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Sonia Ryang. *North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology, and Identity.* Boulder: Westview Press, 1997. xix + 248 pp. $39.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8133-3050-1; $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8133-8952-3.

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On Being North Korean in Japan

Over the last few years, a number of excellent books in various fields have tackled the issue of identity in Japan, the most recent being Tessa Morris-Suzuki's *Reinventing Japan: Nation, Culture, Identity* (M.E. Sharpe, 1997). Sonia Ryang's book contributes to the debate on the multifaceted nature of the Japanese populace in an interesting and timely way. *North Koreans in Japan* is a study of Chongryun, the General Association of Korean residents in Japan, members of a community who regard themselves not as an ethnic minority within Japan but as "overseas nationals" of North Korea. Herself a member of this community, Ryang focuses on its processes of identity construction through political socialization and reproduction of core values in the education process. In particular, she argues that language use constructs identity, but not in a fixed and rigid way; rather, it functions in line with a multitudinous, shifting set of parameters. "We cannot assume one-to-one correspondence between 'ethnic language' and 'ethnic identity' and the clear existence of 'ethnic identity' prior to the use of 'ethnic language.' Rather, *the practice of language use as a process* (reviewer's italics) constitutes identity–ethnic or otherwise!" (p. 213). It is through the changes in the language practices of the Chongryun community that Ryang traces transitions in the shifting Chongryun identity.

The book is divided into three sections. Part One (The School) contains two chapters on Chongryun schooling and the effect of recent curriculum changes; Part Two (The History), another two, on the background to the emergence of Chongryun and the way in which the Chongryun community interacts with the Japanese state; and Part Three (The Search), two more, one on Chongryun members caught in a period of transition and the other on diaspora and beyond.

The first chapter examines the acquisition by Chongryun schoolchildren of the language of self-identification through appropriate sociolinguistic practices prior to the 1993 curriculum reform. Chongryun schools are funded not by the Japanese government but by the North Korean, and thus control their own textbook production. Textbooks are written in Korean, which is the language of instruction–Japanese is taught as a foreign language class. The core curriculum prior to 1993 was much the same as that in Japanese schools but also included "ideological education" classes on the childhood and revolutionary activities of Kim Il Sung as well as on Korean history and geography. The kind of Korean language taught placed great emphasis on the pairing of correct proper names and epithets for Kim Il Sung and his family, thereby providing the tools for Chongryun's organisational life. Students were expected to be able to reproduce verbatim the teachings of the two Kims. The Korean language textbooks brimmed with ideological and political content, stressing the love and care of Kim Il Sung for his people and the need for the reunification of Korea under North Korean direction. Students were severely criticized for inadvertently using Japanese at school (although they spoke it at home). The effect of the stilted, bookish Korean taught as spoken language, and of the campaign against Japanese, was to make the language sterile and to "train children to be technicians of language switching rather than good Korean speakers" (p. 35). Clearly, the concept of identity held by the children differed from that held by their Chongryun teachers, as their refusal to use Korean outside the school shows.

Korean acquired through this process did not give learners the linguistic tools adequate to deal with the totality of their lives; rather, it was restricted in scope and application to the replication of Chongryun *political* identity. By the time students reach the level of Korea University, they are word perfect in reproducing the official line, while able unselfconsciously to switch codes in a different setting. The strength of this Chongryun identity as mirrored in concrete linguistic skills is that it can be suspended and revived as appropriate; it is not monolithic and rigid, but flexible and resilient. In this sense, ac-

cording to Ryang, the utterances of Chongryun students are best viewed as performative, i.e. to be understood as appropriate or inappropriate in context rather than true or false. The link between language and identity is therefore mediated by the social effect of utterances, with Chongryun use of the authorised version of Korean constituting a distinct, if not all-embracing, group and personal identity.

Chapter Two discusses the effects of the three-year curricular reform launched in Chongryun schools in 1993, which saw a reduction of references to the two Kims and the abolition of "ideological education" subjects. No longer do texts assume that students either live in or will move to North Korea; they are clearly located in Japan. Whereas the earlier version of Korean taught was limited to linguistic reproduction of Chongryun's political identity, the new Korean classes aim to give student the skills to talk about their non-organisational life outside school as well. Ryang briefly traces earlier reforms in 1963 (which unified the curriculum of all Chongryun schools), 1973 (which incorporated North Korea's Kim Il Sung worship into the teaching) and 1983 (which continued this focus). The new curriculum, which is intended to give students a wider knowledge of areas outside Chongryun and North Korean, also breaks with the past in emphasizing teaching the spoken version of Korean. Reaction to the changes has varied from approval of the greater links to the Japanese school system (and therefore greater mobility within it) on the one hand to fear of losing Chongryun's essence on the other.

The chapter on the rise of the legitimate Chongryun identity looks at the different orientations (nationalism and communist internationalism) of Korean nationalism in Japan within the League of Koreans, set up as an interim organisation to facilitate repatriation. The role of women in the schools set up during the late 1940s to teach Korean language is acknowledged. Ryang traces the subsequent negative attitude on the part of Japanese government to the teaching of Korean language, the effect of the Korean War on Koreans in Japan, the setting up of the pro-communist Minjon (Democratic Front of Koreans) in 1951, and the tension between it and the Japan Communist Party until it was dissolved in 1955. Chongryun was formed that year, ushering in a period of peaceful coexistence. It is because of the loyalty owed to the Chongryun leader, Han, for this shift away from the JCP that he has remained in power and lives in luxury. Through the examination of the lives of various Chongryun individuals, Ryang examines the way in which individual "class identity and gender identity are subsumed under an identity as 'overseas nationals' of North Korea, who lead a dignified life in Japan, 'thanks to the love and care and wise guidance of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung."' (p. 96). This linguistically-constructed identity is coordinated by Chongryung control of the linguistic life of its members in order to allow the rise of its legitimate identity. The North Korean identity, Ryang concludes, was not always stable from the start but took years of systematic training and control to reinforce.

The Structure of Coexistence chapter looks at the manner in which Chongryun Koreans exist inside the Japanese state system, stressing that while there is relative non-interference by the Japanese government, there are several spheres in which the interests of the two groups overlap. Two examples of this are Chongryun's insistence on law-abiding behaviour from its members and its definition of those members as "overseas nationals of North Korea" rather than "ethnic minority" in a state which had no legal or organisational framework for dealing with the problems of resident aliens. (In fact, Ryang tells us, the Japanese New Left was more of a threat to the Japanese state than the Koreans). While there are Koreans in Japan who have taken Japanese citizenship, most of them are not Chongryun members. Chongryun's chosen identity as overseas nationals of Norht Korea in Japan, however, was by no means guaranteed as far as Japanese legal practice went. "As far as the Japanese government is concerned," Ryang writes, "in theory no North Korean can be normally resident in Japan, and Chongryun Koreans are resident aliens, not North Korean nationals" (p. 124). In 1965, as the result of a treaty between Japan and South Korea, permanent residence status was granted to Koreans who had lived continuously in Japan since August 1945 (or been born in Japan after that date) and who could prove that they were South Korean nationals. This did not include most Chongryun Koreans. In 1982, a new category of "exceptional permanent residence" was instituted by the Ministry of Justice for Koreans who had not been able to attain permanent residence under the 1965 conditions. This was followed in 1992 by a decision to make all Korean permanent residents, including Chongryun Koreans, "special permanent residents" regardless of whether they fell into the 1965 or 1982 categories, and this allowed Chongryun Koreans to apply for certain benefits and to travel more freely with improved re-entry permit status.

The third and final section of the book deals with what Ryang calls "The Search": the search by second generation North Koreans in Japan to discover a replacement for the first generation's strong ideological commitment to North Korea, which can no longer be imposed on the third and fourth generations. The first of these two

chapters deals with the hesitation connected with transformation and readjustment of identity. Ryang looks at specific case studies, one a teacher at a Chongryun school, one the father of one of the students taught by this teacher who despite retaining Chongryun affiliation plans to send his son to a Japanese middle school, and one a young man who has left the organisation. The issue of shifting language use is interestingly developed here, as Ryang reiterates that the relationship between language and identity is not rigid–for Chongryun members, language shift is part of their Chongryun identification. Chongryun is losing its attraction for younger members, as the curriculum reform referred to in an earlier chapter, with its shift from emphasis on written to spoken Korean and the withdrawal of "Kim-related vocabulary," is now destabilising the group's earlier language-bound identity. The issue of language is a particular problem for the second generation: whereas the first generation can stick to the old language which mediates their fixed identity as North Korean nationals, and the third generation possesses performative skills enabling them to shift between languages as required by context, the position of the second generation, caught in transition between the old certainties and the new freedoms, is ambiguous.

The final chapter explores this ambiguity further, taking a generational perspective and examining (through case studies) attitudes towards North and South Korea in order to "grasp the different experiences of the different generations in their migration and diaspora" (p. 166). The two case studies presented both expressed strong emotional ties to North Korea and standard party-line views of South Korea as an object of hatred and contempt. Neither, however, displayed enthusiasm for returning to North Korea on a permanent basis. The chapter discusses the different attitudes to code-switching in language and the varying behavioural patterns displayed by the different generations. In all this, the second generation is the one caught in the middle, not scolding their children for "behaving like Japanese" because they are no longer able to distinguish between what is "Japanese" and what is "Korean," and sometimes feeling guilt on this account. The role of the second generation in writing about Chongryun Koreans in the Korean language of Chongryun is discussed, with emphasis on the limits imposed by the sanitised Chongryun-taught language on discussing any of the more distressing aspects of life such as poverty and domestic violence. "This kind of literary production reflects the limitation of the second generation and at the same time creates further limitations and the gap between Chongryun reality and the rest of reality that the second generation experiences. In this sense, second-generation literature is both a reflection of Chongryun's reality and at the same time constitutive of this reality, in that it produces the discursive milieu in which Chongryun life is narrated. The experience of the first generation is not critically transcended by second-generation writers; it is subsumed under the official discourse of 'overseas nationals"' (p. 196). Ryang further discusses the diaspora experience, which constructs identity, with that of migration, which deconstructs identity, concluding that "after the migrational trauma of the first generation, the second generation has been kept in a state of diasporic stability" (p. 197), which has in one sense protected them but in another has cocooned them from the practical realities of life in the society in which Chongryun exists.

Much of the fascination of this well-written and interesting book lies in its author's unique position as a member of the group which she is studying, a position which allows her access and insights which would no doubt have been denied a researcher without such previous links. The concept of author as both subject and object caused me some unease at first, and it is clear that Ryang herself has thought carefully about this matter. It seems to me that the book both benefits and suffers from its author's personal experience. The benefits are evident, but the slight downside is a nagging sense in places that Ryang has overdone her efforts to authenticate her work as scholarship (which it very clearly is) by often tenuous links to theory in order perhaps to move away from what she may have felt to be an overly personal account. While in many places the theory to which she refers is an important and well integrated part of her argument (as in the tie-up with Austin's theory of performative statements on p. 46), in others it often appears to be tacked on without real relevance or integration. Throughout the text, we find from time to time sections in which the narrative is tied to a random statement about a particular theory; in many cases, these theoretical references are simply sitting there, with no attempt made to develop their implications or to integrate them further with the narrative (for example, the passing references to Wittgenstein on p. 29, Ryle and Goody on p. 30, Foucault on p. 32, Gellner on p. 82, Wittgenstein again on p. 108, Eagleton on p. 110, and many others). I was particularly conscious of this in reading the Introduction, which at first glance seemed like an attempt to justify the essential nub of the matter (that Ryang has written an anthropological study which is also in many ways an account of her own life history) with a heavy and in some cases overdone overlay of theory. Nevertheless, Ryang is never less than candid about this aspect of her work, and indeed

discusses it at some length both in the introduction and in the conclusion.

The occasional unevenness of the theoretical integration is a small flaw, however, and one which does not in any substantial way detract from this interesting and well-crafted study. It is a fact that the author's connections enabled her to make contact in this relatively closed community in a way that another anthropologist could not, and the resulting portrait and analysis is enlightening for us all. This book should be in the library of anyone interested in the politics of identity in Japan.

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