

## **Zainichi – Korean or Japanese?**

### ***The identity problems of the Korean minority in Japan***

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Among the minorities living in Japan, the so-called *zainichi* Koreans form one of the biggest groups. Having minorities in countries is not rare but why is their situation so unique, and when it comes to identity, why do they face many problems? The situation of the minorities in Europe is more advanced than in Japan, but when it comes to the question of identity, it is just as difficult. There are many minorities in Hungary and one of the biggest is the so-called Hungarian Germans, which group can be compared to the *zainichi* Koreans.

At first, let me introduce some basic definitions regarding minority and nationality. I will also touch briefly on the citizenship laws of Hungary and Japan. Thereafter, I will talk about the Korean minority – who they are and how they came to Japan – and about the German minority in the same way as with the *zainichi* Koreans. After this brief introduction, I will compare the two based on three points: collective name, political situation and identity.

Nationality is the state of belonging to a particular country or being a citizen of a particular nation; or according to another definition it is a group of people of the same race, religion, traditions, etc. A minority is any small group in a society that is different from the rest because of their race, religion, political beliefs, etc. who are often treated unfairly.

The citizenship law in Japan adopts the personal rather than territorial principle of nationality which means children obtain their citizenship according to their parents' citizenship rather than their place (country) of birth. For Korean residents to obtain Japanese citizenship, they need to apply to be naturalized. The Ministry of Justice decides whether or not to approve their applications. To qualify, applicants need to meet certain standards of "good conduct," a process that can be used to deny the granting of citizenship.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, in Hungary, children qualify for citizenship if their parents are Hungarian citizens or if the identity of their parents is not known, then on the basis of having been born in Hungary. Dual citizenship in Hungary is legally recognized, and the children of foreign parents can obtain Hungarian citizenship if they were born in Hungary. Applicants for Hungarian citizenship are required to provide proof of the following: possession of a permanent residence in Hungary, financial stability, and absence of past criminal activity. Applicants must also pass a Hungarian language exam, however they are not required to Hungarianize their surnames.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yoshio Sugimoto, *An Introduction to Japanese Society*, Third edition, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 203

<sup>2</sup> Website of the Hungarian citizenship law (<https://emberijogok.kormany.hu/a-magyar-allampolgarsag-megszerzese>) last seen: 29.02.2020

Members of the Korean minority are officially called *zainichi* Koreans, or just *zainichi* meaning „Japan residents”. Their total population is 855, 725 and the largest communities are to be found in Tokyo’s Shin-Okubo district and in Ikuno-ku in Osaka.

During the 1910s, confiscations of land and rice harvests were carried out against Korean farmers under Japanese colonial rule, as a result of which increasing numbers of displaced farmers in the southern regions who had lost their land migrated to Japan. By 1920, approximately 30,000 Koreans had already settled in Japan. The rice riots of Japan in 1918 led to an increase in migration with 300,000 to 400,000 Korean farmers moving to Japan by 1930. During a particularly harsh period of Japanese colonial rule, from 1937 to 1945, use of the Korean language was discouraged and later suppressed. Ultimately, Koreans were forced to observe Japan’s official State Shinto religion which included Emperor worship. The outbreak of World War II led to labour shortages in Japanese war industries, and under the National Mobilization Law, Koreans were forcibly recruited as low-paid workers under the most severe conditions. In 1945, Japan was defeated resulting in the liberation of Korea. The number of Koreans in Japan was around 2 million this time and they were given the choice to return to Korea or to remain in Japan. Of this number, approximately 650,000 remained in Japan, and the others returned to the Korean Peninsula.<sup>3</sup>

Members of the German minority in Hungary are referred to as Hungarian Germans or Danube Swabians. According to the census in 2011, the total population was 184, 858. Regions with significant concentrations of ethnic Germans are Pest county, Baranya county, Tolna county and Bács-Kiskun county.

The first Germans to come to Hungary arrived in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. King Stephen was the founder of the Hungarian state and to stabilize his rule he needed alliances. He agreed to marry Gisela of Bavaria who brought with her an entourage of German priests, knights and peasants. Gisela’s priority was to spread the Roman Catholic religion. With new methods to cultivate lands, the number of available lands grew, but Hungary’s population was not big enough. In the 12th century this was the reason why Germans were settled during the rule of Géza II.

The second wave of German immigration was after the fall of the Ottoman Empire which lasted approximately a century and a half. After the Turks withdrew, agricultural lands that had been abandoned due to constant conflict became available again for cultivation, so Empress Maria Theresa invited more Germans to settle not only in Hungary, but also on lands all along the River Danube. Joseph II, her successor, continued what Maria Theresa began. With the new western agricultural technologies brought by the Germans Hungary’s economy began to recover. During the rule of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, many rights were granted to the German minority along with some regulations, one of which was that law of primogeniture, limiting inheritance to first-born sons. As a result, younger sons tried to establish new farmlands in the villages nearby. In the 19th century this led to new settlements with German residents where the German people were living next to Hungarians in peace.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Soo Im, Lee, Diversity of Zainichi Koreans and Their Ties to Japan and Korea, Studies on Multicultural Societies, Working Paper Series, No. 8, 2012, pp. 2-3

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard Seewann, A magyarországi németek történetének vázlatos áttekintése, Hitel, Volume 26, 2013, pp. 84-87

To compare these two minorities, I collected three main points. The first is their collective name. In case of *zainichi* Koreans, it is about the meaning of *zainichi* and the question of who belongs. In the case of Hungarian Germans, as I mentioned before, they are often called Danube Swabians and I'm going to answer the question if they can really be called that way.

The second point is the political situation after World War II and today. It should be mentioned that as a consequence of the war both Germany and Korea were divided into two parts: one became capitalist, and the other socialist, and I'm going to explain how this situation influenced the Korean minority in Japan and the German minority in Hungary. Lastly, I will compare the question of identity in both cases.

According to Harajiri (1998), the term *zainichi* refers to temporary residential status which already precludes the option of total membership in Japanese society. On the other hand, Fukuoka (1993) states that despite the fact that the term implies 'not belonging to Japan', some Korean residents use this term to emphasize that they are neither Japanese nor Korean. For them, the word *zainichi* rather than bloodline refers to the place of residence. Compared to first-generation Koreans, who have stronger ties to their homeland, members of later generations born and raised in Japan are unfamiliar with Korea and its culture. It is also not rare for Japan-born Koreans to feel at home in neither the South nor the North, after going to these two countries to settle permanently.<sup>5</sup>

The other problem with the term *zainichi* is to define who belongs where. According to Fukuoka and Tsujiyama (1991), there are four groups of different forms of *zainichi* Korean identity. *Pluralists* want to „live with Japanese”, and are classified as „oriented towards Japan”. *Nationalists* live as „overseas citizens”, and are classified as „oriented towards ancestral lands”. *Individualists* do not think of their identity in terms of Korea or Japan, and are classified as „oriented towards the individual”. *Assimilationists* aim to „become Japanese”, and are classified as „oriented towards assimilation”.<sup>6</sup>

With regard to Hungarian Germans, not all are connected to the Danube Swabians. The name Swabian refers only to the people who came from Swabian provinces in the 18th century. Their goal was to spread the Roman Catholic religion in Eastern Europe and to develop farmlands. They came to reside along the River Danube in Hungary and what is known today as Romania. As I explained earlier, there were many different waves of German settlers, but only the pioneers from the 18th century came from Swabia, although even among them they spoke many different dialects. Thus, this name does not define the minority accurately.<sup>7</sup>

The end of World War II in Asia marked the end of Japanese rule over the Korean Peninsula. The American and Soviet forces liberated Korea which, in time, led to the formation of two states: South Korea on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1948, and North Korea on 9<sup>th</sup> September of the same year.

The division of the homeland of the *zainichi* Koreans divided even more their identity, and as a consequence, two ethnic organizations were formed within their community: the General

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<sup>5</sup> David, Chapman, *Zainichi Korean Identity and Ethnicity*, Routledge Contemporary Japan Series, Routledge, 2008, p. 4

<sup>6</sup> Soo Im, Lee, *Diversity of Zainichi Koreans and Their Ties to Japan and Korea*, Studies on Multicultural Societies, Working Paper Series, No. 8, 2012, pp. 6-7

<sup>7</sup> Györgyi, Bindorffer, *Double Identity: Being German and Hungarian at the same time*, New Community, 23(3), 1997, p. 400

Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Japanese: *Zai-Nihon Chōsenjin Sōrengōkai*) having ties to North Korea, and the Korean Residents Union in Japan (Japanese: *Zai-Nihon Daikanminkoku Kyoryū Mindan*) having ties to South Korea.

During the colonial period, Koreans were made Japanese nationals, though a separate law regulated their family registration system. Accordingly, male Koreans had the right to vote and to be elected to national and local legislatures. However, with the independence of South and North Korea and the enactment of a fresh election law immediately after the end of the war, Korean residents in Japan were deprived of voting rights, and the Japanese government put into effect the Alien Registration Ordinance, which effectively targeted Koreans in Japan, classified them as foreigners, forcing them to register as alien residents.<sup>8</sup>

Similar to Korea, Nazi-Germany was also divided into two parts: East Germany, belonging to the Soviet zone of occupation, and West Germany, made up of the combined occupation zones of the three Allied Powers, the US, the UK and France. Hungary, like East Germany belonged to the Eastern Bloc. The postwar situation of the Hungarian Germans was made difficult by the idea that all people with German roots bore collective responsibility for the excesses of the Nazi regime. As a consequence, many Hungarian Germans were sent to Soviet forced-labour camps while others were deported to Germany (either East or West). They were not allowed to take their belongings. Only a few were allowed to remain in Hungary and few among those who had been forcibly removed could return.

Their situation during the 1950s and 1960s would not improve. The German language was forbidden and could not be taught in schools. As a result, many ethnic Germans lost the use of their heritage language. They were forced into total assimilation and faced discrimination. The year 1968 was a turning point for them, when the state realized the need of nationality policies, but these were not meant to actually ease the conditions of the minorities, but rather to exercise control over them. In 1983, the rehabilitation of the Hungarian Germans started, but the assimilation was already too strong, and only few spoke the German language.<sup>9</sup>

In 1989, the Soviet Union collapsed which led to a regime change in all countries of the Eastern Bloc. In 1993, the rights of the minorities were legally recognized. The new laws stated that the history and culture of the minorities is part of their identity, and that it is also in the interest of Hungary to protect these. According to the new laws, autonomous associations of nationalities and later, local governments of minorities were formed. They have voting rights, and under specific rules they can even participate in parliamentary elections.<sup>10</sup>

By way of contrast, the situation of the *zainichi* Koreans did not get much better. They are required to pay taxes, but they lack the right to participate actively in Japanese local governmental organizations, or to vote. Influenced by the European Union, the debate

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<sup>8</sup> Yoshio Sugimoto, *An Introduction to Japanese Society*, Third edition, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 202-204

<sup>9</sup> Gerhard Seewann, *A magyarországi németek történetének vázlatos áttekintése*, Hitel, Volume 26, 2013, pp. 90-92

<sup>10</sup> Ágnes, Tóth, *A magyarországi németek története a hazai történetírásban 1945 után*, Bács-Kiskun megye múltjából XVI., Bács-kiskun Megyei Önkormányzat Levéltára, Kecskemét, 2000, p. 147

regarding the rights of foreigners to vote in local elections has begun but only recently; there are gradual efforts to recognize residential voting for those who have foreign nationality.<sup>11</sup>

As for the question of identity, Hungarian Germans consider themselves Hungarian Germans, belonging to both cultures. Traditionally they were bilingual, but today, as a consequence of the events in the past, knowledge of the German language is no longer part of their identity, and despite everything they went through, they managed to keep their traditions, even if not all of them.<sup>12</sup>

But when we are talking about *zainichi* Koreans, the question of identity is not as obvious as with the case of Hungarian Germans. Some say they are Koreans, others think of themselves as Japanese, a few think they belong to both cultures and a few say they belong to neither. And there is the question of being South or North Korean, which has led to intergenerational conflict.

As a conclusion we can say that Hungarian Germans are united in identity and that the difficulties of the past did not divide them. On the other hand, *zainichi* Koreans are divided in identity, and the events in the past made them even more divided.

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<sup>11</sup> Soo Im, Lee, Diversity of Zainichi Koreans and Their Ties to Japan and Korea, Studies on Multicultural Societies, Working Paper Series, No. 8, 2012, p. 12

<sup>12</sup> Györgyi, Bindorffer, Double Identity: Being German and Hungarian at the same time, New Community, 23(3), 1997, pp. 409-410

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