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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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This book attempts to fill a long neglected gap in the academic literature on Japanese-Korean affairs: a study on the Japan-based Koreans professing allegiance to North Korea, the Chingryun Koreans. Sonia Ryang's stated goal here is to "look at the mechanism through which Chongryun's organizational identity is produced and the social effect Chongryun's self-representation generates both inside and outside its organizational boundaries" (p. 11). In this anthropological study, the author relies on materials from the Japanese Ministry of Justice, from Chongryun-edited textbooks, and from other English, Korean, and Japanese secondary materials to complement information gleaned from her informants. Ryang, a second-generation Chongryun Korean, is generally successful in presenting to her readers a clear and lucid portrayal of the organization and its activities, whose design is to mold the identity of its members into devoting "their lives to the organization, fatherland, and the Leaders" (p. 39). The narrow focus of the book, though, requires preliminary reading for the reader unfamiliar with the general situation of Japan-based Koreans.[1]

Ryang's study was conducted ethnographically with personal acquaintances serving as her subjects. Her concentration is on three interlinked areas: language, ideology, and identity. One might wish to criticize the author for conducting a study of a group within which she was raised "breathing (its) air." However, the closed nature of the Chongryun Koreans makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for an outsider to conduct such a research project. The author succeeds, in my opinion, in weaving a story enriched with her personal experiences, distanced by over a decade of living outside the community for study and research, with the objective eye of a detached researcher.

The Chaeilbon Chosonin Chong Ryonhaphoe (General Federation of Korean Residents in Japan; Chongryun for short) is the third generation of organizations loyal to North Korea to emerge in Japan since 1945. The first organization, the League of Koreans (Choryon), was disbanded in 1949 by the United States occupation government. The second organization, the Democratic Front of Koreans (Minjon), dissolved in 1955 due to its differences with the Japanese Communist Party. One faction of the League reorganized soon after to form the Chongryun. Its members consist of a minority subgroup of nearly 600,000 Koreans based in Japan at this time who for various reasons did not seek repatriation. The organization runs its own education system which includes 150 schools for about 20,000 students (p. 24). It also organizes its student and adult membership though sponsoring groups such as the Young Pioneers, and activities such as the *haksupjo* (literally study groups) and tours to North Korea. The motivation of its members joining this left-wing organization is political, rather than geographical, as the majority of the Chongryun Koreans' ancestral homes are in what is now South Korea. A number of the organization's members also retain ties with the Mindan, a Japan-based organization sympathetic to South Korean interests.

The author divides the book into three broad sections: the "school," the "history," and "the search." The first section focuses on "performance," where schools function to instruct the students in North Korean ideology through the means of the Korean language in the hope that the students establish and maintain their identity as overseas residents of North Korea. This instruction is necessary to arm the students with the tools needed to "resist social pressures to be assimilated into the Japanese" (p. 59). What students do develop, according to Ryang, is a "code switching" ability where they learn to perform the correct act at the correct time–that is, to properly insert the correct ideological words in their proper situation. One informant describes this as "a dual linguistic system…supported by (a) dual value system," where "students have no difficulty from one language to another; when they do so, they even switch their ideology" (p. 41).

The second section addresses the history of the organization. Chongryun Koreans have placed themselves in a predicament of supporting a government not recognized by the state in which they reside. The decision to support North Korea has also presented them from returning to their ancestral homes in South Korea. Closely monitored by Japanese authorities, Chongryun supporters have had to carefully watch their activities so as not to attract negative attention. The threat of deportation, exaggerated according to Ryang, has prevented Chongryun Koreans from actively seeking better living conditions in Japan. The group, for example, refrained from joining other Japan-based Koreans and Chinese in the struggle to have Japan's fingerprinting laws changed.

The final section considers the "search" of many Chongryun Koreans in rethinking their identity in a changing social and political context. This dilemma primarily concerns second generation members of the group. Protected throughout their lives from the outside, non-Chongryun world, this generation has failed to create an existence that allows them a relatively comfortable balance in their multiple identities, something other generations have been successful in doing. In particular, Chongryun Koreans face a situation of improving living conditions in Japan amid reports of a deteriorating North Korea. The death of Kim Il Sung, the man to whom they entrusted their repatriation following his promised "liberation" of the South, has left an ideological void in their lives, leading them to rethink their identities. These changes have come in the midst of radical curriculum change in their schools in the hope to now better prepare third and fourth generation Chongryun Koreans for their futures in Japan, instead of Korea as the second generation was prepared.

Sonia Ryang's study of the Chongryun Koreans is informative in its description of the learning (identity formation) process of this restricted community. Her tracing of the generational changes informs us of the historical adjustments the Chongryun Koreans have had to make to maintain their identity. The author's insistence, however, of inserting theoretical justifications for Chongryun teaching practices in the first section interrupts the narration of her story. As a student of Korean-Japanese relations, I would have liked to have seen greater attention given to the influence of the Pyongyang government on the organization's activities. Also, while Ryang mentions sporadically the discrimination the group's members have faced, I wonder if this area, as well, does not require a more concentrated attention. Finally, the author might consider addressing more clearly the causes behind the educational changes made from the early 1990s.

Note

[1]. For such background, see the dated, but still useful, Lee Changsoo and George De Vos, eds., *Koreans in Japan: Ethnic Conflict and Accommodation* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1981). More recently, see the chapter on Japan-based Koreans in John Maher and Gaynor Macdonald, eds., *Diversity in Japanese Culture and Language* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1995). Michael Weiner's *The Origins of the Korean Community in Japan: 1910-1923* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) presents a detailed description of the early history of Korean migration to Japan.

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