more as necessary paperwork to make their lives easier

than as something significant to their identity” (Matsubara). The number of Japanese with Korean backgrounds has also been increasing due to intermarriage with Japanese, since children born to such couples automatically acquire citizenship.

Today, a large number of Koreans are third or fourth generation residents that were born, raised, and educated in Japan. Most speak Japanese, go by a Japanese name, and are generally indistinguishable from ordinary Japanese. Even so, most do experience occasional discrimination and serious identity conflicts. In “The Identities of Young Koreans in Japan,” Fukuoka discusses the diverse ways that young Koreans struggle with issues of identity. Based on his interviews with over 150 resident Koreans, Fukuoka emphasizes that there is great variety in how Koreans construct their identities. He points out that the general view of lumping Koreans into two groups, those that assimilate into Japanese society and those that attempt to maintain their identity, is an oversimplification.

After stressing that every Korean he spoke with was “truly individual in his or her approach,” Fukuoka attempts to categorize the different approaches that Koreans take in constructing their identities: 1.) *pluralists* hope to forge a new society that respects diversity and fight for social reforms that will further this end; 2.) *nationalists* view themselves as “overseas nationals” and strongly support Korean schools and organizations; 3.) *individualists* attempt to prove themselves through their own material success and tend to ignore the issues of ethnicity and nationality; 4) *nationalization-oriented types* distance themselves from their Korean ethnic identity and often acquire Japanese nationality; and 5.) *ethnic solidarity types* emphasize cooperation amongst Korean residents and strive to strengthen the ethnic consciousness of Koreans in Japan.

As Fukuoka points out, all Koreans have a degree of ethnic consciousness, but that awareness varies considerably, depending on whether the person lives in a Korean neighborhood or attends a Korean school, and to the extent that his or her family maintains an ethnic consciousness in the home. But since ethnic identity is also shaped by the negative attitudes that the host culture holds towards the group, it is often those ethnic Koreans that seem outwardly to have fully assimilated to Japanese culture that suffer most. Having internalized the discriminatory attitudes of those around them, such ethnic Koreans find it difficult to face their own background.

2 Kaneshiro Kazuki’s *Go and zainichi Identity*

In *GO*, Kaneshiro Kazuki attempts to introduce Japanese readers to the problems that Korean-Japanese encounter in their everyday lives. In the introductory chapter, he introduces the historical background of anti-Korean discrimination, and through the struggles of the main character, he examines a variety of issues related to discrimination, from the point of view of how they negatively affect ethnic Koreans’ sense of identity.

The novel touches on a wide range of issues, including the role of the two Korean-affiliated support groups, Chongryun (North Korea) and Mindan (South Korea); alien registration and fingerprinting; job discrimination; police harassment; DNA evidence confirming genetic ties between Japanese and Koreans; Japanese belief in the illusion of homogeneity; ethnic Koreans’ use of Japanese names; “passing” as Japanese; bullying of young Korean girls wearing *chima chomori*, the traditional Korean attire; the relationship between the Japanese mafia and ordinary Koreans; Confucian attitudes in ethnic Korean families and society; ethnic Korean schools; and discrimination within the *zainichi* community.

With its overt attack on the various forms of discrimination against ethnic Koreans in Japan, the novel cannot avoid being political, but Kaneshiro has avoided being didactic by filtering this information through the witty and

caustic commentary of Sugihara, the rowdy Korean-Japanese hero of the novel. In an interview with Oguma Eiji, Kaneshiro says he wrote the novel in a highly entertaining style, partly in reaction to past *zainichi* fiction, which he feels does not reflect the experiences of the younger generation. He also points out that much *zainichi* fiction has assumed an understanding of *zainichi* society that many Japanese lack (265-7).

In *GO*, Kaneshiro's own approach to the problem of ethnic identity seems to be based not on group struggle and unity but on individualism. Instead of working within Chongryun society or with other *zainichi* groups to battle prejudice, Sugihara opts instead to fight such discrimination entirely on his own: usually by punching out "challengers" that attack him but also by educating himself as to the causes and results of discrimination. Intelligent and physically powerful, he is portrayed as a superhuman hero doing solitary battle against all odds. Indeed, one might argue that such an approach is beyond ordinary Korean-Japanese, and that Kaneshiro's apparent rejection of the group in favor of the individual is mistaken: socially active groups are needed, not for people like Sugihara, but for ordinary people incapable of fighting on their own. Kaneshiro's response to this criticism is that "I am a novelist, not an activist, and it is my job to give illusion" (*Chuokoron* 329-330).^{*2} In other words, he hopes to inspire ordinary Korean-Japanese through his portrayal of Sugihara.

Just the same, Kaneshiro does not categorically deny the importance of Chongryun and other political groups, and it is clear that his hero has been shaped—and strengthened—by his association with Chongryun and individuals dedicated to the group. Educated in the Chongryun school system, Sugihara has learned Korean history, the Korean language, and about the "Great Leader," Kim Il Sung. Apart from Sakurai, the mysterious Japanese girl he meets at a party, all of his friends are Korean-Japanese. His decision to break free from this supportive but restrictive world requires courage and determination.

In this way, Kaneshiro aims to replace the old strict terms of identification with a more open-ended view of identity that begins with the individual. As Sugihara says, "I'm going to eliminate national boundaries" (217). The "boundaries" being referred to here include not only various overt barriers to social inclusion, such as laws concerning nationality and the treatment of foreigners, but also more covert forms of racism, such as the view that Korean-Japanese are mere "residents" who will one day leave the country. Perhaps the most difficult "boundary" to eliminate is the close-minded attitude that prevents people from accepting minorities. Kaneshiro does not limit his critique to Japanese, however, and suggests that the Chongryun community has also adopted an exclusivist view of identity. By insisting on a blind loyalty to the Chongryun leadership and treating all those that leave the community as traitors, Korean-Japanese have often counterproductively granted validity to differences that should be questioned.

In Kaneshiro's view, it is precisely this ignorant belief in exclusivist categories that sustains racism in the first place, and it is by challenging these categories that the individual becomes free. By breaking out of his limited Chongryun environment and entering Japanese society, Sugihara begins a new journey of discovery. His relationship with Sakurai represents his more sincere involvement with Japanese society in general. Although he at first hides his identity from Sakurai, he realizes that an authentic relationship requires openness and acceptance. Sakurai's final acceptance of Sugihara is based on a view of him not as a Korean resident but as a unique individual. The end of the novel represents Kaneshiro's idealistic hope that Japan—like Sakurai—will accept Korean residents as individuals.

^{*2} All English translations of Japanese sources—including *GO*—are mine.

3 Korean Ethnic Schools: The Shaping of Identity

Although *GO* opens with Sugihara's deciding to enter a Japanese high school, it is important to recognize that he already has a strong ethnic identity: he attended a Chongryun ethnic Korean school for six years, can speak Korean fluently, and has many ethnic Korean friends. Such an educational background is rather unusual for an ethnic Korean in Japan. In 1993, only about 20,000 out of 150,000 Korean students attended Chongryun schools (Ryang 24). And as Fukuoka Yasunori points out, "The vast majority of young Koreans in Japan do not understand Korean" (Koreans in Japan).

In his interview with Oguma, Kaneshiro says that he has a prerogative to write about the Korean-Japanese community: "Amongst *zainichi* writers, even many in the older generation did not go to ethnic Korean schools, and can only speak Japanese. It seems even more odd to hear younger writers talking about suddenly waking up to their *zainichi* identity. I take pride in the fact that I know the heart of *zainichi* society through personal experience" (326). In a similar way, Sugihara has a strong grounding in the *zainichi* experience.

Even so, Sugihara's description of his Chongryun school experience is largely negative: "At school," he says, "there was always the repressive feeling of being under strict control" (57). He mentions that he learns the Korean language, Korean history, Japanese, math, physics, and other subjects that are taught at Japanese schools, but his emphasis is on the oppressive nature of the education and the irrelevance of the content to their daily lives. He jokingly describes the school's adoption of the North Korean regime's Kim Il Sung worship:

The "Great Leader" Kim Il Sung—it is impossible to talk about ethnic Korean schools without talking about this personage. Absolutely impossible. The extent of this person's greatness was drilled into me from the time I was very young, so much so that I even came to dislike him. (53)

Sugihara admits that early in his education he accepted the "blind loyalty" towards Kim Il Sung as "something that was natural." By the third grade, however, he is already disillusioned: the young Kim Il Sung's fighting the Japanese police with his slingshot seems dull in comparison to Sugihara and his friends' fighting the Japanese police with their water balloons.

Sugihara also strongly objects to the method of Korean language instruction in which students that use Japanese in school are forced to go through "self-criticism": students are pressured to report other students that have committed "language transgressions" and guilty students are forced to stand up in front of the class and reflect on their behavior. Sonia Ryang explains that in Chongryun schools, students learn a formal style of Korean that they rarely use outside of the classroom, and that many policies encourage them to feel that speaking Korean is good and that speaking Japanese is bad. The result of this policy, however, is that students become afraid to say anything at all, and "the language is less enriched and promoted than made sterile" (34). Chongryun has attempted to remedy these problems through its revision of the curriculum in 1993, but it is still too early to say whether the Korean language will become a more integrated part of students' daily lives.

Sugihara does highly evaluate one aspect of his school life: his strong ties to friends, whom he refers to as "blood brothers." Nearly all of his time outside of the home is spent with his classmates: they commute to school together, study together, play together, skip classes together, and most importantly, battle discrimination together. As Sugihara puts it: "What caused those ties to truly blossom, though, was the nourishment of prejudice" (64). In particular, they must defend themselves against racist Japanese students that target Korean students on their way to and from school.

Sugihara's relationships with Wonsoo and Tawake shed light on his attitude towards the ethnic Korean community. Tawake, Sugihara's fast-footed *sempai* (or older student), responds to his restrictive environment by

running from it. Unlike Sugihara, who was often caught by the police, Tawake always managed to outrun them—until he has to be fingerprinted as part of the Alien Registration process. Tawake concludes his account by saying, “They finally caught me. You know, government power is a terrifying thing. You gotta run pretty fast to escape it” (69). Shortly after this confrontation with discrimination, Tawake disappears, presumably to live overseas, and Sugihara says the disappearance is what gave him the courage to leave the Korean school system and to enter a Japanese high school.

Wonsoo, on the other hand, remains dedicated to Chongryun society, and bitterly resents Sugihara for entering a Japanese school. Limited by his education and environment, Wonsoo spends his time fighting with Japanese, gambling, and smoking. After Jong Il’s funeral, he plans to get revenge against the Japanese students involved in the murder. When Sugihara declines to join in the “manhunt,” Wonsoo accuses him of selling his soul to the Japanese. Sugihara responds, “If I did have a Korean soul, I’d sell it in a second” (161), a comment that Wonsoo interprets as a betrayal of their friendship. Towards the end of the novel, Sugihara reconciles with Wonsoo, who explains why he has remained dedicated to Chongryun:

“I understand perfectly well,” he said, “that North Korea and Chongryun only think about using us, and that we can’t count on them for anything. But I’m gonna stick with them because there are a lot of guys counting on me. When I’m fighting for them, I feel like a complete person for a while.” (227-8)

Wonsoo remains dedicated to Chongryun not because he believes in what they represent but because the group provides him with the sense of belonging that Japanese society denies him.

Tawake and Wonsoo, then, represent two possible responses to discrimination: escaping the problem by running away or attaching one’s self to a group that defends one from the discrimination. Sugihara’s dreams of traveling to Norway and his trip to Nagoya make clear that escape holds much appeal for him. Interestingly, he does not consider moving to Korea, where he also feels like an outsider. Although Sugihara decides to stay in Japan, Tawake’s example inspires him to exceed his limitations. In contrast to Wonsoo, Sugihara does not want to attach himself to a group, primarily because he does not want to be fettered by the restrictions that such an association brings. Clearly, Sugihara himself is aware of the difficulty of breaking free from the group:

When I was amongst my friends, I felt secure in being protected by something that was definite. Even if the cost of that sense of security was to be enclosed in an extremely small circle and tightly restricted, it would require a considerable amount of courage to leave it. (65)

Ultimately, Sugihara refuses to be restricted to the “small circle” of Chongryun society, and seeks to define himself in broader terms. One might also argue that his time spent within that circle is what provides him with the strength to break free.

Jong Il, Sugihara’s most valued friend, provides an example of how to respond to discrimination in a more positive and healthy way. Like Wonsoo, Jong Il is dedicated to Chongryun society, but unlike Wonsoo, he respects Sugihara for his decision to go to a Japanese high school and encourages him to try to enter a Japanese college. Indeed, Jong Il first becomes Sugihara’s friend by courageously speaking out against the ethnic Korean school teacher who calls Sugihara “a traitor to the Korean race” and a “sellout.” “We’ve never had a country we could sell,” Jong Il calls out (72). Jong Il recognizes that the Chongryun appeals to race and nationality are as mistaken as the Japanese belief in homogeneity and the Japanese Spirit. Even so, he believes that the Chongryun schools fulfill the important role of supporting weaker members of society. His goal is to become a teacher that gives students the strength to survive in Japanese society:

I’m going to study hard at a Japanese university and bring back the unbiased knowledge and experience

that will give those kids the ability to break out into the broader world. I want to give them the courage that you guys gave me. (79)

Jong Il's response to discrimination, then, is to fight with knowledge and education. By refusing to be defined by the exclusionary terms of prejudice, one can overcome the limitations of ethnic confrontation. Jong Il's hope is to participate in the recent reforms of Chongryun that have aimed to make the organization more responsive to the Japanese world in which its members live.

Not surprisingly, Sugihara remains friends with Jong Il even after he enters the Japanese school system. Jong Il encourages Sugihara to persevere in his studies and to be a good example for younger ethnic Koreans. "Don't disappoint them," he tells Sugihara (79). Later, Sugihara tells Kato that he decides to go to college because it was the "dying request of a friend" (198). Although he does not share Jong Il's dedication to Chongryun, Sugihara respects and values his friendship.

Indeed, Sugihara is determined to leave Chongryun and never return. The negative reactions of his teachers and friends, though painful, confirm his suspicion that the support of that environment comes at a high price—being imprisoned in a restrictive environment. Sugihara chooses freedom instead.

4 Entering Japanese Society: Hiding One's Identity

It would be a mistake to interpret Sugihara's decision to enter a Japanese high school as a rejection of his Korean heritage; rather, he does not want to be defined and limited by that heritage. As he tells his father at the beginning of the novel, "It's a wide world, and I want to see it" (15). At the same time, it is important to remember that Sugihara was born and raised in Japan, speaks Japanese, and goes by a Japanese name. Like most ethnic Koreans, he is indistinguishable from ordinary Japanese.

Ethnic Koreans are often pressured to hide their Korean background, and Sugihara is no exception. A couple of weeks before classes start, he is called into the school and told to use his Japanese name: "Just to avoid any potential problems, we'd like you to use a Japanese name instead of a Korean one" (23). Sugihara wishes that he had the pride and dignity to object, but he docilely accepts the proposal instead.

In "Koreans in Japan: Past and Present," Fukuoka estimates that "over 80% of young Koreans pass as Japanese in their daily life by using Japanese names, except when they tell their secret to close Japanese friends." He points out that although earlier generations of Koreans in Japan may have used Japanese names to avoid discrimination, most younger Koreans simply feel more comfortable with the Japanese name that has been passed down by their parents.

Yu Miri, a well-known ethnic Korean writer that usually goes by her Korean name, writes that most ethnic Koreans feel uncomfortable with their Korean names. She mentions that when she attended a Mindan-run Adult Ceremony about ten years ago, the majority of participants heard their Korean name for the first time in their lives. She herself was too embarrassed to answer "present" in Korean (87). But as Yu points out, Koreans that decide to go by their Korean name often encounter rude comments or discrimination. She explains that a friend of hers angrily gave up using her Korean name after frequently being turned away by real estate agents, and that she herself uses her Japanese name for her credit card and health card in order to avoid the stresses that result from using a Korean name (89).

Sugihara's decision to go by his Japanese name, then, is not unique: he is simply avoiding a confrontation with the administrators of his new school. But his decision is also motivated by resentment towards his Korean school teachers, who harassed him relentlessly and accused him of being a traitor:

I figured that since I had become a traitor to my race, I would go ahead and betray my race like they wanted. But even though I consented to go by a Japanese name, I did not intend to hide the fact that I was a South Korean resident of Japan. Not that I was particularly planning to parade the fact either. (24)

Sugihara's tacit admission of being a "traitor to his race" indicates the complexity of his emotions: he feels a degree of shame for his complicity, resentment towards his former Korean teachers, and resignation towards his Japanese teachers. Furthermore, his halfhearted claim about not parading his Korean background suggests that he would be willing simply to "pass" as Japanese.

In spite of the school's arrangements to have Sugihara use his Japanese name, the name of his junior high school—which makes clear his Korean background—is carelessly left on all the class lists, so that the "secret" is soon known by all. Within three days, he must defend himself against "challengers," who think that beating up an ethnic Korean will improve their reputation. Sugihara jokingly explains the stereotypical view that many Japanese hold towards Koreans:

. . . I was a poster boy for the Korean karate gym. By beating me up and defeating the Korean karate gym, a guy could impress his buddies. This was extremely low-level thinking, but I was at a low-level school, so it couldn't be helped. (24)

Stigmatized in this way, Sugihara must constantly fight classmates that appear at his desk to fight. Trained by his father, a former professional boxer, he violently and consistently dispatches his opponents, but this only consolidates his reputation, and he remains isolated and avoided, his only high school friend being Kato, the son of a mafia boss. At school, then, Sugihara encounters the prejudice that results from being known as a Korean.

In his relationship with Sakurai, a mysterious Japanese girl that he meets at one of Kato's parties, Sugihara struggles with the issue of hiding his Korean background. On the one hand, he does not feel a strong obligation to inform her, as he does not feel defined by that background. As he says, when he eventually confesses, "Nationality doesn't matter." On the other hand, the pressure to tell Sakurai the truth mounts as their relationship deepens. She urges him, "When you get depressed, talk to me about it." When he meets her family for the first time, he becomes nervous: "It occurred to me that I had never before had dinner with a Japanese family," he thinks. Kato also urges him to tell her the truth and asks, "Does she know everything about you?" Given that Sugihara's relationship with Sakurai has been positive, and she is open-minded, he is convinced that nationality will not matter, but he hesitates anyway.

The stigma attached to being Korean explains the paradox of why so many ethnic Koreans in Japan struggle with identity crises even when they have not directly experienced such discrimination. Having to keep one's identity hidden creates a feeling of being tainted by that secret, and at the same time, one inevitably obsesses over how people will react when the "secret" becomes known. This dynamic typifies the prejudice experienced by many Burakumin in Japan as well (see my paper, "Burakumin Identity and Japanese Identity.")

The climax of the novel occurs when Sugihara reveals his Korean identity to Sakurai for the first time. After the funeral of Jong Il, who dies in a tragic altercation that results largely from prejudice against resident Koreans, Sakurai offers to spend the night with him, and just before sleeping with her, he reveals his Korean roots. Sakurai responds with shock, and explains that her father told her not to date Chinese or Korean men because they have "contaminated blood."

Having read the latest DNA research concerning the origins of the Japanese, Sugihara believes that "disproving such nonsense would be extremely easy" (179). He soon realizes, however, that reason often proves

powerless against prejudice. Sakurai dismisses his arguments with the comment, “You know all kinds of stuff, don’t you? But that’s not it at all. I understand what you’re saying, but it’s still impossible. It’s just kind of scary” (181), and accuses Sugihara of being dishonest.

Sakurai’s accusation stings Sugihara, and he honestly explains why he hid his Korean background from her:

I grabbed the doorknob, and after a moment’s hesitation, turned to her, and said, “My real name is ‘Lee.’ As in ‘Bruce Lee.’ I didn’t want to tell you because it’s a ridiculously foreign-sounding name, and I was scared I would lose you—like I just did.” (183)

Sugihara admits his own vulnerability and fear of rejection, but identifying with Bruce Lee, the perennial outsider fighting for inclusion, he also proudly gives his actual name for the first time. Although the rejection is painful, Sugihara does not despair.

Some Japanese readers may feel that Sakurai’s reaction is unrealistic and out of character, but Fukuoka reports that many ethnic Koreans have had experiences of being ostracized after revealing their identities. One woman reported that when she told a good friend about her Korean background, she stopped talking to her. Another told about being shamed in front of the entire class by another child (“The Identities of Young Koreans in Japan”). In an interview, Kaneshiro himself said that the scene was based on his own experience of rejection (272).

5 Towards a New Identity: Crossing Borders and Finding Acceptance

All in one day, Sugihara attends his best friend’s funeral, is spurned by his former Korean friends, and is rejected by his Japanese girlfriend. The events represent the barriers that he must overcome in coming to terms with his own identity: he must physically combat Japanese violence and racism, reject the Korean demand to withdraw from Japanese society, and—perhaps most difficultly—deal with rejection on the personal level.

Even before his reunion with Sakurai at the end of the novel, Sugihara has come to a new understanding of himself that is not defined by labels: he is neither Korean, nor Japanese; he is, as his father says in Spanish, a *desarraigado* (or wanderer). As he tells Sakurai in the closing scene of the novel: “I’m not a ‘resident,’ and I’m not a ‘South Korean’ or a ‘North Korean’ or a ‘Mongoloid’ either. . . . I’m me” (234). Sugihara has developed a strong individualism that is rooted in—but which also transcends—his experience as an outsider.

Sugihara has developed a more liberal attitude towards culture, one not defined or limited by his nationality or country of residence. Before meeting Sakurai, he is clearly inspired by Jong Il’s belief in the power of education and knowledge: he regularly exchanges books and information with Jong Il, decides to follow Jong Il’s suggestion to enter a Japanese university, and spends much of his time researching various aspects of discrimination, such as the “myth of Japanese homogeneity” (93). The danger for Sugihara, however, is that his obsession with discrimination will lead to a negative and destructive sense of identity. Sugihara’s father, quoting Nietzsche, warns him of this danger, but it is ultimately his relationship with Sakurai that saves him.

Not surprisingly, Sugihara’s attitude towards study and his own research changes radically as he begins to spend more time with Sakurai. As with Jong Il, Sugihara exchanges books, CD’s, and information with Sakurai, but his focus is no longer on discrimination: rather, he and Sakurai spend their time “looking for cool things” (115). Certainly, they seem to especially enjoy jazz, 60’s music, avant-garde art, and other culture of social protest, but their enjoyment has no ulterior political motive. Perhaps more significantly, they enjoy movies and literature from many countries—in stark contrast to Jong Il, who reads only Japanese fiction. Such a positive and

liberating response to culture is a new experience for Sugihara, and foreshadows his new view of himself as a wanderer, who transcends all borders.

Sugihara's reconciliation with Wonsoo towards the end of the novel reflects a similarly accepting attitude towards Chongryun society. Though his decision to leave the Chongryun school system was initially accompanied by bitterness and anger, he eventually sees that Wonsoo and others have given him the strength to move beyond that limited environment. In a conversation punctuated by long silences and awkwardness, he and Wonsoo recognize that their lives will head in different directions. "I understand," Sugihara says to Wonsoo, who explains that he will remain dedicated to Chongryun. "Go on," says Wonsoo, with simple words that reverberate with meaning. The words parallel Tawake's challenge to plunge into a fight with a Japanese motorcycle gang, and Sakurai's words of acceptance at the end of the novel. As Sugihara's train pulls away from the station, he feels the "fond old gaze" on his back.

In a scene that more clearly reveals Sugihara's attitude towards ethnic Korean society, he explains to Miyamoto, a Korean-Japanese that is organizing a group, why he does not want to participate: "I don't have a problem with what you guys are trying to do. I think you're doing the right thing, and I also think it's meaningful work. I want to do the same thing on my own" (221). Although Sugihara feels limited within groups, he understands that for many ethnic Koreans, support groups fulfill an important role.

Sugihara's bloody fight with his father ironically shows a similar respect towards the older generation of ethnic Koreans. Angry with his father for the rough treatment he has received, Sugihara mocks him for his sentimental tale about his brother, who recently died, and challenges him to a fight with the words, "Anyway, your generation is finished. The generation of destitute beggars is finished" (210). Violently punching his father repeatedly, Sugihara is defeated when his father spits blood into his eyes and knocks him out. The loss suggests that Kaneshiro admires previous generations of ethnic Koreans that have struggled against discrimination in Japan, and indicates that Sugihara has not yet achieved the heroic stature of his father.

After the fight, Sugihara's father admits that his son's generation has come of age and expresses his hope for change: "This country has slowly started to change. And it's bound to change even more in the future. Whether you're Japanese or ethnic Korean isn't gonna matter anymore. Your generation should start turning its eye more and more to the outside world" (216). Hearing these words, Sugihara realizes that his father has forsaken the reassuring support of Chongryun society so that he will be able to have more freedom:

I realized why the jerk had suddenly changed his nationality to South Korea. It wasn't for Hawaii; it was for me. He wanted to remove at least one of the shackles that were holding me down. . . . He had lost nearly all of his friends, and people stopped visiting us because he had turned his back on Chongryun and Mindan. He had fought his way on his own without any help, and no one in this country would applaud his efforts. (217)

For the first time, Sugihara recognizes his debt to his father, and by extension, to other ethnic Koreans that have struggled on behalf of future generations. This recognition gives him renewed strength, and he vows to his father to "eliminate borders."

For Sugihara, the most difficult barrier to overcome is being rejected on a personal level. His long conversation with the young police officer shortly after leaving Sakurai helps him understand that although such rejection is painful, acceptance is also possible. After reaching his neighborhood late at night, Sugihara is questioned suspiciously by the young police officer, who asks him where he lives. Thinking that his Korean background will be discovered and that he will be harassed for not carrying his Alien Registration Card, Sugihara

panics and knocks the police officer down. Afraid that he may have killed the officer, he waits for him to regain consciousness, and when he awakens, the two gradually confide in each other, both sharing their tales of rejection.

Sugihara recognizes that the pain of discrimination increases dramatically when one seeks acceptance. Previously, he had kept aloof from Japanese, and this detachment had kept him safe, but with Sakurai, he had hoped for acceptance:

“Up to now . . . all the discrimination hasn’t really bothered me. . . . But ever since I met her, I’ve been afraid of being discriminated against. That’s the first time I’ve ever felt that way. I guess I’ve never met a Japanese person who meant so much to me. . . . I couldn’t tell her the truth about my background because I thought if I told her, she wouldn’t like me—even though I didn’t think she was prejudiced. I guess in the end, I didn’t believe in her.” (191)

Sugihara admits that he should have been more honest, but his fear of rejection—which resulted from countless experiences of racism—prevented him from telling her the truth.

Hoping to encourage Sugihara, the young police officer tells Sugihara about an ethnic Korean named Kim, who beat up someone for making a racist comment. At the same time, the police officer’s open-minded attitude also becomes obvious: “I had an admiration for Kim . . . but I don’t mean because he was an ethnic Korean or anything to do with that. It was just Kim that I admired” (192). The police officer admires Kim as an individual and believes that Sugihara will find women that will accept him in the same way. Saying goodbye to Sugihara, he says, “Be like the ‘Dreaded Kim.’ If you do, you’ll have plenty of women” (194). The police officer’s words are fortuitous, for Sugihara is indeed much like Kim.

In the end, Sakurai does accept Sugihara, and this final scene represents Kaneshiro’s own optimistic hope of Japan’s ultimate acceptance of ethnic Koreans. Kaneshiro does not suggest that such an acceptance will be without awkwardness or misunderstanding. When Sugihara asks, “What am I?” and Sakurai hesitatingly answers, “You’re a Korean resident of Japan,” her answer angers him: “I swear I could just kill some of you Japanese sometimes. How the hell can you call us ‘residents’ without even batting an eye? I was born and raised in this country, goddamn it” (233-4). Sugihara’s passion, however, turns out to be precisely what attracts her to him.

Explaining how Sugihara’s passion attracted her to him in the first place, Sakurai tells the story of how she witnessed Sugihara’s fight with an opposing basketball team. Sakurai did not overhear the racial slur that triggered Sugihara’s anger, but she is captivated by his flashy drop kicks that knock down the entire opposing team and sexually excited when he glares at her as he is being led off the court. Sakurai’s tale, with its emphasis on Sugihara’s unique moves and bizarre behavior, reveal that she accepts him as an individual. As she tells Sugihara, “I don’t care about your nationality anymore. As long as you keep flying, and glare at me once in a while, I don’t even care if you can speak Japanese. I mean, nobody can fly and glare like you” (239). Not surprisingly, Sugihara is moved to tears by these words of acceptance.

“Let’s go.” —Sakurai’s words, the final line that echoes the title, indicates a new beginning. It is easy to imagine some of the difficulties that Sakurai and Sugihara will face—including strong opposition from Sakurai’s father—but their relationship, based on love and mutual respect, seems likely to succeed.

6 Conclusion

In *GO*, Kaneshiro Kazuki traces the development of a young ethnic Korean in coming to terms with his identity. Through Sugihara’s witty commentary, the novel strongly condemns the various forms of discrimination against ethnic Koreans in Japan, especially police harassment, discriminatory laws, and negative stereotypes. The

novel is also critical of the ethnic Korean community and suggests that a more constructive engagement with mainstream Japanese society is needed. The novel ends with an idealistic vision of Japanese acceptance of ethnic Koreans as individuals.

As a junior high school student in a Chongryun school, Sugihara experiences police harassment and bullying from Japanese students, but because of that discrimination, he develops a strong sense of ethnic identity that is unfortunately based primarily on the unified front that the ethnic Korean students need to protect themselves. The strong bonds of camaraderie and inspirational examples of escape, however, provide Sugihara with the courage to break free from his limited environment.

Once enrolled in a Japanese high school, however, Sugihara finds himself without friends and frequently badgered by “challengers” that believe that defeating an ethnic Korean will improve their reputations. Encouraged by his one remaining Korean friend, Jong Il, Sugihara studies hard to enter a Japanese university, but his excessive focus on discrimination makes clear that his identity remains defined in largely negative terms. Gradually, as he becomes more involved with Sakurai, he begins to see culture—and himself—in more international terms.

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